

Tuesday 7 May 2019

## VicForests transforming harvest and species protection systems

VicForests has completed the key first consultation phase of a revision of its harvesting methods and practices to enhance threatened species protection.

The consultative process has benefitted from input from major stakeholders, including industry, environment groups and Government.

More than 100 stakeholder organisations have been directly contacted by VicForests.

The extensive consultation is part of VicForests goal of attaining the Forest Stewardship Council® Controlled Wood standard by 2020.

The proposed altered harvesting methods and species protection approach will be governed by two key documents, currently in draft. They are:

- VicForests Harvesting and Regeneration Systems
- VicForests High Conservation Value Management Systems

The documents can be found at [FSC® 2020 draft systems](#).

VicForests is proposing to increase the use of a variable retention harvesting method and to markedly decrease the use of clear-fall harvesting and regeneration burning methods to enhance biodiversity outcomes.

Variable harvesting retention involves lighter harvesting that can see up to 80% of a forest stand retained within a coupe. Further, the regeneration of harvested forest may be achieved by re-seeding without burning or, where appropriate, using low intensity or limited burning.

The much-reduced reliance on high intensity post-harvest burning will enhance outcomes for retained habitat elements.

VicForests' high conservation value management system for threatened species will centre on retaining hollow bearing and large old trees, and include trees that are assessed to have the potential for developing into future hollow bearing trees.

This is in addition to all other existing protection measures currently applied for many endangered species and their habitats.

These trees essentially provide current and future habitat for a wide range of species, including threatened species such as Leadbeater's Possum and the Greater Glider.

Some clear-fall operations are still expected to occur, particularly in Ash forests where there are no high conservation values present. Underpinning science shows that this method of mimicking the effects of

bushfire minimises safety hazards for forest workers and provides the best regeneration and regrowth of these forest types.

In March and April, input into the developing drafts was invited from an array of stakeholders. VicForests has received many comprehensive responses, including from key industry, forest user and environment groups.

During May, the input will be analysed by VicForests ecologists, silviculture (harvesting) and operational health and safety specialists, and revised drafts will be developed.

This will be followed by a second round of consultations into the updated drafts in June, before they are finalised in preparation for an FSC® audit anticipated for November 2019.

The broad principles of the new practices have commenced in some coupes, and these will be continuously refined based on operational learnings and stakeholder feedback.

Therefore, the documents will remain iterative, and VicForests will continue to receive input and review the documents on an on-going basis.

“This is a transformational period for VicForests,” said acting Chief Executive Officer, Anne Geary. “We are focused and committed to revising our harvesting and species protection to align with the FSC® standard, and also with changing community and industry expectations.

“We thank those groups and individuals who have taken time to provide detailed and constructive input that will assist us to complete our plans.”

Submissions on the two documents can still be made to: [vfs.fsc@vicforests.com.au](mailto:vfs.fsc@vicforests.com.au).

## ENDS

### *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 of that area – nominally equivalent to 4 trees in 10,000.*
- *VicForests is certified under the Responsible Wood certification.*
- *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 Glider 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.*