

Media Release

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Federal Government confirms strong Commonwealth environmental oversight in Regional Forest Agreements

Senior officials from the Federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment have confirmed the Commonwealth has oversight and termination powers over forestry operations covered by Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs), and that these powers are built into the RFA framework.

During a Senate Committee hearing yesterday into proposed legislation sponsored by Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie that seeks to remove legal uncertainty for RFA forestry operations in Australia, the officials also confirmed that Senator McKenzie's Bill will not diminish these powers.

Sen McKenzie: *Can the Commonwealth terminate or suspend an RFA if it has concerns the obligations are not being met by the State?*

Emma Campbell: (First Assistant Secretary - Dept. Agriculture, Water, and the Environment): *The RFA has dispute resolution clauses, that yes, they can be terminated.*

Sen McKenzie: *So, the Commonwealth has the power to terminate or suspend an RFA if it has concerns the obligations are not being met by the State?*

Emma Campbell: *Either Party can terminate the RFA.*

Sen McKenzie: *...Does this amendment before us today change that?*

Emma Campbell: *No, that provision is within the RFA, not in the [EPBC] Act.*

Sen McKenzie: *So, removing the words ["in accordance with"] from [section 38 (1) of] the EPBC Act will not change Commonwealth oversight of Regional Forestry Agreements?*

Emma Campbell: *It will not change the Commonwealth's ability to terminate the RFA.*

Australian Forest Products Association CEO Ross Hampton said RFAs were designed to provide equivalent protections as the EPBC Act and Australians can have confidence that Australia's native forestry operations are regulated to the highest environmental standards in the world.

"This legislation will provide certainty for Australia's forestry industries by reaffirming that the Commonwealth's significant regulatory powers through the RFA framework provides the necessary Commonwealth oversight for RFA forestry operations," Mr Hampton said.

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