



PRIME MINISTER

68/95

JOINT STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP, THE MINISTER FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND ENERGY, SENATOR THE HON BOB COLLINS AND THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, SPORT AND TERRITORIES, SENATOR THE HON JOHN FAULKNER

FOREST POLICY

The Government today agreed to a Commonwealth position on National Reserve Criteria designed to establish a world class forest conservation reserve system.

These criteria form the basis for negotiation with the States on Deferred Forest Assessments (DFAs), Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) and on nationally agreed criteria for establishing forest conservation reserves.

The National Reserve Criteria is a central plank of the National Forest Policy Statement and the Commonwealth's commitment to identify and protect key forest areas in a comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) reserve system.

The Government's decision took into account more than 50 submissions from stakeholders as well as an extended process of consultation with the States, interest groups, scientists and the National Forest Policy Advisory Forum.

The criteria reaffirmed the position set out in a Commonwealth Discussion Paper which was released on 30 March 1995. In today's decision, the Government has amplified and clarified some details regarding the application of these criteria.

The Commonwealth's National Reserve Criteria includes:-

- a broad benchmark of 15% of the pre-1750 distribution of each forest community to be protected within conservation reserves
- retention in reserves of at least 60% of existing old growth increasing up to 100% in some cases for rare old growth
- protection of 90% or more wherever practicable of high quality wilderness
- recognition of the role of "off-reserve management" to conservation objectives.

The Chief Biodiversity Officer of the United Nations' primary nature conservation body International Union for the Conservation of Nature in his review of the criteria, stated that it is *"an excellent set of criteria which reflects extremely well the current art and science of reserve protected area system design. It draws on the best available science in Australia and elsewhere and appropriately reflects current thinking at the international level."*

Implementation of a CAR reserve system, appropriate management of commercial forests, and the forthcoming wood and paper industries strategy will benefit industry and regional communities through increased certainty.

The Commonwealth is also committed to ensuring that a high value-added wood products industry can operate on an ecologically sustainable basis outside these areas. This is being addressed through the Wood and Paper Industries Strategy to be released in August.

These policy initiatives will ensure that Australia has both a vibrant forest-based industry as well as a world class forest conservation reserve.

It is recognised that the likely impact of the DFA and RFA processes may be the withdrawal of some native forest resources. The Government has endorsed a set of guidelines for consultations with affected businesses, workers and communities to facilitate the transition to a sustainable higher value-added industry based increasingly on plantation and regrowth resources.

It will not be possible to estimate detailed structural adjustment requirements until at least the Deferred Forest Assessments have been completed.

Coupe by coupe assessment of forest areas for the 1995 woodchip licence renewal process has been replaced this year by a regional approach to protect areas of forest which may be required for the reserve system, pending the completion of RFAs.

MELBOURNE

5 July 1995