



PRIME MINISTER

JOINT STATEMENT

PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA, THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP

PREMIER OF VICTORIA, THE HON JEFF KENNETT, MLA

HISTORIC REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT SIGNED

Today, I was pleased to sign Australia's first Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) with the Premier of Victoria, the Hon Jeff Kennett MLA.

The RFA for East Gippsland expands and consolidates Victoria's impressive reserve system. Almost 90 per cent of the East Gippsland region is public land, with 50 per cent of that land within a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserve System.

Today's agreement is a milestone in Australian forest management.

The RFA will give greater certainty of access to timber resources, providing the basis for investment in the timber industry and the creation of new jobs - providing up to an estimated \$140 million boost for the economy.

The agreement is for the next 20 years and includes provision for a performance review every five years.

The lead up to today's historic signing has involved extensive cooperation between the Commonwealth and State Governments.

It is a welcome and positive result for the environment and the economy and illustrates that with sound policy it is possible to reach a balanced and responsible outcome in forest management.

Today's signing ensures world class protection of wilderness, old growth and biodiversity. It provides for the ecologically sustainable development of forests within and outside the CAR Reserves.

The CAR Reserve System in East Gippsland meets or exceeds all the nationally agreed conservation criteria and surpasses international standards.

Mr Kennett said that "this outstanding result is largely due to the extent of Victoria's existing reserves and the State's detailed forest planning and management arrangements".

The State and Federal Governments will pursue options for complementary legislation to support the agreement.

Both the Premier and I thank the Ministers and Departmental officers involved in the negotiations leading up to the historic agreement.

The Regional Forest Agreement is a result of a great deal of hard work and commitment on the part of everyone involved including scientists, researchers, officials and community groups. It is also a credit to all those members of the public who took part in the extensive consultation process, workshops and public meetings.

This is the first of many Regional Forest Agreements for Australia's forests.

3 February 1997