



Central West communities snubbed by Victorian Government

The Victorian Government has ignored the concerns of rural communities in its rush to create more national parks.

The Institute of Foresters of Australia calls on Minister d'Ambrosio to direct the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to follow its legislated charter which requires VEAC to adhere to the principles of 'ecologically sustainable development'.

Institute spokesman, Mark Poynter, said: 'VEAC's advice to the Minister is a clear breach of the VEAC Act (2001) which requires VEAC to "enhance individual and community well-being", yet VEAC's recommendation to slash the State Forest area by 90 per cent is opposed by a substantial majority of local people living in and around State forests.

'These communities rely on the forests for a range of public services and life-style activities.

'The recently released final report of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's (VEAC) into the future of forested public land in Central West Victoria shows that the agency has not listened to local communities. They have ignored the great work done to care and look after the environment by Landcare, farmers, foresters and people living in bushland settings.

'The notion promoted by VEAC that only national parks and reserves can 'protect' the environment, is plainly incorrect.

'The IFA strongly supports biodiversity conservation, and we believe that the existing mix of dedicated parks, other reserves and State Forests already conserves biodiversity while allowing people to undertake activities such as horse-riding, free camping, hunting, dog-walking, and domestic firewood collection.

'VEAC has not explained why the current mix of public land categories is unacceptable and what threats to biodiversity, if any, will be alleviated by the land tenure changes that it is recommending.

'The critical threats to biodiversity, such as fire, pest plants, feral carnivores, and climate change do not respect land tenure boundaries. Conservation requires active forest management and simply changing the land category from State Forest to parks and conservation reserves will not address these key threats.

VEAC's recommendations are inappropriate for a government agency responsible for creating a balance between conservation and uses that satisfy all stakeholders.

'If adopted, VEAC's final recommendations for the Central-West forests would provide only an illusion of environmental protection, while permanently shutting-out a range of legitimate community uses,' said Mark.

Contacts

Mark Poynter
0415 846 819
mailto: