

Forest Audit Program – Operational Planning Audit 2011/12

DEPI Response

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) has received the Forest Audit Program audit report on Operational Planning, and notes the issues raised in relation to coupe planning for timber harvesting operations conducted in western Victoria in 2010/11.

At the time of commissioning this audit, the former Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) managed the timber harvesting and commercial firewood in state forests in western Victoria. This responsibility was transferred 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 been implemented.

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

The Forestry Regulation Branch within DEPI now has the functional responsibility for the operational planning, in particular the preparation of Forest Coupe Plans for each commercial timber harvesting operation 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.

At the time of the audit, both DSE and VicForests were using the Coupe Information System (CIS) to track forest coupe status. Since that time, VicForests has introduced a new management system suitable for their operations in eastern Victoria. In 2013/14, DEPI will also develop a new system tailored to the small-scale commercial timber harvesting operations in western Victoria.

A number of the issues and recommendations outlined in the audit report have already been addressed by DEPI. For example, 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 will continue to improve its forest operational planning 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 18 recommendations contained in the audit report.

Adam Fennessy

Secretary Department of Environment and Primary Industries

DEPI response to Operational Planning Audit 2011/12

Recommendation 1: *The Department of Sustainability and Environment (now DEPI) review the method of preparation of the Forest Coupe Plan (FCP) to achieve a document that can be electronically reproduced in its final and approved form, adds value to the role of the target audience and clearly communicates necessary information.*

DEPI Response:

DEPI has reviewed the method of preparation of Forest Coupe Plans. All Forest Coupe Plans generated by DEPI for all commercial operations since July 2013 can be electronically reproduced in the final and approved form. They are now consistent with the requirements of the Code of Practice for timber production, are kept up to date with a version control, checking and approvals procedure. The current Forest Coupe Plans communicates all necessary information. DEPI will continue to improve the quality of, and information contained in all Forest Coupe Plans in 2013/14.

Recommendation 2: *DEPI review the document Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines 2006 on the basis of the findings of this audit and incorporate into this document clear directions on levels of authority and the requirements to prepare, review and approve a FCP prior to distribution.*

DEPI Response:

DEPI will revise the document *Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines 2006* as it further develops its forest operational planning systems in 2013/14. The *Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines 2006* need to be updated to reflect recent changes to the Code of Practice for timber production.

The new DEPI operational planning system and the revised *Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines* (or its equivalent) will ensure appropriate levels of governance for DEPI timber harvesting operations, and will attribute appropriate direction and accountability for staff involved in the preparation, review and approval of Forest Coupe Plans.

Recommendation 3: *DSE review the document Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines 2006 to ensure that the appendices reflect current CIS generated templates.*

DEPI Response:

As part of a review of forest management systems for western Victoria DEPI will review the document *Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines 2006*. The current appendices relating to Coupe Information System (CIS) generated templates are not applicable as CIS is no longer in use. The new operational planning system and associated *Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines* (or its equivalent) will be regularly updated to ensure consistency with other processes.

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Recommendation 4: DSE review all tiers of documentation applicable to the Horsham FMA to ensure a consistent approach to biodiversity conservation and forest management.

DEPI Response

DEPI notes the inconsistent information about biodiversity management in Horsham coupes. DEPI is currently reviewing the regulatory framework to provide a more consistent approach to managing biodiversity conservation and timber harvesting across all Forest Management Areas. The outcomes will be incorporated in the 2013/14 review of DEPI's operational planning systems.

Recommendation 5: DSE considers implementing a programme to achieve accreditation in its operational planning management system.

DEPI Response:

DEPI will ensure the new operational planning system is robust, transparent and consistent with international accreditation standards. Achieving formal accreditation will be considered as part of the 2013/14 development of the new improved operational planning system.

Recommendation 6: DSE review the document *Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines 2006* to ensure that references to other documentation are current.

DEPI Response:

DEPI will revise the document *Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines 2006*. The new DEPI operational planning system, and the revised *Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines* (or its equivalent) will ensure that references to other documentation are current and kept up to date.

Recommendation 7: DSE enforce a system of version control into the preparation of FCPs so that is transparent if a document is a draft or final document.

DEPI Response:

All Forest Coupe Plans generated by DEPI since July 2013 have version control procedures, indicating draft, approved final, and approved amended versions.

Recommendation 8: All prints of the DSE FCP generated by CIS default to a "draft" watermark, and that it is a selection option for a "final" to be produced.

DEPI Response:

The CIS is no longer in use; however, Forest Coupe Plans and associated documents generated by other systems will indicate its preparation status, either with a watermark or header/footer to the document.

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Recommendation 9: *All amendments to the FCP are to be included in an amendment section within the FCP, and require approval.*

DEPI Response:

Currently, any amendments to Forest Coupe Plans generated by DEPI are approved and attached to the original plan. An appropriate amendment process will be included in the new improved operational planning system and associated Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines (or its equivalent).

Recommendation 10: *It is recommended that FCP amendments be removed from the role of the Coupe Diary, and that changes are reflected in the FCP.*

DEPI Response:

The role of the coupe diary and interaction with the Forest Coupe Plan will be considered as part of the 2013/14 review of the operational planning system. Currently, any amendments to the Forest Coupe Plans are approved and attached to the original plan.

Recommendation 11: *FCPs contain a distribution list identifying the names and roles of individuals to receive the document.*

DEPI Response:

Forest Coupe Plans are operational documents intended to be used by licensees, and are kept up to date by the responsible forest officer. DEPI identifies the responsible forest officer on each Forest Coupe Plan.

Recommendation 12: *DSE standardise the quality of mapping included in the FCP in line with the guidelines to ensure that all the features identified in the WUP and FCP are displayed on operational mapping and that the maps include a detailed legend.*

DEPI Response:

All maps are currently generated using GIS, and include all necessary features identified in the WUP. A quality assurance and checking procedure ensures all maps are standardised and include a consistent legend. Mapping procedures will be further refined through the 2013/14 review of operational planning procedures and the revision of the Forest Coupe Planning Guidelines.

Recommendation 13: *DSE review the guidelines in relation to the undertaking of pre-operational coupe inspections and develop a survey template to document this activity.*

DEPI Response:

A revised forest coupe reconnaissance (survey) template has been developed and is currently being used. This will be further improved as a component of the 2013/14 review of operational planning procedures.

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Recommendation 14: *DSE initiates a schedule of regular internal and external auditing and review.*

DEPI Response:

DEPI will include a schedule of internal audits and commit to developing quality assurance procedures in its operational planning systems for commercial timber harvesting in 2013/14.

Recommendation 15: *DSE include in their guidelines and Management Procedures clear instruction on determining the status of old mine sites as historic sites or operational hazards.*

DEPI Response:

DEPI agrees that historical places and features located inside forest coupes should be identified and protected by timber harvesting operators. Future guidance documents provided to licensees will clearly outline this requirement. Mineshafts and other such hazards are also treated as an occupational safety issue. Whilst maintaining a safe working environment is an important part of timber harvesting, this is not part of the environmental regulatory responsibilities of DEPI and considered outside the scope of the Forest Audit Program.

Recommendation 16: *DSE incorporates operational controls in the FCP for old mine sites.*

DEPI Response:

The current Forest Coupe Plans include a control section for all identified values or hazards, which includes mine sites.

Recommendation 17: *DSE ensures that the approver of FCPs is charged with the responsibility on ensuring special exclusion zones or harvesting modifications as specified in the WUP approval are planned in the FCPs.*

DEPI Response:

The Forest Coupe Plans generated by DEPI includes a section that requires identification of Special Management Zones, Special Protection Zones and other tenures within and adjacent to operational areas, and document control measures to manage such areas. A quality assurance procedure ensures SMZ, SPZ and other tenures are specified in the Forest Coupe Plans.

Recommendation 18: *DSE schedule harvest activities to be consistent with the requirements of the biological assets identified in the WUP process.*

DEPI Response:

DEPI currently schedules timber harvesting activities that are consistent with the biological assets identified in the WUP process, and will ensure that this is more clearly documented in the new improved operational planning system.