



Wafa
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
FOREST ALLIANCE

In the face of a looming climate emergency, WA is sending our best green carbon store up in smoke.

Now, with the Regional Forest Agreement due to expire, it is time to update the science and the laws underpinning forest management.

MEDIA RELEASE

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The WA Government is considering signing a new Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) that would lock intensive logging of the South West's jarrah and karri forests without proper environmental oversight.

WA's 20-year RFA was signed in 1999 to provide resource security to the timber industry by removing the requirement for logging plans to be assessed under Federal environmental law.

It expires on the 4th of May 2019, providing a vital opportunity for forest management to be updated using the latest climate and biodiversity science.

Logging exempt from Federal environment law

"Logging is the only industry in Australia that has severe impacts on wildlife and biodiversity but enjoys a special exemption from Federal environmental law," said Jess Beckerling, convener of the WA Forest Alliance.

"Without an RFA in place, logging planned for forests that are habitat for endangered wildlife would have to go through proper environmental impact assessments.

"Since the RFA was signed in 1999, 195 000 ha of karri and jarrah forests have been intensively logged without proper environmental assessmentⁱ and at least five forest-dependent mammals and birds unique to WA have become endangered or critically endangered.ⁱⁱ

Government urged to conduct full scientific review

"The WA Forest Alliance is urging the State Government not to renew the RFA. It has been disastrous for the South West forests, wildlife, communities and the timber industry," said Ms Beckerling.

Wafa is recommending that the McGowan Government initiate a full scientific review similar to that announced by the Victorian State Government to bring WA's climate and biodiversity science up to date.

Intact forests vital for climate

"The past 20 years have seen profound changes to the climate. It would be totally irresponsible to renew a long-term agreement with forest health and climate change implications based on a 1990s understanding of climate change.

"Forests are playing a vital role in capturing and storing carbon. The science shows that old trees and intact forests store, and continue to capture, more carbon from the atmosphere than young regrowth trees and that protecting natural forests is among our best tools for combatting dangerous climate change.ⁱⁱⁱ

"Every year in the South West, 80 – 90 per cent of all the jarrah wood sold is used as firewood or charcoal or wasted at the mills, releasing massive quantities of carbon.

"As the South West becomes drier and hotter, forests are more vulnerable to impacts of logging, burning, disease, insect attack, heat-waves and drought.^{iv}

"A recent study shows that old jarrah forests use 50 per cent less water than regrowth.^v This means regrowth jarrah is far more vulnerable to drought-induced collapse than old jarrah forests, and also that logging reduces the amount of water available to streams and rivers.

"We also know that deforestation has contributed significantly to the reduction in rainfall in the South West^{vi}.

"Protecting forests is good for the climate and, at the same time, intact forests are better able to cope with climate change.

"The expiry of the 20-year RFA is an excellent opportunity for the WA Government to bring forest management into the 21st Century," said Ms Beckerling.

CONTACT

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ⁱ FPC Annual Reports, 1998-2018; State of the Forests report (Commonwealth, 2018).

ⁱⁱ *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* – Threatened species listings and recovery plans. (2019)

ⁱⁱⁱ https://theconversation.com/big-old-trees-grow-faster-making-them-vital-carbon-absorbers-22104?fbclid=IwAR1-YNyghJ2i1OGUA8RdOXneXdnjIO_Or8WvkC1m835XuBva10BumImQDvc

and <http://forestsforlife.org.au/climate-and-the-forests/>

^{iv} For example, gumleaf skeletoniser *Uraba lugans*. See <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/aen.12255>

^v <https://library.dbca.wa.gov.au/static/FullTextFiles/625450.pdf>

^{vi} <https://research-repository.uwa.edu.au/en/publications/the-effect-of-land-clearing-on-rainfall-and-fresh-water-resources>