



19 March 2021

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

By email: [ec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:ec.sen@aph.gov.au)

**IFA/AFG submission on the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment  
(Regional Forest Agreements) Bill 2020**

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee for its inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Regional Forest Agreements) Bill 2020.

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) and Australian Forest Growers (AFG) is pleased to make this submission to the Committee. The IFA/AFG is an independent professional association that represents forest scientists, managers and growers. Our members operate across all aspects of forest and land management throughout Australia. In total we have approximately 1,000 members, supported by an office of 3 part-time staff.

The IFA/AFG strongly supports the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Regional Forest Agreements) Bill 2020.

Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) were developed to provide a long-term solution to the multiple use of Australia's forests, seeking to balance competing economic, social and environmental demands on forests, by setting obligations and commitments for forest management that deliver:

- ecologically sustainable forest management
- an expanded and permanent forest conservation estate to provide for the protection of Australia's unique forest biodiversity, and
- certainty of resource access and supply to industry.

This Bill makes necessary amendments to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and the *Regional Forest Agreement Act 2002* (RFA Act) to clarify the meaning of forestry operations covered by RFAs and by s38 of the EPBC Act. The intention of the amendment is to confirm that the specific requirements for environmental approvals under the EPBC Act do not apply to forestry operations that are undertaken in accordance with an RFA, as the development of RFAs has already incorporated the process of addressing EPBC Act environmental matters.



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This provision is intended to reduce uncertainty, duplication, and fragmentation in government decision-making, by recognising RFAs as durable long-term agreements on the management, use and conservation of Australia's native forests.

The IFA/AFG considers this clarity is critically important to the effective implementation of the RFAs. The Bill will provide forest managers, growers, and the timber industry with secure access to forest resources, timely approval of land use planning and development decisions, while protecting environmental, heritage and cultural values.

It is important to note that native forestry operations are not exempt from environmental laws or Commonwealth oversight. Rather, the Commonwealth has delegated this function to the states, and in turn the states have developed robust regulatory frameworks designed to be responsive to how forestry operations work. The IFA/AFG considers this is appropriate recognition that State governments have primary responsibility for land management functions and environmental safeguards for forestry operations, with provisions made for Commonwealth oversight and input on relevant matters; most notably matters of national environmental significance.

The IFA/AFG would be happy to work with the Federal Government on the resolution of this issue, to provide clarity for all stakeholders on the intent of regulation for sustainable forestry operations within the framework of RFAs. If you require any further information, please contact:

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P:

Yours sincerely,

Bob Gordon  
President  
The Institute of Foresters of Australia & Australian Forest Growers