

Forest Audit Program – Harvesting and Coupe Closure Audit 2012/13

DEPI Response

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) has received the Forest Audit Program audit report on Harvesting and Coupe Closure, and notes the issues raised in relation to timber harvesting operations conducted in western Victoria in 2011/12.

The responsibility of managing small-scale commercial timber harvesting in state forests in western Victoria was transferred from the former Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) to the former Department of Primary Industries (DPI) on 23 December 2011. As a consequence of this transition, a refreshed approach to the planning and management of commercial timber harvesting has commenced.

In June 2013, the Department of Environment and Primary Industries was created through the amalgamation of DSE and DPI.

The Forestry Regulation Branch within DEPI has the functional responsibility for the operational planning and management of commercial timber harvesting operations undertaken in state forests as identified in relevant Wood Utilisation Plans. The Forest Regulation Branch is reviewing its operational planning systems for commercial timber harvesting in 2013/14, including a revision of the document *Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines 2006* to ensure consistency with the current Code of Practice for Timber Production. DEPI is also developing a Forest Management System to facilitate management of commercial timber harvesting operations to ensure continuous improvement in the way state forest timber resources in western Victoria area are managed.

A number of the issues and recommendations outlined in the audit report have already been addressed by DEPI. For example, 'old' coupe plans conferred from DSE are currently being revised to ensure they are consistent with prescribed maximum areas and other regulatory requirements. DEPI now generates forest coupe plans that are consistent with the regulatory requirements, that are kept up to date, and have version control and robust checking and approvals procedures. DEPI has also introduced a monitoring processes to ensure timber harvesting operations are meeting required expectations. DEPI will continue to improve its forest operational planning and timber harvesting management procedures, and commits to addressing the remaining areas for improvement outlined in the audit report during 2013/14.

Following are DEPI's specific responses to the 6 recommendations contained in the audit report that are relevant to DEPI.

Adam Fennessy

Secretary Department of Environment and Primary Industries

DEPI response to Harvesting and Coupe Closure Audit 2011/12

Recommendation 3.1 - *That VicForests and DEPI either include a specific soil erosion hazard class map in all coupes files or annotate the geology or other map to indicate the distribution of soil erosion hazard class(es) across the coupe.*

DEPI Response:

DEPI has not produced Soil Erosion Hazard Class maps for coupes that are flat and not undergoing any soil disturbance. On these low risk sites, mapping and preparing soil erosion hazard class maps has no tangible benefit. DEPI will seek to review the Code requirements for soil erosion hazard maps on these low risk activities.

Recommendation 3.2 - *That VicForests and DEPI collect and retain evidence of appropriate disposal of any prescribed industrial wastes generated on the coupe (e.g. oil drums, used engine oil, oil filters, oily rags). That evidence may take the form of a waste transport certificate or other relevant document from an Environment Protection Authority (EPA) licensed waste transporter or receiver.*

DEPI Response:

DEPI undertakes regular monitoring during and on completion of timber harvesting, that includes checks for fuel and oil spills, fuel and oil drums, rags and other mechanical rubbish. Where instances are found, the details are documented and the licensee directed to remove items.

The DEPI Coupe Plans refer to the management of fuels, oils and waste within the coupes, and require the licensee to comply with the Timber Harvesting Operator's Procedures (2008). These do not require the licensee to provide DEPI with evidence of disposal in an EPA-approved disposal facility.

DEPI does and will continue to ensure that licensees remove all wastes from the coupe. DEPI does not consider it realistic to track the disposal of wastes from the coupe.

Recommendation 3.3 - *That VicForests and DEPI include maps in coupe files that annotate the Code waterway class that is applicable to every waterway located within or adjacent to the coupe.*

DEPI Response:

As a part of the development of a Forest Management System to facilitate the management of commercial timber harvesting operations, DEPI will be reviewing and updating the Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines to ensure that exclusion zones pertaining to waterways within and immediately adjacent to coupes are identified, as required by the Code.

DEPI response to Harvesting and Coupe Closure Audit 2011/12

Recommendation 4.1 - *That DEPI consult with adjoining landowners regarding coupe boundaries, as prescribed by the Code.*

DEPI Response:

Whilst the notification of adjoining landholders is only a guiding requirement of the Code, DEPI does consider the notification of adjoining landholders important where boundaries could be disputed. As a part of the development of a Forest Management System to facilitate the management of commercial timber harvesting operations, DEPI will be reviewing and updating the Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines to ensure that landowners immediately adjacent to coupes are identified and notified where possible.

Recommendation 4.1 - *That DEPI develop a standardised coupe monitoring process with its harvesting operations and gather evidence to demonstrate compliance with relevant Code and MP prescriptions.*

DEPI Response:

Since the completion of this audit, DEPI has introduced regular monitoring during and on completion of timber harvesting operations, that incorporates requirements of the Code and relevant procedures.

Recommendation 4.1 - *That DEPI review VicForests' and other models of forest coupe planning to develop a system that strengthens its capacity to demonstrate compliance with the Code and MPs.*

DEPI Response:

DEPI now generates forest coupe plans that are consistent with the regulatory requirements, that are kept up to date, and have version control and robust checking and approvals procedures. DEPI is also developing a Forest Management System to facilitate the management of commercial timber harvesting operations to ensure continuous improvement in the way timber resources in western Victoria area are managed.