

31 July 2009

Independent Review of the EPBC Act
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2601
Australia

(e) epbcreview@environment.gov.au



29 Torrens Street
BRADDON ACT 2612
AUSTRALIA

T +61 2 6273 8111
F +61 2 6273 8011
W www.a3p.asn.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Submission on the interim report of the Independent Review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a written submission on the interim report on the Independent Review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 ('EPBC Act').

1. THE AUSTRALIAN PLANTATION PRODUCTS & PAPER INDUSTRY COUNCIL'S (A3P) INTEREST IN THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE EPBC ACT.

A3P is the national industry association representing the interests of all segments of the plantation-based wood products and paper manufacturing industry. A3P member's employ more than 13,500 people in plantation management, sawmills, panel board, and paper manufacturing plants, mainly in rural and regional areas. Each year A3P members create and sell more than \$4 billion of products, produce more than 12 million cubic metres of logs, 3 million cubic metres of sawn timber and more than 2 million tonnes of paper. A list of A3P members and statistics on their operations is available from the A3P website: www.a3p.asn.au.

A3P members include significant land, forest, and environmental managers (of plantation, native forest and other land). These A3P members have a significant current and historical role in land and forest management in the various states of Australia with a key focus on triple bottom line accounting outcomes (ie: maximising social, environmental and economic values).

As a result A3P (on behalf of its members) has an interest in the Independent Review of the EPBC Act and feels the plantation industry supply chain delivers a substantial number of positive environmental outcomes.

This submission includes both specific and broader comments on chapters of relevance in the draft report.

2. CHAPTER 6 – COMMENTS ON FORESTRY.

Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs): RFAs are agreements between the Federal and State Governments based on comprehensive regional assessment (CRA) processes (covering environmental, heritage, social and economic uses and values), and incorporating comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve systems (CAR reserve). Assessment and approval provisions of the EPBC Act do not apply to forestry operations that are undertaken in accordance with an RFA.

A3P supports Regional Forestry Agreements (RFAs) continuing their current status as exempt from Part 3 of the EPBC Act. A3P is interested to see the types of proposals put forward to improve transparency and accountability of the operation of the RFAs to better assess the implementation of environmental protection under the RFAs as proposed in the draft report.

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM): Two linked broader plantation forestry and timber industry initiatives address key biodiversity issues including the proposed threats, such as invasive species; loss, fragmentation and degradation of habitat; unsustainable use of natural resources; changes to the aquatic environment, are sustainable forest management and associated certification. Forests play a significant role in environmental management (certainly above their percentage share of total land-use in Australia) and the main tool that underpins this environmental management focus is sustainable forest management.

A key principle of sustainable forest management is the simultaneous management of forests for multiple uses, integrating commercial and non commercial objectives such as biodiversity management, timber production, recreation, aesthetics, grazing, soil and water catchment protection, carbon sequestration, cultural and scientific values

A3P recommends the adoption and implementation of the core principles of sustainable forest management to all forms of land use in Australia and internationally, as the best method to achieve environmental and triple bottom line outcomes.

Certification - A3P encourages its members to seek independent sustainable forest management certification and chain of custody certification to demonstrate the sustainability aspects of their forest management to governments, citizens and the marketplace. Two of the main sustainable forest management schemes are The Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The PEFC includes the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS).

Certification is seen by A3P as a vehicle to ensure that sustainable forest management is adopted, practiced, and is the culture of land managers across Australia.

Fire Management: A3P has concerns about misconceptions regarding fire management and its impact on biodiversity (specifically in forested land). A3P members include significant land and forest managers (of plantation, native forest and other land). These A3P members have a significant current and historical role in fire detection, suppression and management on land directly managed by them and on adjacent land holdings in the various states of Australia.

These organisations play a key role (and have had a long successful history) in fire management on a landscape scale (across differing land tenures, land uses, and fuel types) including fire suppression, fire prevention, fire policy input, fire planning and management. This includes investment in fire prevention, detection, and suppression resources, commensurate with the plantation asset value and fire risk.

Strategic hazard reduction burning is a key prevention strategy utilised by forest managers to reduce fuel load and the risk of large bushfires. Other strategies include grazing, mechanical hazard reduction (mineral earth breaks), community education, and regulation of potential fire ignitions.

Strategic hazard reduction burning has been shown, by extensive research, real fire experience and history, and acceptance by land and forest managers, to be the most effective fire prevention and mitigation tool in a land/forest manager's arsenal. Fire has been natural part of the Australian environment for thousands of years and has shaped our ecosystems. Indeed many of our species and ecosystems need fire to regenerate. The precise effects of bushfires on biodiversity are dependent on many factors such as intensity, site conditions, extent and season. Intense mega fires effect forest and soil health, biodiversity, protection of threatened species and our water catchments.

A3P suggests that further thought be given to fire management, fuel load management and role of active landscape management in light of the Victorian Bushfires in early 2009.

3. CHAPTER 8 – COMMENTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE.

A3P's structure mirrors the integrated nature of the plantation products and paper industry supply chain. Our industry is unique because the start of that supply chain is a tree, which stores carbon during growth. That carbon storage is maintained in finished forest products throughout their life and even after disposal. Wood fibre is recycled, forest and timber residues and by-products from manufacturing are used to produce renewable heat and power, and carbon storage in the forest stand is perpetuated through the continuous cycle of harvesting and replanting. This makes ours the only carbon positive industry in Australia. A3P members acknowledge that climate is changing as a result of human intervention and that action is required.

As a net store of carbon, the industry should remain vibrant with the introduction of an emissions trading scheme. Expansion of commercial timber plantations, and wood and paper product manufacturing, would provide a net benefit from a climate change perspective, as well as delivering socio-economic and other environmental outcomes.

A3P members' different businesses along the supply chain are all part of the climate change solution. In terms of the forest grower's response to the impacts of climate change on the environment, the goal of sustainable forest management is entirely congruent with increased environmental values in the future.

A3P recommends that climate change is not declared a matter of National Environmental Significance (NES) due to the uncertainties surrounding the application, structure, and framework of the CPRS and RET.

4. CHAPTER 9 – COMMENTS ON WATER.

The National Water Initiative (NWI) is Australia's enduring blueprint for water reform. Through it, governments across Australia have agreed on actions to achieve a more cohesive national approach to the way Australia manages, measures, plans for, prices, and trades water. The NWI represents a shared commitment by governments to increase the efficiency of Australia's water use, leading to greater certainty for investment and productivity, for rural and urban communities, and for the environment.

Under the NWI, governments have made commitments to:

- prepare water plans with provision for the environment
- deal with over-allocated or stressed water systems
- introduce registers of water rights and standards for water accounting
- expand the trade in water
- improve pricing for water storage and delivery
- meet and manage urban water demands.

The overall objective of the National Water Initiative is to achieve a nationally compatible market, regulatory and planning based system of managing surface and groundwater resources for rural and urban use that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes. The NWI identifies certain land use change activities (including large scale plantation forestry) as having the potential to intercept surface / ground water. The NWI requires assessment of the significance of the impact of these land use change activities on catchments and aquifers, based on an understanding of the total water cycle, economic and environmental costs and benefits of the activities of concern. Appropriate planning, management and regulatory measures will be applied to land use change activities where necessary to protect the integrity of the water access entitlements systems and the achievement of environmental objectives.

A3P recommends on this basis that the NWI is the appropriate policy vehicle for water management on a national basis, and as such DEWHA should take that into account when considering any potential amendment to the EPBC Act.

5. CHAPTER 22 – COMMENTS ON EPBC ACT ADMINISTRATION.

In regard to funding and training for DEWHA to undertake effective and efficient administration of the EPBC Act - A3P recommends an increase in the base level of recurrent funding to DEWHA over a longer timeframe targeted on a risk-based approach to key functions including training and retention of key staff. In addition (and designed to be complementary) A3P recommends that DAFF would also see an increase in the base level of recurrent funding to underpin the efficient and effective administration of the related RFA Act.

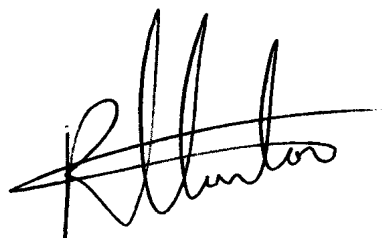
6. **CHAPTER 23 – COMMENTS ON REDUCING REGULATORY BURDEN AND STREAMLINING PROCESSES.**

In regard to reducing the regulatory burden and streamlining processes between the Federal and State Government environmental regulatory regimes regarding functions of the EPBC Act -A3P supports the principles and initiatives that target the reduction of regulatory overlap and duplication wherever possible, and suggests that any identified outcomes from the review that refine the use of bilateral agreements and target administrative in-efficiencies are developed and implemented.

The plantation timber industry looks forward to working constructively with the Independent Review in the finalisation of the report on the EPBC Act.

If you have any questions in relation to the matters raised above please contact Gavin Matthew (02 6273 8111 or gavin.matthew@a3p.asn.au).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Stanton', with a horizontal line drawn through the middle of the signature.

RICHARD STANTON
Chief Executive Officer

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