

## **GOONGERAH ENVIRONMENT CENTRE (GECO)**

### **MAJOR EVENT REVIEW – SUBMISSION GUIDE**

#### **Background:**

In March 2020, just a few months after the devastating 2019/2020 Black Summer bushfires, state and federal governments rolled over the controversial Regional Forest Agreements which give logging an exemption from federal environment laws.

Logging is the only extractive industry that gets this special exemption, and it is spelt disaster for a number of threatened and endangered species.

A new clause has been introduced where a major event (like the 2019/2020 bushfires) can trigger a Major Event Review, to assess the impacts of major events on the terms of the agreement.

Late last year the Victorian and federal government agreed to conduct a review and it is now open to public consultation. Submissions are open till **31 August 2021**.

**We would love to read what you submit! Feel free to forward your submission or BCC us if you are sending it via email to [geco@geco.org.au](mailto:geco@geco.org.au)**

#### **Scope of the review:**

- Looking at the impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires and how they affect the Regional Forest Agreements
- How can our forest values be better managed after the bushfires and what specific values are important to you?
- Report or evidence regarding the impacts of the bushfires on forests that are important
- The current reserve system (National Parks, protection areas, reserves)
- Protection of Matters of Environment Significance (threatened plants and animals, ecological communities, old growth forests, rainforests, significance of forests to First Nations Peoples)
- The long-term stability of forests and wildlife

#### **Writing a submission:**

Submissions do not have to be long and detailed. Including personal stories about how you have witnessed forests and wildlife be impacted by the bushfires, and submissions written in your own words will have a greater impact. Some of the values you might personally like to address are:

- the importance of protecting forests and wildlife after the bushfires
- the review is not legally binding and there is no obligation for state or federal governments to take on board any of the recommendations. This is a major flaw in the review, state and federal government need to commit to taking concrete action to protect forests and wildlife after the bushfires which consider the recommendations,
- support for the recovery of bushfire affected threatened species,
- the importance of protecting forests for climate

- the inherent value of forests and nature-based tourism for economic recovery following the bushfires and COVID-19,
- the critical role of Traditional Owners and the importance of respecting First Nations Peoples rights and having the ultimate say over what happens on Country.

If you'd like some more detailed information about the impacts of the 2019/2020 bushfires on forests and wildlife, check out our joint report [After the fires: Protecting our forest refuges](#)

[Click here to read more and send your submission](#)

**Some of the key points:**

- The bushfires have had devastating impacts on Victoria's forests and wildlife. Many forests dependent species were already in peril from the cumulative impacts of drought, bushfires, and logging
- In the last fifty years, logging has greatly modified large areas of forest throughout Victoria, the operation of the Regional Forest Agreements continues to be a disaster for the survival of forests and wildlife.
- Many bushfire-affected threatened species have logging listed as a major threat in their FFG Act Action Statements.
- Despite the horrendous and extensive bushfire impacts to wildlife and forests, and the now undeniable increase in the habitat value of remaining areas– pre-fire logging plans have stayed in place. Astoundingly, two additional schedules of new logging areas have been announced post fire, one approved in July, and another approved in December 2020.
- The 2019-20 bushfires burnt more than 1.25 million hectares of forest across eastern Victoria, pushing many ecosystems to the brink of collapse and threatening the survival of hundreds of plant and animal species. But there have not only been no reductions or substantive changes to existing logging plans since the bushfires, two additional logging schedules were approved by state-owned VicForests in the first 12 months after the bushfires
- The state government's own risk assessment of threatened species and habitats carried out in October 2020 and released over the holiday break acknowledges the toll logging has on threatened wildlife. However, the government has not yet moved to provide any new protections for rare animals like the Greater Glider or Sooty Owl.
- More than 200 flora species have had 50–100% of their extent affected by the fires, of which 154 have been identified by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) as of high concern due to fire impacts. DELWP has also identified 67 fauna species of most concern, with 20 species having between 50–80% of their distribution within the fire extent.
- In May 2020, the Victorian government's Environment Department made recommendations that logging stop in key unburnt habitat for threatened species to halt the threat of irreversible damage to biodiversity after the 2019-20 bushfires. Despite those recommendations, logging has recommenced in these areas following the bushfires.
- Future logging plans remain a significant threat to forests and wildlife. Across the 10 refuge areas, 553 logging coupes covering more than 20,000ha of forests are planned for logging by the Victorian government's logging agency

VicForests. There are many important areas for bushfire impacted threatened species in the Central Highlands, Gippsland, and Alpine areas up for logging.

- Leading scientists from the Threatened Species Recovery Hub made recommendations in January 2020 following the bushfires to locate and protect key refuge areas which “will be of profound importance for species’ recovery, and hence should be the immediate and ongoing focus for conservation management”. Key refuges for wildlife have already been logged, and many more are up for logging
- Almost half of the conservation parks, reserves and Special Protection Zones within the Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system in these three FMAs is within the fire extent. The bushfires also heavily impacted the proposed Immediate Protection Areas (IPAs). Announced in November 2019, the IPAs were intended as new conservation measures for the threatened Greater Glider. Approximately 90% of the IPAs in East Gippsland burnt, with a large proportion subject to high severity fires.

**Some of the recommendations we will be making, feel free to adapt these for your own submission:**

- Logging, including so-called salvage logging operations, must be fully suspended in East Gippsland, and should be suspended elsewhere in forests that contain threatened species impacted by the fires.
- A moratorium on logging is urgently needed at least until there can be comprehensive, well-resourced surveys undertaken as part of the Major Event Review, and required protections put in place for threatened species.
- Protect key refuges and unburnt forests from current and future logging to ensure the survival and persistence of flora and fauna species that rely on these forests to survive
- Declare new reserves and national parks with direction from Traditional Owners
- Bring forward the 2030 transition out of native forest logging. In November 2019, the Victorian government committed to a decade-long transition out of native forest logging. This timeframe was too slow even before the bushfires and its devastating impact on forests and wildlife. Now there is an even more urgent need to rapidly transition the logging industry out of native forests
- Urgently prepare Recovery Plans for species both impacted by the fires and threatened by ongoing logging, and update Conservation Advice. Recovery Plans are critical to protecting listed species, yet so many species at risk of extinction still have no Recovery Plans. The work to finalise these Plans is now even more urgent due to the fires. Some listed species never had Plans prepared at all - others were written in the 1990s and have not been substantively updated or strengthened since then, despite ongoing species declines and obviously weak, vague, and inadequate protections.
- Continued legal exemption of the logging industry from national environment law is a significant gateway for the continued logging of threatened species habitat. We

strongly urge you to reconsider the exemption under the RFAs, especially considering the extensive damage to the Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserve system in eastern Victoria.