

## ENVIRONMENTAL AUDITING OF FORESTRY

### OVERVIEW OF 2005 PROGRAM

Publication 990

May 2005

EPA has engaged Mr Geoff Byrne of URS Australia Pty Ltd, an environmental auditor appointed under the *Environment Protection Act 1970*, to conduct this year's audit. A team consisting of individuals with expertise in forestry, ecology and soil science will provide support to the auditor.

The auditor has selected timber harvesting operations in the Bendigo, Central Highlands, Central Gippsland and East Gippsland FMAs for assessment during the 2005 forest audit. The selection of FMAs and coupes by the auditor followed a similar approach to that adopted in the 2004 forest audit. The process ensures that all FMAs are audited at least once every five years.

Audits, by their nature, examine a sample of activities. Timber harvesting occurs in planned areas of forest, of variable size and shape, known as coupes. This year we plan to audit 40 coupes, including eight 'active' coupes to be assessed prior to completion of harvesting, two coupes from within State forest that supplies water to Melbourne and up to 8 km of recently constructed or upgraded roads. This will represent between eight and ten per cent of all coupes harvested on public land during the 2004–05 timber harvesting season.

In addition, the process taken to regenerate 25 coupes harvested in the 2000–01 financial year will be assessed using an office-based methodology. An assessment of the harvesting rates within the Thompson, Yarra Tributaries and Tarago Water

Catchments against those agreed between Melbourne Water and DSE will also be undertaken.

Coupes from selected FMAs will be assessed to represent the range of timber harvesting operations undertaken across the state. The scope of the audit does not include forestry planning processes. However the audit will consider planning insofar as it impinges on environmental values associated with timber harvesting operations.

Information on the methodology for assessment of coupes will be made available once it is finalised by the auditor.

*Planned timelines for the 2005 forest audit are:*

Planning:	February – April
FMA/coupe selection and information gathering:	March – April
Field assessment:	May – June
Reporting (including compilation of results and verification):	July – November

### FOREST AUDIT PROGRAM OUTLINE

The key components of this program are to:

- conduct audits of compliance of timber harvesting operations with the code
- establish and coordinate a consultative process.

# ENVIRONMENTAL AUDITING IN VICTORIA

The outcomes of the audit program are expected to be of benefit to DSE, VicForests, the forestry industry and the community by providing an objective and independent assessment of the status of compliance of timber harvesting operations with the code. DSE and VicForests will be able to use the independent information to assist sound decision-making for continual improvement in forestry operations.

There are four distinct phases in the conduct of the forest audit:

- planning
- selection of FMAs and coupes, and information gathering
- field assessment
- reporting.

## BACKGROUND

EPA Victoria is responsible for ensuring environmental audits of timber harvesting on public land in Victoria are undertaken. The annual audits are conducted under the Victorian statutory environmental audit system, administered by EPA (EPA Publication 902, *Environmental Auditing in Victoria*).

The audits are undertaken to assess compliance of timber harvesting operations with the *Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production – Revision No. 2, 1996* (the code).

The code lays down statewide goals and guidelines that apply to timber harvesting operations. It aims to ensure that timber harvesting is undertaken efficiently and with care, and that the appropriate environmental, social and cultural values are protected. Implementation of the code and monitoring of public land forest operators' compliance with the code requirements is the responsibility of VicForests in the east of the state

and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) in the west. DSE administers the overall application of the code on public land.

In the previous forest audits, timber harvesting operations were assessed in the Central Gippsland, East Gippsland, Central Highlands, Dandenong, Tambo, North East, Portland and Otway Forest Management Areas (FMA's).

The audit reports are made publicly available and copies of past audit reports (2003 and 2004 – EPA Publications 932 and 969 respectively) and relevant background information are available from EPA's website at [www.epa.vic.gov.au/EnvAudit](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/EnvAudit).

## CONSULTATION

EPA is seeking to consult widely with all stakeholders who have an interest in timber harvesting in Victoria for their views and input into the 2005 audit program.

This consultation has already included providing input into the selection of Forest Management Areas to be audited this year.

EPA will contact stakeholders in the FMAs that will be subject to audit to seek input into and provide information on the program.

Stakeholders and interested individuals will be kept informed of the progress of the 2005 audit and updates will be placed on EPA's website.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information and updates on Victoria's forest audit program, contact EPA's Environmental Audit Unit or visit our website.

Website: [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au)

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