

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production – Revision No. 2, 1996 (the code) was developed to control timber production on public land in Victoria. The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) administers the application of the code on public land. In October 2002, the Minister for Environment and Conservation announced that EPA would be responsible for appointing independent environmental auditors to undertake environmental audits of forestry on public land to ensure compliance with The Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production.

This audit of coupes harvested during the 2002-03 operational year is the first of the audits conducted by an independent auditor. Operations on 30 coupes in four forest management areas in Victoria were assessed during the audit. This represented approximately 7 per cent of the 455 coupes harvested in Victoria during the 2002-03 operational year. Field inspections of the coupes were conducted during June and July, with an average of two coupes being inspected per day.

The audit identified examples of very good application of code requirements and instances where actions taken exceeded code requirements. This included the development and implementation of cording and matting of log landings and snig tracks to reduce the environmental impact of coupe operation. Other examples were the in-field investigation of log landing rehabilitation and rehabilitation of temporary culverts.

In general, a high level of code compliance was achieved in the areas of:

- wood utilisation planning;
- water yield protection;
- snig and forwarding tracks; and
- roading.

Areas of the code in which there had been more consistent instances of non-compliance were:

- coupe planning;
- log landing and dump rehabilitation;
- habitat tree marking and protection; and
- reserved area protection.

Additional areas of lower code compliance at either specific FMAs or with certain forest types were:

- rainforest; and
- management of boundary tracks, roading, and snig and forwarding tracks in East Gippsland.

The distribution of compliance has been influenced by various factors such as;

- regional differences in the interpretation of code requirements,
- prevailing forest and soil types and
- evolving harvesting and coupe management practices.

Some issues identified during this audit have been identified in a number of previous audits conducted by DSE. These include;

- marking and protection of habitat trees;

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- marking of coupe protection areas; and
- rehabilitation of temporary roads.

The involvement of DSE officers in the 2002-03 fire season caused a number of forest officers to be absent from the district and therefore unable to directly monitor all operations at coupes under their supervision.

The use of cording and matting at the coupes and the supervision of coupe operations by forest operations managers are two areas where developments have overtaken the code. These developments will need to be accommodated in the code or other appropriate mechanisms.

This is the first year that this form of third party audit has been applied to compliance of timber harvesting operations with the code. Specific recommendations have been made to identify areas of the code where attention is required to improve the level and consistency of compliance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The audit has identified areas of the code for which there was a low rate of compliance and elements of the code that could be amended to facilitate compliance. Recommendations below provide suggestions for improvement and are not given in any particular order.

- 1 Improve the method and control of boundary track installation by DSE operators, in particular with the crossing of protected areas and filter strips and the quality of cross-drain construction.
- 2 Amend the management prescriptions to clearly specify the appropriate reference point for measurement of rainforest extent viz. the canopy or bole of the trees and gaps between sections of canopy.
- 3 Promulgate a consistent approach to and provide further training in rainforest identification.
- 4 Ensure that all buffer and filter strips are clearly marked at the correct width on the coupe using tape colours consistent with the coupe plan.
- 5 Fully complete coupe plans and include the maximum slope on which harvesting operations may be conducted.
- 6 Mark all roads on the coupe maps and identified as being either temporary or permanent to facilitate planning and identification of road rehabilitation requirements.
- 7 Mark the location of landings and roads on all coupe maps using a legend that is consistent for all FMAs.
- 8 Provide allowance in coupe plans for consideration of prevailing soil types in setting buffer widths.
- 9 Forest operations managers should be made accountable for code compliance through appropriate mechanisms.
- 10 Finalise and promulgate guidelines for use of cording and matting. Incorporate allowance for this process in snig track cross-draining requirements of the code.
- 11 Better implement the selection, marking and protection of habitat trees.

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- 12 Provide consistent understanding of requirements for temporary road closure rehabilitation requirements.
- 13 Bring cull trees to the ground in a manner that minimises soil disturbance.
- 14 Provide for rehabilitation of convergent snig tracks to the same standard as required for log landings. This should be undertaken where areas of soil compaction have resulted from machinery traffic.
- 15 Develop a guideline for slash minimisation to assist forest officers with determining acceptable levels of slash in filter strips.