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15 January 2013

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au



Dear Senate Committee,

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Senate Environment and Communications Legislative Committee inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012.

VicForests is a State owned business enterprise responsible for the harvest, sale and regeneration of timber from State forest in Victoria. On an annual basis timber harvesting occurs on approximately 300 individual harvest areas comprising a typical area of approximately 5000 hectares.

All of VicForests operations are subject to approval and published in the Government Gazette on a Timber Release Plan. Additionally VicForests operates a Sustainable Forest Management System certified to the Australian Forestry Standard (AS4708). Both of these processes have requirements to ensure compliance with a range of regulatory documents. In relation to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, VicForests operations occur in regions covered under Part 4, Division 4, being within areas subject to a Regional Forest Agreement (RFA).

VicForests identify the need for continued efficiencies in environmental planning processes, which are transparent and provide for community and stakeholder confidence in environmental planning and assessment.

The current process identified by the EPBC Act allows for assessment and planning decisions to be made at a State level where an agreement is in place, which ensures that decisions on environmental planning are made by those best placed to do so. This ensures efficiency by dealing with issues at the appropriate government level, rather than elevating to the Commonwealth.

VicForests understands an Agreement between the *Australian Government and Victoria relating to environmental impact assessment* was made to ensure efficient, timely and effective processes for environmental assessment and approval of actions, whilst protecting the environment, promoting the conservation and ecological sustainable use of natural resources and minimising duplication of environmental impact assessment processes.

As the agreement provides for a process that is in line with the EPBC Act requirements and ultimately allows the Commonwealth Minister final decision making power to approve or refuse an action assessed under the agreement, this is done so efficiently and without compromising the integrity and requirements of the Act.

The current Act provides for effective and efficient processes in its current form and we would encourage retaining the ability for the Commonwealth to enter into agreements with State or Territories and allow them to approve proposed environmental actions. We believe that the proposed Bill does not align with the COAG outcomes, and feel that these changes would unnecessarily weaken the current system and therefore support retaining the Act in its current form.

VicForests welcomes the inquiry into the EPBC Bill and is grateful for the opportunity to provide input into the on-going effective management of environmental values. If you have queries regarding this submission or VicForests operations, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards

Dan Sedunary
Manager Planning
VicForests

