

Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee: Inquiry into the EPBC Amendment (Retaining Federal Approval Powers) Bill 2012

Senator McKenzie asked the following question which was taken on notice:

“Mrs Caminiti, earlier this morning we heard the regional forestry agreements being held up as a model for state and federal cooperation. Given the importance of forestry to the Wellington area, do you have some comments around how that plays out in the local area and economy?”

Regional Forestry Agreements (RFAs) were developed in the late 1990s through an extensive process of consultation, although I am not certain of the level of Council involvement in this process at the time. The timber industry is important to the economy of the Wellington Shire, with Australian Sustainable Hardwoods timber mill located in Heyfield processing much of Victoria’s hardwood harvested from state forests under RFAs. The RFAs appear to have worked well as a cooperative planning process which provide certainty to the industry, however, sustainable yields are subject to periodic review taking into account events such as landscape scale fires which have impacted Gippsland in 2003, 2006/7, 2009 and currently. There are some aspects of RFA implementation, particularly around environmental milestones that are of concern. The **Independent Review on Progress with Implementation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) FINAL REPORT May 2010** highlights deficiencies around monitoring, review and public reporting. This report recommends that these processes be strengthened in line with the Hawke review which makes a number of recommendations relevant to the RFAs including that the current mechanisms contained in the EPBC Act for RFA forest management be retained but be subject to rigorous independent performance auditing, reporting and sanctions for serious non-compliance. Support of this recommendation is in line with Council’s submission to ensure that adequate checks and balances are in place to give consideration and protection to our environmental assets.

Yours sincerely
Jo Caminiti



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