

# **Victorian Environmental Assessment Council**

## **Central West Forests Investigation**

### **Response to Submissions on the proposed terms of reference**

Pursuant to the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001* (the Act), a notice of the proposed terms of reference for a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) investigation into public land in the vicinity of the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range Forests within the area shown on the accompanying map, was published in newspapers circulating generally throughout Victoria in November 2016.

The public submission period on the proposed terms of reference ran until 2 December 2016. Section 16(2) of the Act states that following the submission period each House of Parliament must be provided with a statement of how any comments received on the proposed terms of reference have been dealt with.

Twenty submissions were received on the terms of reference in total. Eleven were from environment, friends and Landcare groups including the Victorian National Parks Association, the Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance (an alliance of Landcare and conservation management networks) across central Victoria, Environment Victoria and the Upper Campaspe Landcare Network (a network of 16 Landcare and friends groups). Six submissions were from individuals. Two were received from businesses - a plant hire contractor and VicForests, and one from the Victorian Association of Forest Industries.

#### **General comments**

No submissions were opposed to the investigation and most submissions were supportive of the terms of reference and supported the area proposed.

Some submissions raised issues for VEAC to consider in undertaking the investigation and a few raised other changes. Responses to these issues are as follows.

#### **Wording of the terms of reference**

Eleven of the submissions requested the addition of ecological/biodiversity values in the purpose. There were two recommendations to include social values. Three of the submissions recommended that VEAC investigate the economic values of public land. One submission recommended VEAC investigate predicted impacts of climate change, structural health of forests and the action needed

to ensure resilience. This submission also asked that tenure allows for remedial silviculture and that governments fund silviculture operations.

Another submission requested that the terms of reference include protection, management and usage of resources that ensure conservation, enhancement of natural and cultural values, and reconstruction of ecosystems.

There was a recommendation to add consultation with relevant land management agencies to the considerations in section 18. This is a requirement in the Act.

Under legislation, VEAC is required to consider the potential environmental, social and economic consequences of implementing any proposed recommendations, however the terms of reference have been amended to include consideration of biodiversity, social and economic values.

### **Area of investigation**

The majority of submissions were satisfied with the area proposed for investigation. Four submissions suggested additional areas be included in the investigation, one for inclusion of all the forests of in western Victoria, one for all of the forests in Central Victoria and two for a number of other areas of public land in central west Victoria.

The boundaries for the investigation have been left as advertised.

The name of the investigation has been changed from Central West Forests to Central West Investigation as there are a number of areas of public land included in the investigation area that are not forests.

### **Other comments**

Several submission raised matters that will be addressed during the investigation including the need to take immediate action to repair and protect the natural environment, that further restrictions in land available for timber production would have severe implications for hardwood processing industry in western Victoria, the need to recognise the importance of multiple uses being allowed in Victorian forests and the need to review the uses and values in the context of the surrounding public land.