

Australian Standard Protects Forest Values

Significant biodiversity values are recognised and protected under the Australian Standard for Forest Management (AS4708) (the Standard).

The Standard has 40 explicit forest management requirements under eight Criteria. In order to be certified under the Standard a forest manager must be able to demonstrate to the accredited certification body that they have met the requirements. Several of these criteria deal with forest biodiversity and structure, including:

Requirement 4.3.1

“The forest manager shall actively identify and assess the significance of biological diversity values and structural elements (such as standing and fallen dead wood and hollow bearing trees) to support the maintenance and protection of identified significant biological diversity values”.

Requirement 4.3.3

“The forest manager shall implement practices to support the protection and maintenance of significant biological diversity values likely to be affected by forest operations ...”

Requirement 4.3.4

“The forest manager shall progressively establish and maintain a spatial configuration of forest cover, stand structure elements and growth stages that are intended to support the protection and maintenance of significant biological diversity values”.

Requirement 4.4.3

“The forest manager shall evaluate and use silvicultural systems that have been demonstrated to be appropriate for the forest type, the specific stand and sit conditions, forest management objectives and market/product requirements.”

Note 2 – The AFS Technical Reference Committee considered ... and strong community concern about clearfelling in arriving at its position on silvicultural practices. ...However, it does not preclude the use of clearfelling where it is the most appropriate silvicultural system.”

Definitions

Significant Biological Diversity Values

Significant Biological Diversity Values include:

- *threatened (including vulnerable, rare and endangered) forest types or ecosystems and old-growth forest that is depleted within a forest type or ecosystem as identified, under the nationally agreed forest reserve criteria;*

- *forest types or ecosystems and old-growth forest that are under-represented in the regional conservation reserve system, as implemented through Regional Forest Agreements;*
- *known and likely occurrences of threatened (including vulnerable, rare, or endangered) species and communities and relevant habitat;*
- *habitat of migratory species listed under the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999;*
- *Ramsar wetlands; and*
- *natural heritage places with regionally or nationally significant concentrations of biological diversity values (e.g., refugia and centres of endemism).*

Old-growth forest

Forest that is ecologically mature and has been subjected to negligible unnatural disturbance such as logging, roading and clearing. The definition focuses on forest in which the upper stratum or overstorey is in the late mature to over mature growth phases. (This definition has been amended to produce an agreed National operational interpretation as follows: 'Oldgrowth forest is ecologically mature forest where the effects of disturbances are now negligible'.)

It has been asserted that "the AFS does not prohibit clearfelling of high conservation value forests and primeval forests". The Australian Standard for Forest Management does not use these explicit words. "High conservation value" and "primeval" are not clearly defined and commonly used terms in Australian forest management and therefore it is difficult to use them in a standard which must be clear, so that it can be audited against. However, any fair and balanced reading of the Australian Standard, particularly the clauses listed above, would have to acknowledge that the type of values likely to be embodied in the high conservation value and primeval forest concepts are identified and protected by the Standard's requirements.

It is also important to note that the Standard is designed for use in auditing the management of all types of Australian forests including Australia's diverse native forest and plantations, regardless of age. This is consistent with the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) which both provide for the certification of management of native (natural) and plantation forests.

For more information contact:

*Richard Stanton, National Secretary, Australian Forest Standard
on (02) 6122-9000 or 0421 310 758*

Australian Forest Standard: www.forestrystandard.org.au

Email: richard.stanton@forestrystandard.org.au

NOTES

Australian Forestry Standard Limited is a Standards Development Organisation and a not-for-profit public company registered in July 2003. The company owns the standard development functions and manages the elements of the **Australian Forest Certification Scheme**. The Australian Standard for Forest Management will:

- provide Australian and overseas consumers with an independent, internationally recognised third-party certification scheme for forest management in Australia
- promote a culture of 'continuous improvement' of the sustainable forest management practices in Australia
- support a market for forest products that are a result of sustainable forest management practices and value adding processes that maintain the integrity of the source forest certification and promote the broader environmental benefits of using wood-based products.

PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes) PEFC is a framework for the mutual recognition of credible national or regional forest certification schemes that have been developed based on internationally recognised requirements for sustainable forest management. Since its launch in 1999, PEFC has become the largest forest certification umbrella organisation covering national schemes from all over the world, delivering hundreds of millions of tonnes of wood to the processing industry and then on to the market place from over 220 million hectares of certified forests. PEFC has strong grass roots support from many stakeholders including the forestry sector, governments, trade associations, trade unions and non-governmental organisations.

Forest Certification Forest certification is a process, which provides an assurance mechanism to purchasers of wood and paper products that the wood used in the products comes from sustainably managed forests. Sustainably managed forests are those whose management implements performance standards based on internationally agreed environmental, social and economic requirements.