

VicForests Sets Out Roadmap for FSC Controlled Wood

VicForests, today, released the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) audit report (May 2018) and reaffirmed its commitment to pursuing certification of FSC Controlled Wood standard.

In conjunction with the results, VicForests released its FSC 2020: VicForests Controlled Wood Roadmap outlining the steps for VicForests to achieve its goal and address non-conformities raised in the audit.

VicForests will resubmit for certification of FSC Controlled Wood standard by 2020.

VicForests has been separately certified since 2007 under the Responsible Wood certification (the Australian Forestry Standard) which is endorsed by the international Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) – the largest such system in the world covering around 240 million hectares of forest across 30 countries and equating to around two-thirds of the world's total certified forest area.

The FSC Controlled Wood audit found VicForests conformed with 15 of 23 key indicators with 3 minor non-conformities, largely of an administrative nature; and 4 major non-conformities and one indicator deemed inapplicable. The audit raised some areas requiring further attention to achieve FSC Controlled Wood, being:

- Accidental encroachments into sensitive areas
- Clear-felling and regeneration burns that impact old growth, threatened species and High Conservation Values (HCVs)
- Enhanced consultation with stakeholders

In response to the report, VicForests' roadmap commits to improve operations and engagement and ensure the best position to achieve FSC Controlled Wood standard.

The roadmap commits VicForests to:

- Develop and implement new practices to further reduce boundary encroachments
- Review harvest methods and regeneration practices including in relation to their impact on High Conservation Values and Old Growth stands
- Revise and improve a new stakeholder engagement plan

Chief Executive Officer, Nathan Trushell, said VicForests accepts there is more work needed and that it would redouble efforts to address outstanding issues raised in the audit.

Over 8 years VicForests has harvested more than 2500 coupes with a breach rate of 1 per cent – a majority of which were self-reported. The audit raised encroachments on rainforest, of which there has been one substantiated breach. VicForests will strive for zero.



“These results show that FSC certification is a journey, that there remain areas for improvement, and that VicForests is well on its way to achieving FSC,” Mr Trushell said

“We have come a long way. This year, the State Government and VicForests announced a new policy to ensure trees over 2.5 metres in diameter are automatically preserved and protected.

“The State Government has also announced extended areas of the Kuark Forest, including Old growth, will be protected.

“We are protecting habitat for threatened species including the Greater Glider and Leadbeater’s Possum, and we work with leading scientists to conduct much-needed research into these animals to better understand their habitat requirements.

“Accidental encroachments are also a concern for us. While the FSC audit says the incidence is not high, VicForests aims to achieve zero encroachments outside authorised boundaries. We will examine how new technologies may help us do better.

“We also commit to working with stakeholders across other issues, such as harvest methods. VicForests has begun moving to a more intensive engagement with communities and has undertaken more frequent community group and local government consultation.

Mr Trushell said VicForests was now within striking distance of adding FSC Controlled Wood to its Responsible Wood certification.

“That is our goal by 2020 and I’m confident that can be achieved.”

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Background:

- *There is 7.1 million hectares of public forests across Victoria, about 94 per cent of which is protected in parks, reserves or is unsuitable for native timber harvesting.*
- *VicForests harvests around 3000 hectares per year, or 0.04 per cent. This represents, nominally, the equivalent of 4 in every 10,000 trees.*
- *VicForests is separately certified under the Responsible Wood certification. All commercial native timber harvesting enterprises across Australia are certified under this system including Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia.*
- *High Conservation Values (HCVs) are protected through rigorous conservation practices including exclusion zones for threatened species and buffer zones to prevent encroachment on rainforest areas.*
- *VicForests protects any Leadbeater Possum or colonies through a 12.6-hectare Timber Harvest Exclusion Zone, equivalent to about 6 MCG fields. This protection has been consulted and agreed upon with a wide range of independent scientists, regulators and environment groups.*
- *VicForests also applies Greater Gliders protection zones, throughout East Gippsland, of 100 hectares in areas where more than 10 Gliders are found in a one-kilometre line.*



- *VicForests is committed to the highest standard of regeneration. VicForests replants all the areas that are harvested, replanting areas with the same trees that were there previously.*
- *Over 8 years, VicForests has harvested more than 2500 coupes with a breach rate of, only, 1 per cent; and only one substantiated breach of encroachments on rainforest buffer zones.*
- *Separate to the eastern Victorian audit, where most harvesting occurs, VicForests underwent a “pre-assessment”, or gap analysis, of the much smaller western Victorian operations.*