

**Assessment of the values of State forests in eastern Victoria**

**Terms of Reference**

Pursuant to section 26B of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Minister for Environment hereby requests the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (the Council) to carry out an assessment of the values of State forests within eastern Victoria (the assessment). This includes the 1.8 million hectares of State forests subject to the timber harvesting allocation order and relevant adjacent State forests within the North East, Gippsland and East Gippsland Regional Forest Agreement Areas. The approximate assessment area is shown on the accompanying map.

The assessment will inform the work of the Great Outdoors Taskforce in its provision of advice and recommendations to the Minister for Environment on the future use and management of state forest areas. The Great Outdoors Taskforce is tasked with making recommendations to government about the use of land within the assessment area. Recommendations may consider areas of high conservation value, areas suitable for enhanced tourism and outdoor recreation experiences, and opportunities for Traditional Owner management. In making its recommendations the Great Outdoors Taskforce will consider the findings of the assessment, as well as input from Traditional Owners, a range of stakeholders at a local and regional level, and the general community.

The purpose of the assessment is to identify:

- a) the biodiversity, ecological, geological and geomorphological values of the specified area
- b) the historic heritage, social and economic values of the specified area
- c) the current and likely future threats to those values, including climate change.

This assessment will build upon the Council's *Conservation values of state forests – Assessment report (2017)* by providing a more localised assessment of the values of these areas. The Council is not required to consider areas recently covered in its *Assessment of the values of Immediate Protection Areas in the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North (2022)* and the *Assessment of the values of the Immediate Protection Areas in the Central Highlands (final report in preparation)*.

The Council is required to consider the values referred to above at the relevant state, regional and local levels, including the occurrence in existing protected areas and on other public land.

This request is for an assessment and report on the above values. The Council is not required to undertake public consultation or make recommendations.

The Council will share information with the Great Outdoors Taskforce as the assessment progresses and keep the Taskforce updated on the progress of developing its report.

The Council must publish its assessment of the matters specified in paragraphs (a) to (c) above within six months of making of this request.

Map 1: Approximate location of assessment area in Victoria (grey hatch) including Allocation Order (grey shading) and State forests (light green shading).

