

Margaret Blakers

The Chair
VEAC
Level 6, 8 Nicholson St
East Melbourne 3002
Victoria, Australia

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Dear Mr Honeywood

STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC LAND

VEAC's Statewide Assessment of Public Land is important and timely and I regret that I missed the deadline for submissions. However I understand that a letter can nevertheless be considered. In this letter I ask VEAC to consider a specific proposal which is that the land use category of 'state forest' should be abolished. Land currently so designated should be retained as public land but assigned to tenures that reflect the values of today's world.

'State forest' as a land tenure dates back to the nineteenth century when governments wanted to secure forested land for industry, particularly mining and building, and to rein in wasteful logging practices.¹ In the twenty-first century these circumstances no longer prevail and the concept of reserving public land as 'state forest' is outdated and anachronistic. The wood products industry is overwhelmingly plantation-based and most plantations are privately owned. Public native forests today are highly valued for wildlife, water, climate protection, recreation and other public benefits and should be reserved and managed for these purposes.

Most of Victoria's three million hectares of 'state forests' are covered by 20-year Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) that will begin to expire from February 2017 (East Gippsland). RFAs privilege native forest logging by exempting it from the need to obtain approval under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. There is ample evidence that this has led to lower standards of biodiversity protection than would prevail if the EPBC Act applied directly² and that species are being pushed towards extinction as a result. The level of protection envisaged for state forests by the Land Conservation Council/VEAC has not been achieved.

The focus of the Public Land Assessment is on management effectiveness. I contend that designating land as 'state forest' is no longer conducive to effective management of the range of values that Victoria's forests hold for today and the future. With RFAs about to expire, it is

¹ See for example debate on the 1907 Forests Act, Victorian Hansard v.116, starting p559 ([link](#))

² See for example Feehely, J., Hammond-Deakin, N. and Millner, F. (2013) *One Stop Chop: How Regional Forest Agreements Streamline Environmental Destruction*. ([link](#))

time for a fundamental rethink of how Victoria's diverse and beautiful native forest heritage can best be protected and managed. This issue falls squarely within the terms of reference for the investigation and I look forward to submitting more information at later stages.

Thankyou for considering this letter.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Blakers