

To The Secretary, Senate Standing Committee

Scope of this Submission:

This submission responds to point 5 of the senate inquiry into the operation of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999: specifically;

"the effectiveness of Regional Forest Agreements, in protecting forest species and forest habitats where the EPBC Act does not directly apply; "

Discussion:

The EPBC Act 1999 specifically exempts logging activities via Ss. 38 – 42. However, since the writing of the EPBC Act the nature of native forest logging has dramatically changed from one of sawlog production to become a woodchip driven industry. Up to 80% of native forest timber is now going to woodchip and this is having a significant impact on the interpretation of the Codes of Practice and Forest Management plans by the Government and commercial operators of the forest coupes. These documents which are supposed to protect endangered and threatened species have recently been revised to make the permitted logging operations more suitable for wood chipping. These include practices such as "thinnings", which further threaten endangered species such as the Leadbeater's possum.

There are a number of examples of government agencies operating under an RFA such as the Department of Sustainability and Environment and VicForests using loop-holes to continue to log endangered species' habitat, such as the Baw Baw frog and Leadbeaters possum. These examples are detailed in the [Baw Baw Report](#) and [Royston reports](#) that were commissioned by the Central Highlands Alliance Inc.

A [scientific study by Practical Ecology](#) commissioned by The Central Highlands Alliance Inc. has revealed that rainforests were erroneously identified by Vic Forests for logging.

In conjunction with the RFA's the DSE was supposed to establish recovery teams for endangered species such as the Leadbeater's possum. This has not consistently occurred and the species have declined in numbers significantly. The RFA's were supposed to be reviewed every 5 years. To date, none has been reviewed anywhere in Victoria.

Finally the Victorian DSE is conducting illegal clearing of extensive firebreaks within National Parks and through endangered species' habitat.

It is clear from these examples that both the transition of the logging industry to one of high volume wood chip and the examples of deficiencies briefly described above are having devastating effects on our endangered species. The RFA and the Government agencies and mechanisms put in place to protect endangered species are failing. The EPBC Act should be proactive in its requirements for identification and protection of endangered species in our native forests and the exemption of logging from the EPBC Act must be revoked.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Meacher

References

The Baw Baw Report

http://www.myenvironment.net.au/index.php/me/reports/baw_baw_report

The Royston Report

http://www.myenvironment.net.au/index.php/me/reports/royston_report_the_code_of_forest_practice

Rainforest Report by Practical Ecology

<http://www.myenvironment.net.au/index.php/me/content/download/1136/6729/file/Rainforest%20Assessment%20Royston%20River%20Catchment%20Aug%202005.pdf>