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Your Questions Answered

1 What are the JANIS criteria (for designing a reserve system)?

JANIS is the short name given to the Joint Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC), Ministerial Council on Forestry, Fisheries and Aquaculture (MCFFA), and National Forest Policy Statement Implementation Subcommittee. In 1993, JANIS established an intergovernmental working group to draft national reserve criteria. The Technical Working Group had representatives from Commonwealth and State forestry, conservation and scientific agencies. A report by JANIS, *Proposed Nationally Agreed Criteria for the Establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Forests in Australia*, was released in mid-1996 and public submissions were invited. Following consideration of these submissions by JANIS, the criteria were finalised and were endorsed by ANZECC and MCFFA ministers.

The National Reserve Criteria include provision for the protection of biodiversity, old growth and wilderness, as well as recognising the role of off-reserve management in meeting conservation objectives. Further details on the criteria are available on the internet at <http://www.rfa.gov.au> or <http://www.calm.wa.gov.au> or by calling the RFA Infoline on (08) 9480 5872.

2 Will the community still have input after publication of the Options Report?

Yes. When the options are developed they will be published for public comment. The comments made will be taken into account when developing preferred options for consideration by the Prime Minister and the Premier.

3 What steps are being taken to ensure all stakeholders get a fair hearing?

A Stakeholder Reference Group was formed more than a year ago. It consists of about 60 organisations with

direct and indirect interests in the RFA region. These groups include Aboriginal and community groups, forest-based industries (beekeeping, seed collecting, timber and timber-products, tourism and wildflower picking), agricultural interests, environmental and heritage groups, shire councils and WA Government agencies, tertiary institutions and professional bodies.

Community consultation is playing a central part in the development of the Regional Forest Agreement. RFA progress reports are being published every fortnight in the West Australian newspaper and local papers throughout the region.

An RFA Infokit is available from 23 community information centres throughout the South West and in Perth. A 24-hour RFA Infoline has been set up, and there are numerous websites with information on the issue (see Answer 1).

4 Can this agreement really be a long-term solution?

Yes. For the first time ever, WA and the other States and Territories are working with the Commonwealth to produce a nationally agreed system of forest management. It will bring certainty, security and sustainability to the management of our forests.

The RFA for Western Australia's South West Forest Region will be for 20 years, with five-yearly performance reviews. The overall outcome will be the best scientific and administrative package ever produced for the holistic management of Western Australia's forest in the interests of the community as a whole, and of future generations.

5 Who is managing the RFA process in WA?

The process is under the direction of a joint Commonwealth-State Steering Committee, representing the Prime Minister and the Premier, and relevant Federal and State Ministers.

The Steering Committee is advised by a panel of independent scientists and experts, and a range of national consultative forums. It also receives advice

from a Stakeholder Reference Group, a Noongah Action Group and a State Agreement Acts Committee, formed specifically for the RFA.

The Steering Committee has the job of coordinating and facilitating the whole process, including the conduct of projects and the integration of the various assessments that make up the Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA).

The Steering Committee is assisted by Technical Committees that have been reviewing past research, recommending and implementing new research projects and monitoring the research programs to ensure maintenance of the high standards required.

6 Who are the members of the Steering Committee?

The Commonwealth members are Richard Webb and Catharine Masters (Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet) Tony Press (Environment Australia), Peter Thomas (Department of Primary Industry & Energy). The State members are Trish Patton (Ministry of Premier & Cabinet), Syd Shea and Alan Walker (Department of Conservation and Land Management), Lee Ranford (Department of Minerals & Energy).

7 What is the process for developing the RFA for the South West Forest Region?

The process has been going on for a year-and-a-half. It has involved scientific review of past research, identification of what further work needed to be done, allocation or engagement of experts to identify heritage, cultural, economic and other values of the region and programs to identify perceived community and social values.

More than 500 experts from a range of disciplines including forest ecology, soil science, geomorphology, hydrology, archaeology, botany, zoology, geography, economics, social science and geology have been involved in the process.

The current phase is the Integration Phase - in which community consultation will be stepped up as assessment reports are released. An options report will be released for public comment.

The last stage of the RFA process will involve examination of the options in the light of stakeholder and public comment, development of a preferred option for submission to the Commonwealth and State governments, and the preparation of a draft agreement for their signature.

8 If the process and the criteria are so good, why don't the governments agree on a national standard for forest management and get on with it?

That is what they have done. They have subscribed to a National Forest Policy Statement and to the criteria and processes for carrying out that policy. It would be convenient to have a pro forma agreement that all parties could sign, but the governments have recognised that the ecological, heritage and social values of forests differ from one forest region to another, and that economic sustainability also differs. So it is essential to go through the process for each forest region if we are to achieve a viable and lasting outcome. The national uniformity comes from using the same yardsticks in each area.

DECEMBER 1997

Forests and People

The Social Assessment Process

To ensure the RFA is effective and responsive to Western Australian needs, a detailed social assessment of South West communities is being undertaken. During the first phase, the assessment has provided a social snapshot of forest-based industries and communities that may be affected by forest planning decisions.

To develop an understanding of the relationship between forests and people, a number of projects have been conducted, and information from a variety of sources has been integrated to form a social assessment of RFA communities.

A review of the key land use decisions in the region was conducted to understand past effects on communities and towns. The review identified other social impact assessment studies.

To understand general community attitudes and interests in the forests, a telephone survey was carried out in October 1997 involving more than 1000 RFA residents selected at random.

Further information was gathered using surveys and personal interviews to understand local issues and concerns relating to forest use, and to develop a profile of RFA stakeholder interests.

As a component of the regional social profile, Australian Bureau of Statistics data were used to extract demographic and employment statistics, labour force characteristics, community infrastructure and services in South West towns.

The social assessment process also aims to understand the relationship between forest-based industries, the workers and local towns. To do so, industry groups with an economic dependence on the forests have been asked to complete written surveys. These industry groups include: timber, tourism, mining, wineries and other forest based industries such as apiary, craft and

speciality timber, firewood, wildflower pickers and seed collectors. Timber industry employees were also surveyed because of the potential for them to be directly affected if there are large-scale changes in forest use.

The next phase

Following the release of the Options Report, the Steering Committee will hold information meetings to discuss the options and gain community feedback. The public consultation period will allow for further social assessment analysis, including detailed community discussions on the social implications of the options.

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RFA PROCESS

