

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about VicForests' FSC 2020 Project

6 May 2019

VicForests has identified a set of FAQs about its FSC 2020 Project. Answers to these questions are set out below.

| Question | Answer |
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| <p>1. What is FSC 'Controlled Wood'?</p> | <p>FSC controlled wood is material from acceptable sources that can be mixed with FSC-certified material in products that carry the FSC Mix label.</p> <p>The <i>FSC Controlled Wood Standard for Forest Management Enterprises (FSC-STD-30-010)</i> is an international standard that allows forest management enterprises to provide evidence to a company or third-party certification body that the wood they supply has been controlled to avoid wood being harvested from unacceptable sources. Unacceptable sources include illegally harvested wood, wood harvested in violation of traditional and civil rights, wood harvested in forests in which high conservation values are threatened, wood harvested in forests being converted to plantations or non-forest use, and wood from forests in which genetically modified trees are planted.</p> <p>The Controlled Wood standard is considered a first step towards achieving full forest management certification under the FSC framework.</p> |
| <p>2. Why is VicForests pursuing certification under the FSC Controlled Wood standard?</p> | <p>VicForests was established to sustainably manage the State's renewable timber resources for the long-term environmental, economic and social benefit of all Victorians.</p> <p>Third-party certification provides an independent, objective and standardised measure of forest management sustainability. Through third-party certification, VicForests demonstrates that its operations meet requirements for best practice in sustainable forest management. This is done by ensuring its operations meet a set of predetermined and clearly defined environmental, economic, social and cultural performance requirements that support the sustainable management of forests.</p> <p>There are two major forest management certification schemes operating worldwide - PEFC (Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification) and FSC (Forest Stewardship Council). VicForests' operations are already certified to the <i>Responsible Wood</i> standard endorsed by PEFC, which is the largest forest certification system in the world. VicForests has maintained this certification since February 2007.</p> <p>The next step towards third party certification within the FSC framework is to demonstrate conformance with the FSC Controlled Wood standard.</p> |
| <p>3. What part of the Victorian forested landscape is VicForests permitted to harvest?</p> | <p>There is around 7.1 million hectares of public forests across Victoria, and around 94% of this is protected in parks and reserves or is unsuitable for native timber harvesting.</p> <p>VicForests currently harvests around 2,500 – 3,000 ha per year¹, which is less than 0.04% of the total public native forest estate. This means that VicForests' sustainable timber harvesting occurs in a very small proportion of Victoria's public native forests – and is conducted in accordance with State regulations as well as industry standards.</p> |

¹ VicForests 2014, *VicForests' 2014 Area Statement*. Online: <http://www.vicforests.com.au/planning-1/area-statement>.

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| <p>4. What will VicForests do differently under its FSC 2020 project?</p> | <p>As part of its FSC 2020 project, VicForests is conducting a comprehensive review and revision of its harvesting and regeneration systems and its High Conservation Values (HVCs) Management Systems, to better align with FSC Controlled Wood standard.</p> <p>VicForests recently released the following draft plans for stakeholder input²:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VicForests’ High Conservation Value Management Systems • VicForests’ Harvesting and Regeneration Systems <p>These documents reflect VicForests’ intent to modify practices in relation to its harvesting and regeneration and high conservation values.</p> <p>Enhanced stakeholder engagement is central to the review of these plans and related instructions. In this context, we are working to provide multiple opportunities for stakeholder input over time. In addition to ongoing engagement and consultation across the state, VicForests has committed to following up the release of the draft plans with a subsequent invitation for further input on a revised set of plans that incorporate stakeholder feedback.</p> |
| <p>5. Is VicForests continuing to apply clear-felling systems?</p> | <p>VicForests has committed to progressively reduce its reliance on the predominant use of clear-felling and regeneration burning.</p> <p>This is occurring through the further development and application of variable retention systems. These systems incorporate increasing levels of retained trees and reduced use of burning to prepare coupes for regrowth and regeneration.</p> <p>This shift is guided by a range of contemporary national and international studies on forest silviculture, i.e. harvesting and regeneration systems. VicForests is also listening and responding to a broad range of stakeholder views and concerns about clear-felling and high intensity burns for regeneration of Ash forests.</p> <p>VicForests is underway in making this shift.</p> |
| <p>6. With retention harvesting systems, will the trees be retained permanently?</p> | <p>VicForests’ increasing focus on tree retention within harvesting areas will incorporate protection for existing hollow-bearing trees, because these are known to be critical for habitat.</p> <p>In addition, VicForests is focussing on recruitment of future habitat trees; these are trees that may not yet have significant habitat features but are likely to develop these features. Existing hollow-bearing trees and recruitment trees will be designated in mapped records and retained indefinitely, i.e. for the life of those retained trees.</p> <p>The primary objectives of VicForests’ shift to increase tree retention are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthen the protection of existing threatened animal and plant species and their habitat requirements; • protect and enhance habitat for hollow-dependent fauna and ensure that existing habitat is conserved while new habitats can develop, by retaining and recruiting high quality potential habitat trees; • facilitate biodiversity corridors and aggregated retention across the broader forest landscape, to complement existing reserves, i.e. areas protected from any harvesting; and |

² These draft plans are available on VicForests’ website: <http://www.vicforests.com.au/what-is-certification/fsc-certification-overview/fsc-2020-vicforests-controlled-wood-roadmap>

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintain the structural diversity and biodiversity of native forests within timber production areas. <p>In suitable areas and coupes, more selective harvesting and regrowth systems will be implemented. This means tree retention rates of 40% or more of the forest cover within the designated coupe area. These retention levels will typically exceed the requirements specifically for habitat conservation.</p> <p>These coupes present the opportunity for VicForests to manage low intensity harvesting operations, and potentially more frequent operations over time. For example: a coupe that is harvested with 50% retention of forest cover could potentially support another low intensity harvest in approximately 30 years, while still retaining late mature/senescent trees and a significant proportion of regrowth and mature trees for recruitment of future habitat.</p> <p>VicForests intends to engage further with its stakeholders on this approach to retention. VicForests will also monitor forest growth and yield across a sample of harvest sites.</p> |
| <p>7. Has VicForests consulted with independent experts on the development of its revised systems for harvesting and regeneration and the identification, retention and protection of HCVs?</p> | <p>Yes. VicForests has consulted with independent experts and research partners, principally university and forest ecology specialists; and is continuing to liaise with these specialists on the design of its silvicultural systems.</p> <p>As part of this consultation, VicForests has reviewed relevant research on the conservation of large trees in harvested forests and across the broader landscape. This includes assessments of factors that influence the effectiveness of the retention of large old trees within harvesting coupes.</p> <p>VicForests has drawn on key findings from the published research and expert opinions in designing its new harvesting and regeneration systems; and is continuing to refine these systems with further stakeholder input.</p> |
| <p>8. How will VicForests' new Harvesting & Regeneration Systems impact on the conservation of Leadbeater's Possum?</p> | <p>Leadbeater's Possum conservation measures already in place will be enhanced by VicForests' new harvesting and regeneration systems.</p> <p>A detailed overview of the extensive work already done to protect the Leadbeater's Possum can be found at VicForests' website: "Protecting the Leadbeater's Possum".³</p> <p>Subject to strict regulations pertaining to the protection of fauna values, VicForests' professional foresters routinely survey all areas of State forests designated as available for timber harvesting. They assess these harvesting areas for the presence or likely presence of threatened species such as Leadbeater's Possum. Among many other values, the pre-harvest surveys are designed to identify Possum habitat, and when potential habitat is identified, it is protected in accordance with regulatory requirements.</p> |
| <p>9. How will VicForests' new Harvesting & Regeneration Systems impact on the conservation of the Greater Glider?</p> | <p>Similar to its position on conserving habitat for the Leadbeater's Possum, VicForests' new harvesting and regeneration systems will enhance existing conservation measures specifically in place for the Greater Glider.</p> <p>VicForests is further developing its suite of variable retention and group retention systems that will increase the level of tree retention within timber production zones. This will include retaining more habitat trees for Greater Gliders and more future potential habitat trees.</p> |

³ VicForests, 2019. *Protecting the Leadbeater's Possum*. Online: <http://www.vicforests.com.au/leadbeaters-possum1/protecting-the-leadbeaters-possum>

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| | <p>VicForests is awaiting the State Government’s new prescription for the protection of Greater Gliders and will ensure is increased retention complements the anticipated, upcoming State-wide prescription.</p> |
| <p>10. What does the Controlled Wood standard require in relation to protecting old-growth forest?</p> | <p>The FSC Controlled Wood standard requires harvesting operations to ensure they do not threaten high conservation values (HCVs). HCVs are defined under the Australia’s National Forest Stewardship Standard (FSC-STD-AUS-01-2018 EN); and under HCV category 3.</p> <p>HCVs include old-growth forest, which is defined as <i>ecologically mature forest where the effects of disturbances are now negligible</i>.</p> <p>Therefore, under the FSC Controlled Wood standard, VicForests needs to ensure that old-growth forest, as defined in the national standard, is not threatened by management activities (e.g. timber harvesting).</p> <p>VicForests has addressed this requirement within its draft High Conservation Management System (v1.0, March 2019), which states:</p> <p><i>When mapped old-growth forest is verified by field surveys, or otherwise identified outside of modelled mapping, VicForests will exclude and protect these values from timber production.</i></p> <p><i>This policy extends beyond regulatory requirements to protect all pre-1900 Ash forests within the Central Highlands. This policy will encompass ‘old-growth forest’ in Ash and Mixed species forests, across all FMAs.</i></p> <p>VicForests intends to ensure protection for old-growth forest by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conducting an HCV assessment for all areas designated as available for timber harvesting that have mapped old-growth forest or are assessed as potentially having old-growth forest that is not mapped; • verifying the presence of old-growth forest, in conjunction with recognised experts where required; • mapping and excluding these verified areas of old-growth forest from timber production; and • complementing this systematic protection of old growth forest through prescribed retention of trees and small clumps of trees that have features of old-growth; i.e. are in the senescent/late mature growth stages. |
| <p>11. What about large and giant trees?</p> | <p>In the context of considering old-growth forest, VicForests also recognises the habitat value and significant historical and aesthetic values of particularly large or tall trees - some of which are referred to as large trees or giant trees. These trees occur within old-growth forest stands <i>and</i> as isolated individuals or in patches that do not meet the old-growth definition.</p> <p>Giant trees and some old large trees are relatively rare in the landscape, especially across forest areas that have been subject to high intensity bushfires and timber harvesting. VicForests maintains a register of these trees, and VicForests’ <i>Giant, Tall and Other Large Tree Protection Instruction</i> outlines the process by which field staff assess and identify these trees.</p> <p>In March 2018, the State Government introduced a new state-wide protection measure for large trees. This protection measure has been implemented initially by agreement with VicForests, and the parties to this agreement</p> |

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| | <p>expect it will be formalised in the regulatory framework in 2019.⁴ The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and VicForests entered into this agreement, on the basis that it is expected the increased level of protection for large trees will provide benefits to a range of hollow-dependant fauna including the Greater Glider, Leadbeater's Possum, Yellow-bellied Glider, Mountain Brush-tailed Possum, Masked Owl, Sooty Owl and Powerful Owl.</p> <p>Under this state-wide protection measure, in all coupes where timber harvesting is conducted, VicForests must retain and protect all large trees from the direct impacts of timber harvesting and regeneration burning, including by ensuring that slash and bark accumulation is cleared from within 3 metres of the base of retained trees. A large tree is defined as a living tree of any species with a diameter at breast height (1.3m above ground) equal to or greater than 2.5 metres over bark.</p> |
| <p>12. What does the Controlled Wood standard require in relation to protecting Rainforest?</p> | <p>VicForests' obligations to protect rainforest are nested within the FSC Controlled Wood standard requirements. These requirements focus on ensuring that HCVs, including rainforest, are not threatened by management activities.</p> <p>VicForests, in seeking to align our practices with FSC Controlled Wood standard requirements, will meet and where possible exceed this expectation.</p> |
| <p>13. What is the timeline for VicForests' FSC 2020 project?</p> | <p>VicForests is seeking an evaluation against FSC Controlled Wood Standard by 2020. VicForests is liaising and consulting with a range of stakeholders and aligning its practices to ensure compliance with FSC Controlled Wood standard throughout 2019 - with the aim of entering an audit for controlled wood standard in late 2019.</p> |

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⁴ DELWP, 2019. *Statewide Protection for Large Trees*. Online: <https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/statewide-protection-for-large-trees>