

Forest Management System – Summary Audit Report			
Client name:	VicForests	Certificate #:	AFS 703072
Client address	Level 12, 461 Bourke Street Melbourne, Victoria 3001	Website:	vicforests.com.au
Audit type:	Routine Surveillance	Audit date:	15-19 June 2020
Standard:	AS4708:2013	Auditor/s:	Ross Garsden
<p>This document provides a summary of the findings contained in a report to this client with respect to the implementation of the client’s management system as determined during an audit conducted by BSI.</p>			

Scope of certification:

Activities associated with the sustainable management of native forests in Victoria for timber production, including: the planning and supervision of harvesting operations; marketing of forest products and the regeneration of forests post-harvest. The Defined Forest Area consists of ash and mixed eucalypt forests in the east of the State and community forests primarily in the west of the State.

Executive summary:

This report presents the findings of a routine surveillance assessment regarding VicForests’ compliance with the nominated Standard. The audit included an assessment of administrative functions at the Head Office and forest management activities in the Central Highlands. The assessment was conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 situation. The audit employed Information and Communication Technologies. There were no connectivity issues and the audit objectives have been achieved.

Immediately prior to this assessment, VicForests learned the outcome of Federal Court proceedings in relation to Leadbeater’s Possum. As a result, the audit time was extended to include an assessment of VicForests’ response to the court findings.

In September 2020 the Court made its Orders. In response, VicForests has subsequently lodged an appeal. Following the Federal Court decision, several other cases have arisen however these are outside the scope of this assessment.

Well before this court case was finalised, VicForests had already initiated several improvements in several key areas of its forests practices that were relevant to the case. These measures included:

- the implementation of retention harvesting and modified regeneration techniques which have now been in place since 1 July 2019;
- the implementation of protection measures included in the Greater Glider Action Statement released in November 2019, including the cessation of old growth forest harvesting; and;
- a significant increase in the number of pre-harvest surveys for threatened species and hollow bearing trees.

BSI notes that despite finding against VicForests in relation to the EPBC Breaches, no orders were made against VicForests for civil penalties despite their availability at law. The

judgement expressly stated that the case "is not a criminal prosecution". While criminal sanctions can ensue from breaches of the EPBC Act, this is not the case here. Further, as noted above, no civil penalty orders were made against VicForests.

The audit included an evaluation of correspondence from interested parties in relation to the validity of VicForests' certification in light of the Federal Court findings. Where appropriate, the correspondence was passed on to VicForests for consideration. The audit included direct communication with a number of interested parties. The audit has confirmed that VicForests complaints handling processes are consistent with the requirements of the Standard. BSI has determined that the issues raised do not have any adverse impact on VicForests' certification.

The audit identified a significant strength in the organisation's management system in relation to contractor accountability with respect to Safety Management Systems and the effectiveness of contractor field audits.

Significant improvements were noted in this assessment in relation to:

- Availability of coupe maps/plans on the VicForests website
- 5-Year planning process including standardised mapping and plans accessible to staff and public
- Provision of resources (Specialist Modeller) for resource modelling
- Revised post-harvest fauna monitoring processes
- Standardised electronic and hard-copy file structure
- Improved roading management arrangements (Roading Manual)
- Pre-harvest visual impact assessment (3D modelling)
- VF Haulage Safety Management System (HSMS) and demonstrated trend in reducing rollovers
- Development of an internal training plan and schedule for staff development.

One new non-conformance was identified during this audit in relation to procedures for maintaining knowledge of changes to the DFA. Additionally, a number of new opportunities for improvement have also been noted in relation to: heavy vehicle transport; non-conformance management; record keeping; training; and operational controls.

The audit has confirmed the organisation's commitment to continual improvement in both its operational performance and the systems that support the business. The audit has verified that VicForests continues to meet the requirements of AS 4708:2013.

The next audit is planned to assess the management activities in East Gippsland. The auditor would like to acknowledge the cooperation and constructive engagement of all staff involved in the planning and conduct of this audit. Once again, VicForests staff demonstrated a high level of professionalism and competence and an interest and willingness to actively engage and support the audit process.

Defined forest area statement (Forest Management Units)	
FMU 1 – Ash Species / Eastern DFA	
FMU 2 – High Elevation mixed species / Eastern DFA	
FMU 3 – Low elevation mixed species/ Eastern DFA	
FMU 4 – Coastal mixed species / Eastern DFA	
FMU 5 – Low elevation mixed species / Western DFA	
FMU 6 – Coastal mixed species / Western DFA	
FMU 7 – Red gum / Western DFA	
FMU 8 – Box Ironbark / Western DFA	
FMU 9 – Ash Species (Blackwood) / Western DFA	
Defined forest area (in hectares):	2,673,023 ha
Advised to AFS Limited on:	19 June 2020
Certificate expires on:	8 February 2022
Report prepared by:	
Ross Garsden	Lead Auditor – Forest Management Systems
<i>Name of person who prepared this report</i>	<i>Position</i>

END OF REPORT