



REPORT

NRW FOREST PRODUCTS

**AFS SUMMARY
RECERTIFICATION AUDIT
REPORT
FEBRUARY 2009**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This audit was a Re-certification audit of the Forest Management System operated by NRW Forest Products according to the requirements of the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS). The audit encompassed assessment of Central Office and Regional offices and field activities.

2. THE AUDIT

2.1 Audit Scope

Commercial harvest and removal of native forest products and related activities on the NRW Forest Products' Defined Forest Areas designated for this purpose.

2.2 Audit Objectives

Conduct a re-certification audit against the requirements of the Australian Forestry Standard (AS4708:2007).

2.3 Audit Protocols

The audit was conducted in accordance with JAS-ANZ Procedure 26 Revision 3, DNV Certification audit protocols and with the requirements of the Australian Forestry Standard. The audit was conducted by a lead auditor assessed by DNV as meeting the competency requirements for qualification as an AFS auditor and assisted by a Senior Environmental Auditor. The audit comprised ten audit days in total.

2.4 Audit Process

The audit was conducted from the 9th – 13th February 2009 at Forestry House, Brisbane, and regional and district offices and depots, harvesting silvicultural operations, workshops, sawmills, research sites and wildfire and fire management areas in the South East and Cypress Forest Management Areas. The audit included an opening and closing meetings with senior NRW Forest Products staff, review of system and operational documentation, interviews with operational and senior management, interviews with key stakeholders and interested parties, review of records associated with management and control of the forest management system, and field assessments of forestry activities.

2.5 Background of Client

NRW Forest Products is a Business Unit of the Queensland Department of Natural Resources & Water (NRW), which conducts native forest harvesting and regeneration operations in accordance with State legislation on behalf of the State of Queensland.

The former forestry agency, DPI Forestry, achieved certification of its environmental management system to ISO14001 in 1999 and to the AFS in 2005. Native forest and plantation operations were separated in April 2006. The operations of NRW Forest Products are divided across a Central Office, North, Western, South East and Cypress Forest Management Areas (FMAs).

3. AUDIT RESULTS

3.1 Performance against assessed Criteria & Requirements

Findings of this audit demonstrated a high level of achievement of the requirements of the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS), including continual improvement of forest management performance.



3.1.1 Criterion 1 – Forest management shall be undertaken in a systematic manner that addresses the range of forest values

NRW Forest Products maintains a “Forest Management Policy” which complies with the requirements of the AFS. The Policy is well displayed for employees and effectively communicated to interested parties and the public. The *Forest Management Policy Statement* maintained by NRW Forest Products could identify that the adoption of a “risk management approach” includes workplace health and safety and injury management. The NRW Forest Products “Forest Harvesting Safety Policy” remains in draft form. Finalisation of this policy is considered to be high priority in order for NRW Forest Products to demonstrate full commitment to the AFS.

NRW Forest Products have effectively identified, and established access to, the relevant parts, sections and clauses of acts, policies, standards, codes, regulations and agreements and have determined how they apply to identified forest management aspects.

NRW Forest Products have comprehensively identified and assessed for significance forest management aspects and impacts within a corporate context. At the FMA level, aspects and impacts are addressed through different processes which are not always consistent with requirements of the AFS.

With reference to AFS definitions for forest management aspects and impacts, NRW Forest Products could consider how they might assess impacts for their significance considering “beneficial” outcomes (i.e. assessment that is not wholly confined to risk assessment as is the current approach). These comments are of particular relevance to NRW Forest Products as there exists a responsibility, and considerable record of, activities benefiting environmental, economic and social outcomes associated with forest management for wood production.

The NRW Forest Products Business Plan for 2008/09 well reflects forest management aspects that have been identified and analysed in the Aspects and Impacts Register. The NRW Forest Products – Operational Plan for 2008/09 effectively implements the Business Plan and shows attention and detailed assessment of progress through quarterly achievement reviews.

The development, implementation and monitoring of *Operational Harvest Plans (OHPs)* continues to be of a very high standard and is a credit to those responsible. OHP’s are a major tool for demonstrating conformance with the requirements of the AFS.

Interviews and discussions undertaken during the course of the audit suggest the some refresher training for corporate management personnel focusing on the implementation of “forest management systems” of the type required for conformance with the AFS would be of value.

The establishment of Sale Permits and the development of OHPs do not effectively identify forest management aspects associated with the haulage of logs from the sale area to the mill.

Consideration could be given to establishing a more frequent Continuous Improvement Audit (CIA) regime and that the activities of corporate NRW Forest Products relevant to AFS requirements are internally audited using the CIA approach.

3.1.2 Criterion 2 – Forest management shall provide for public participation and foster on-going relationships to be a good neighbour

At the time of the audit NRW Forest Products were proactively involved in the Statewide Forests Process (SFP) for the Cypress FMA. This was a good example of NRW Forest AFS Summary Recertification Audit Report February 2009



Products engaging stakeholder participation. However, interviews with local sawmillers in the Cypress FMA revealed some misunderstanding on their part regarding NRW Forest Products role in supporting their interests, and NRW Forest Products level of influence on government decisions regarding the future of land management status and timber availability. Notwithstanding, feedback from stakeholders clearly demonstrated appreciation of local NRW Forest Products staff efforts in facilitating meaningful participation.

3.1.3 Criterion 3 – Forest management shall protect and maintain the biological diversity of forests, including their successional stages, across the regional landscape

All Operational Harvesting Plans (OHPs) showed rigorous attention to the identification and assessment of biodiversity values. Past silvicultural practices that have encouraged regeneration and growth of Cypress at the expense of native hardwood species and consequently may have disadvantaged a range of biodiversity with regard to both food and shelter requirements could be reviewed in light of potential changes to land use objectives (e.g. phase-out of commercial timber harvesting).

3.1.4 Criterion 4 – Forest management shall maintain the productive capacity of forests

Silvicultural practices are well established and documented in HM&RM Manuals. However, these practices could be reviewed considering the potential outcomes of the SFP for the Cypress FMA. Likewise, objectives for timely and effective regeneration could be reviewed as timely and effective regeneration has been primarily based on the establishment and growth of a commercial resource.

NRW Forest Products maintain a very detailed and comprehensive “Fire Management Plan” (November 2008 Version 1.2) that reflects policy and addresses all criteria of the AFS. The Plan is supported by FMA Fire Plans and the level and co-operation with other fire management agencies (e.g. EPA/QFRS) was found to be well established and effective for both fire prevention and wildfire response.

3.1.5 Criterion 5 – Forest management shall maintain forest ecosystem health and vitality

Regional NRW Forest Products staff consistently demonstrate an understanding of forest processes in terms of ecological health and practice surveillance of forest health on a regional basis even though they may have no direct responsibility as custodians of the forests. Communication of this understanding and of threats to forest health and vitality to other responsible authorities and the community is most evident.

3.1.6 Criterion 6 – Forest management shall protect soil and water resources.

Examination of Operational Harvesting Plans for Sale Areas and site inspection showed rigorous attention to the identification of soil and water values and the application of controls for their protection. Measures included soil assessment (e.g. erodibility), water course protection, slope and instability exclusions zones and forest road and track management. These are all rigorously addressed by the EPA Code of Practice for Native Forest Timber Production on State Lands 2007, and in turn rigorously addressed by NRW Forest Products adherence to the Code.

NRW Forest Products have established procedures and controls to minimise risk and to be prepared for hydrocarbon and other chemical spills to soil and water. However, Operational Harvesting Plans do not refer to the NRW Forest Products ‘Pollution & Waste Management



Plan' for hydrocarbons, and do not establish controls over the storage, handling and application of chemicals by contractors, other than hydrocarbons.

3.1.7 Criterion 7 – Forest management shall maintain forests' contribution to carbon cycles

NRW Forest Products acknowledge the benefits of forests as carbon sinks. In addition, NRW Forest Products responsibility and record of wildfire prevention and control in Queensland forests will have already considerably contributed to minimising greenhouse gas emissions.

3.1.8 Criterion 8 – Forest management shall protect and maintain, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, their natural, cultural, social, religious and spiritual heritage values

Indigenous peoples rights and responsibilities are built into NRW Forest Products planning processes, including procedures for legislative requirements for determination, consultation and recognition of native title claims and cultural heritage values (e.g. *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) & *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003*.). NRW Forest Products maintain a *Cultural Heritage Policy & Procedures Manual*.(7 October 2008).

All OHPs examined showed diligent attention to the interrogation of cultural heritage data bases (including completion of *Indigenous Cultural Heritage Search* forms, the *Indigenous Cultural Heritage Risk Assessment Worksheet*), and to the development of controls to protect values where they occur.

NRW Forest Products acknowledges existing legal and traditional uses for native forests (e.g. recreation, grazing, beekeeping, fossicking and horse riding) and OHPs include identification, and consideration of potential impacts to other forest users.

3.1.9 Criterion 9 – Forest management shall maintain and enhance long-term social and economic benefits

NRW Forest Products is committed to, and can demonstrate, support and benefits to local and regional communities by contributing to many facets of the forest industry and related industries and support businesses. Direct and indirect employment is significant, including sales to small-scale local enterprises. NRW Forest Products are active in education and with the provision of forest and forest management information, particularly for survey information, boundaries and maps.

NRW Forest Products is active in promoting safety programs for employees and contractors. It provides significant administrative and human resources, (e.g. Safety officers, SPI audits, recording systems etc.) to facilitate the maintenance of safe work practices in planning, implementing and supervising forest operations. However, efforts to 'facilitate improvement in workplace health and safety' by monitoring 'safety performance (incidence of accidents)' could be improved with regard to the reporting of safety incidents. Current reporting requirements are those "accidents" that result in death or hospitalization in excess of 4 days. NRW Forest Products could consider establishing a monitoring regime that aims to prevent occurrences of accidents (e.g. investigating 'near miss' incidents as an opportunity to prevent similar hazards from occurring where the consequent harm may be more significant).

4 AUDIT CONCLUSIONS



Assessment of the Forest Management System operated by NRW Forest Products according to the requirements of the Australian Forestry Standard showed levels of conformance with both AFS requirements and NRW Forest Products forest management policies and procedures commensurate with third party certification requirements. Three minor non-conformances were raised, each to which corrective action can be readily applied. Recommendation for re-certification to AS 4708 - 2007 is made.

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