

Forest Audit Program

Module 3 – Tactical Planning Audit

CARMS REF: 68515-7

For Department of Sustainability and Environment

17 August 2012

Reference 0142314

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Final Report

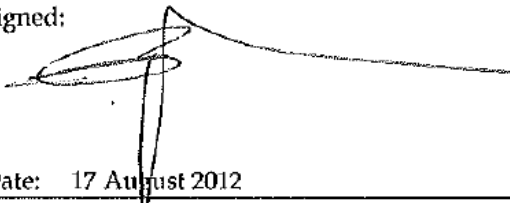
Environmental Resources Management Australia Pty Ltd

Quality System

17 August 2012



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Approved by: Geoff Byrne
Position: Environmental Auditor appointed pursuant to the Environment Protection Act (1970)
Signed: 
Date: 17 August 2012

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the finding of an environmental audit of timber planning on public land in Victoria for the years 2009-2010

The primary objective of the audit is to assess compliance against the DSE's Forest Audit Program Module 3: Tactical Planning, which comprised elements from; the Code of Practice for Timber Production, 2007 (the Code), the Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests 2009 and the *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004*.

This audit assessed DSE and VicForests planning for eight Forest Management Areas (FMAs). The audit was conducted between mid October and December 2011, with report preparation occurring in January 2012.

FMAs audited were defined by DSE in the scope of the audit request. The FMAs included in the audit were Horsham, Midlands, Bendigo, Mid Murray West, Central, Dandenong, Central Gippsland and Benalla Mansfield FMAs.

For the assessment of each WUP and TRP amendment an audit workbook was used. The workbook includes specific audit criteria relating to each element of sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 of the Code, 3.2.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4 and 2.1.6 of the 2009 Management Procedures. *The Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004* was also referenced in the workbook.

Overall the level of compliance was very high with no instances of non-compliance.

The audit notes a number of areas for improvement regarding documentation for landscape management and harvesting volumes. The audit also makes recommendations on minor improvement to the Forest Audit Program.

Details of the audit are provided in *Table 1*, below.

Table 1

Audit Details

EPA file reference no.	68515-7
Auditor	Geoffrey Byrne
Auditor Term of Appointment	14 May 2011 to 23 Aug 2013
Name of person requesting the audit	Lee Meizis
Relationship to premises/location	Department of Sustainability and Environment is responsible for the regulation and management of commercial timber harvesting activities conducted in Victoria's State forests
Date of request	17 August 2011
Date EPA notified of audit	10 August 2012
Completion date of the audit	13 August 2012
Reasons for audit	The Department of Sustainability and Environment's timber harvesting compliance framework
Description of activity	Audit 1 - Tactical Planning (As outlined in the FAP toolbox Module 3). To assess compliance against criteria associated with the approval process for Timber Release Plans (TRPs) and Wood Utilisation Plans (WUPs) during the 2009/10harvesting season.
EPA region	South-west Region North West Gippsland North East Metro Southern Metro
Site/premises name	Forest harvest operations in state forests in Victoria
GIS coordinate of site centroid (GDAS4)	
Longitude/northing	N/A
Latitude/Easting	N/A
Members and categories of support team utilised	None
Outcome of the audit	The audit has not identified any imminent environmental hazards or unacceptable risks to the beneficial uses posed by the Tactical Planning activities for harvesting in state forests.
Further work or requirements	None
Groundwater segment	N/A
Surrounding land use	N/A

This report presents the finding of an environmental audit of timber production on public land in Victoria for the years 2009-2010. Geoff Byrne of ERM Australia Pty Ltd was commissioned by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) in his capacity as an environmental auditor appointed pursuant to Part IXD of the *Environment Protection Act 1970*, to conduct the audit.

The primary objective of the audit is to assess compliance against Module 3: Tactical Planning, which forms part of DSE's Forest Audit Program. This module assesses compliance against elements from the following:

- Code of Practice for Timber Production, 2007 (the Code)
- Management Procedures for Timber Harvesting, Rooding and Regeneration in Victoria's State Forests 2009
- Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004.

DSE is responsible for monitoring and administering the Code and Management Procedures on public land in Victoria. VicForests is responsible for the management of commercial harvest and sale of timber from state forest within the east of the state. DSE requires VicForests to comply with the Code in the Conduct of those harvesting operations. As part of those operations VicForests also has responsibility for monitoring compliance with the Code. DSE managed commercial harvesting operations in the west of the state and was also required to comply with the Code. The management of harvesting operations is grouped into Forest Management Areas (FMAs) and the VicForest Operational Areas (OAs). Each FMA/OA is further divided into districts which administer the management of harvesting coupes through individual forest officers.

The audit was implemented using the Victorian statutory environmental audit system administered by EPA. On public land, the Code prescribes minimum requirements for environmental protection. The Code requires that DSE management plans are produced to tailor prescriptions to the specific values and characteristics of forest within each region. The management plans are supported by state-wide Management Procedures.

The audit was undertaken to assess compliance of forestry planning activities with the Code and Management Procedures, based on the existing approvals and arrangements. The outcomes of the audit will benefit both the forestry industry and the community by providing an objective and independent assessment of the status of compliance with the Code and Management Procedures and will assist DSE and VicForests to pursue their objectives of continual improvement.

The audit itself did not include assessment of the efficacy of the Code and other associated management framework / harvesting documents.

2

SCOPE OF AUDIT

The audit has been carried out in accordance with EPA publication 953, 'Environmental Auditor Guidelines for Conducting Environmental Audits'

This module aims to provide users with the necessary information and tools to enable an audit of the following tactical planning activities:

- Wood Utilisation Plan and Timber Release Plan Development
- Wood Utilisation Plan and Timber Release Plan Approval Process.

Specifically excluded from the scope of Module 3 is audit of:

- The strategic planning and development phase of Allocation Orders by DSE under the *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004* (as amended)
- The strategic planning and development phase of Forest Management Plans by DSE
- Roding activities conducted in State forests that are not associated with timber production
- Practices associated with production and collection of domestic forest produce (including firewood).

2.1

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND PERIOD OF AUDIT

The audit has been requested by DSE for the purpose of reporting on the compliance of timber harvesting, limited to the following:

- Commercial timber harvesting operations outlined in the Horsham FMA 2009/2010 WUP (one commercial timber harvesting coupe)
- Midlands FMA 2009/2010 WUP (one commercial timber harvesting coupe)
- Bendigo FMA 2009/2010 WUP (22 commercial timber harvesting coupes)
- Mid Murray West (MMW) FMA 2009/2010 WUP (two commercial timber harvesting coupes)
- The 2006-11 further change to a TRP gazetted on 6 August 2009 (approvals associated with addition of 232 coupes for harvest, 97 coupes with amended boundaries, 32 incorrectly attributed coupes, 13 new roadline coupes, 11 unallocated coupes and 42 coupes to be removed)

- The 2006-11 further change to a TRP gazetted on 7 January 2010 (removal of seven thinning coupes nominated in the Report on the 2008-09 VicForests' Coupe Finalisation Process)
- The 2009-14 TRP amendment gazetted on 7 January 2010 (removal of 19 thinning coupes nominated in the Report on the 2008-09 VicForests' Coupe Finalisation Process).

2.2 SEGMENTS AND ELEMENTS AUDITED

The segment of the environment covered by this audit is covered by the Forest Management Areas (FMA) of Horsham, Midlands, Bendigo, Mid Murray West, Central, Dandenong, Central Gippsland and Benalla Mansfield.

The following elements of the environment (as defined in the *Environment Protection Act 1970*) have been considered in completing the audit:

- Land
- Surface water
- Vegetation
- Wildlife.

2.3 BENEFICIAL USES

In assessing the risk of harm or detriment to the environment, the following beneficial uses have been considered as broadly relevant in the audit:

- Life, health and wellbeing of humans
- Life, health and wellbeing of other forms of life, including the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity
- Local amenity and aesthetic enjoyment.

2.4 AUDIT CRITERIA

Any audit must utilise a benchmark, or framework, against which the risks, systems and performance of the audited operations are referenced. For this audit, the criteria contained in the following documents have been utilised.

2.4.1 *Code of Practice for Timber Production*

The purpose of the audit is to report on the compliance of planning for forest harvesting on public land with the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007 (the Code). The Code was developed through a process of scientific review and community consultation and was ratified in accordance with section 55 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987*.

The stated purpose of the Code is to ensure that commercial timber growing and timber harvesting operations are carried out on both public land and private land in a way that:

- Promotes an internationally competitive forest industry
- Is compatible with the conservation of the wide range of environmental values associated with the forests
- Promotes the ecologically sustainable management of native forests proposed for continuous timber production.

The Code recognises that conservation of forest depends upon careful stewardship and responsible management so that they can continue to provide benefits to society. To this end the Code provides guidelines and prescriptions for environmental protection during commercial harvesting operations.

The Code comprises a number of chapters, the most relevant for this audit being section 2.1, Forest Planning, of Chapter 2, Application of the Code – Public Forests. Goals and guidelines are contained in the Code and this audit has assessed compliance against the elements that make up the various guidelines.

The Code is available from the DSE website (www.dse.vic.gov.au).

2.4.2 *Management Procedures*

The Code is supplemented by statewide Management Procedures. The Management Procedures relevant to this audit are those published by the DSE in September 2007 and October 2009.

The Management Procedures specify environmental and operational requirements additional to the requirements of the Code. They also form a standard operating procedure associated with the Forest and Fire Environmental Management System. Their objectives are to standardise the management of timber harvesting operations and associated activities in all Victorian State forests; provide instruction on operational and administrative procedures; form part of the regulatory framework for timber harvesting operations and associated activities; provide a framework for consistent

administrative arrangements between DSE and VicForests at an operational level; and provide a framework for VicForests and DSE to prepare subsidiary operational procedures for staff, contractors and Timber Harvesting Operators.

Copies of the Management Procedures are available from the DSE website (www.dse.vic.gov.au).

2.4.3 *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004*

The *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004* (the Act) sets the obligations for persons undertaking timber harvesting on public land, including complying with the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007 (Code). The Act establishes a framework for the sustainable management of Victoria's State forests and proposes a Sustainability Charter that establishes criteria and indicators to monitor and report on performance. The Sustainability Charter was subsequently published by DSE in 2006 and specifies objectives around maintaining items such as biodiversity, ecosystems, and managing disturbance.

The *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004* enables the allocation of timber resources to VicForests for commercial forestry operations. It also defines VicForests' reporting and performance obligations. The Act also establishes a Timber Harvesting Operator Licence system and prescribes an enforcement and penalty regime for breaches of specified environmental requirements.

The *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004* is available from the Australasian Legal Information Institute (Austlii) website (http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/sfa2004289/).

2.5 *SUPPORT TEAM*

In completing this audit, the following personnel provided support to the auditor:

- Gary Selwyn (Principal Consultant, ERM)
- Cameron Fairlie (Consultant, ERM)

The methodology used for this audit was that described in the DSE Forest Audit Program Toolbox Module 3: Tactical Planning. This is the first audit to be conducted using this Module.

The audit methodology comprised the following tasks:

- Preparation of Audit Plan
- Review of relevant legislation
- Review of documentation and compliance with relevant procedures and processes
- Review of relevant intra- and inter- agency correspondence
- Assessment of selected data relating to harvesting performance
- Examination and review of management prescriptions and procedures relating to the conduct of timber harvesting during the audit period
- Interviews with DSE and VicForests managerial and technical staff.

A copy of the Audit Plan is presented in Attachment A.

The auditor was initially supplied with a CD from the DSE containing information relating to the legislative framework of the WUP and TRP planning process and the three TRPs and four WUPs to be audited.

After reviewing this information, the auditor initiated the first of two interviews with VicForests. The first interview was attended by the Senior Regulation and Compliance Officer (DSE), the Director Planning for (VicForests), the Manager Environmental Systems (VicForests), Tactical Planning Systems officer (VicForests) and the Risk & Compliance OHS & Environmental Systems (VicForests). Following this meeting additional information was received regarding the operations of VicForests. The second meeting was with the Manager, Tactical Planning and the Officer Tactical Planning Systems, which clarified a few outlying points.

Interviews were also conducted with DSE staff responsible for harvest planning covering the relevant WUPs subject to audit. The auditor had telephone interviews with the Forest Planning Officer for South West Victoria and the Forest Planning Officer for North West Victoria. From this additional information and maps were obtained.

For the assessment of each Wood Utilisation Plan (WUP) and Timber Release Plan (TRP) the audit workbook, DSE Module 3 – Tactical Planning, was used. The workbook includes specific questions relating to elements of sections 2.1 (Forest Planning) of the Code and sections 2.1 (Timber Release Plans) and 3.2.1 (Wood Utilisation Plans) of the Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests 2009.

3.2 *FMA/OA SELECTION*

The choice of which FMA/OA to be audited was defined by DSE in the scope of the audit request.

3.3 *ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT*

When considering a Code or Management Procedure breach relating to the workbook elements, the impact of the breach on the environment is normally assessed using the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) tool contained in the DSE forest audit modules. As noted in the Module 3 Audit guidelines, the use of the EIA tool is not relevant for the tactical planning phase and has therefore been excluded from this audit.

3.4 *REPORTING*

This report contains the findings of the audit. It has been finalised after review by DSE and VicForests on matters of fact contained in a draft report.

The report is structured to match the structure of the audit workbooks that have been completed for the audit.

AUDIT FINDINGS

The audit findings have been structured as follows:

- WUP Planning Development
- WUP Planning Approval
- TRP Planning Development
- TRP Planning Approval.

For each, criteria contained in the audit workbook have been addressed as they relate to the Code, the Management Procedures and the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004.

The auditor acknowledges the open and frank responses provided by both DSE and VicForests to requests for information and clarification of issues. Both the organisations and individual officers displayed a positive attitude to, and cooperated with, the audit process.

4.1

WOOD UTILISATION PLANNING DEVELOPMENT

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“Schedules of coupes selected for timber harvesting and associated access roading must be described in the WUP or TRP”

Criterion 2

Does the WUP/TRP adequately describe the schedule of coupes proposed for timber harvesting?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant, they state the name and address (#) of coupe, forest type, silvicultural system, gross and net area (ha) and forest stand description.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant, they state the coupe address, harvest year, silvicultural system, dominant forest type, gross & nett area (ha) and distance of roadway.

Criterion 3

WUP / TRP states / shows location of major roads?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant, they show the location of major roads on accompanying maps to the WUP.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant, they show the location of major roads on accompanying maps to the WUP.

Criterion 4

Have road extensions or upgrades been noted in WUP / TRP or access road leading into coupes?

South-West – Horsham

This criterion is not relevant for the Horsham WUP as there were no road extensions or upgrades.

South-West – Midlands

The Midlands WUP is compliant; coupe # 195-514-0003 denotes road improvement.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

This criterion is not relevant for the Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs as no there were no road extensions or upgrades.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must be consistent with the Code of Practice for Timber Production (as amended) and with the relevant Forest Management Plan.”

Criterion 5

Has the WUP or TRP been prepared for a multi-year period (3 or 5 years respectively) and using appropriate expertise?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant, they have been completed for a three year period, 2009/2010, 2010/2011 and 2011/12.

North-West – Bendigo

The Bendigo WUP is compliant, it has been completed for a three year period 2009/2010, 2010/2011 and 2011/12.

North-West - Mid Murray West

The Mid Murray West WUP is compliant, it was prepared for a one year period 2009/2010, however the Code outlines that it should normally be prepared for a three year period. The WUP was in development concurrently with the tendering process for commercial timber licences for the Mid Murray West FMA. Due to this, DSE head office in Melbourne decided to prepare a one year plan.

Criterion 7

Are coupe location and dispersion of coupes within the forest consistent with Forest Management Plan Strategies?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant. Whilst the FMPs are no longer specifically referenced in the WUP process, no inconsistencies with the broad intent of the FMP were identified.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant. Whilst the FMPs are no longer specifically referenced in the WUP process, no inconsistencies with the broad intent of the FMP were identified.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must minimise impact on biodiversity and provide for the maintenance of a range of forest age classes and structures.”

Criterion 8

Has the removal of trees as part of road construction activities for timber production been considered within each Plan?

South-West – Midlands

The Midlands WUP is compliant. The removal of trees has been taken into account for road construction for one coupe, # 195-514-0003. This was documented on the WUP and in DSE's Coupe Information System (CIS) database.

South-West – Horsham

This criterion is not relevant as there was no road construction in the Horsham WUP.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

This criterion is not relevant as there was no road construction in the Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs.

Code Reference: 2.2.2 Conservation of Biodiversity

“Use of wildlife corridors, comprising appropriate widths of retained forest, to facilitate animal movement between patches of forest of varying ages and stages of development, and contributing to a linked system of reserves.”

Criterion 9

Streamside buffers may act as a wildlife corridor however, other topographic features may also constitute wildlife corridors depending on the forest type and fauna present.

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

This criterion is not relevant. Due to the nature of the silvicultural systems employed in the Horsham and Midlands WUPs, comprising thinning from below, fallen firewood and single tree selection, there is little risk to the WUP impacting upon wildlife corridors that would restrict animal movement.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

This criterion is not relevant. Due to the nature of the silvicultural systems employed in the Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs, thinning from below, thinning from above and single tree selection, there is little risk to the WUP impacting upon wildlife corridors that would restrict animal movement.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must identify and mitigate impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage values, in consultation with Traditional Owners and any other relevant.”

Criterion 10

Have Aboriginal cultural values been identified and mitigated in consultation with Traditional owners?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant.

In the development of the WUP, DSE provides Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV) with a shapefile of each coupe that is to be on the WUP. AAV then determines whether a desktop search is sufficient or a physical reconnaissance is required. The local identifiable Aboriginal community group is included in the identification and management of any cultural values. The values identified by AAV are then incorporated into CIS, as too are their

management recommendations. Only one coupe in the Midlands WUP had an identified AAV site; #198-000-0001. This site was recorded within the Midlands WUP for that coupe and the management recommendations were incorporated into CIS.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant.

The North-West Region follows the same procedure for AAV consultation as the South-West Region. The Mid Murray West WUP had no AAV values identified and the Bendigo WUP identified one coupe, # 158-021-0013. This was recorded in the WUP, with the recommended management procedures incorporated into CIS.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must minimise the impact of harvesting on water quality and quantity over a period of time within any particular catchment.”

Criterion 11

WUP / TRP considers seasonal closures within the FMA and coupe being harvested outside of specified closure period?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant. The CIS entries state the year and season of the proposed harvesting for each coupe.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant. The CIS entries state the year and season of the proposed harvesting for each coupe, further the WUP details specific SMZ on a seasonal basis.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must take account of forest type, the silvicultural system to be employed, and the needs of the regeneration program.”

Criterion 13

Has each WUP / TRP identified areas where forest stands can be managed more intensively to increase production of timber?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant, as both WUPs specify thinning from below and seed tree as silvicultural systems to more intensively increase timber production.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant, as both specify thinning from below and above as silvicultural systems to more intensively increase timber production.

Criterion 14

Where selection or thinning silvicultural systems are proposed, has the area of forest to be harvested been determined by the forest type, its stand condition and other relevant environmental factors?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant. Due to the nature of harvesting, being predominately firewood and minor sawlog, the WUP has taken into account forest and type and stand condition.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant. Due to the nature of harvesting, being predominately firewood and minor sawlog, the WUP has taken into account forest and type and stand condition.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must minimise adverse visual impact and consider effects on areas of landscape sensitivity.”

Criterion 15

WUP / TRP takes account of FMP landscape management guidelines?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant, however the documentation and the process by which the FMP landscape management guidelines are taken into account could be improved.

The FMPs reference the use of the Visual Management System (VMS) as a tool to identify areas considered to be of high scenic value. Guidelines around methods used for landscape protection are captured in the Timber Harvesting Operator’s Procedures. Within the Wood Utilisation Planning guidelines and the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Wood Utilisation Planning there is no reference for taking into account the VMS for landscape sensitivity. DSE states that the objectives are identified through a few different processes, informally through District Planning for the WUP, and formally through Forest Management Zoning.

The informal process occurs at a District planning level, where landscape management is left to the discretion of the forest officer who is developing the

WUP. Therefore it relies solely on the expertise and knowledge of the current officer / team. Spatial layers of forest management zoning are the primary tools used at this planning level, so too are visual observations, with the District manager having final approval.

The Forest Management Zones are the formal tool for managing landscape protection, where areas of high visual sensitivity are identified and incorporated within an SPZ spatial layer. If they are not incorporated within a spatial layer then it is reliant on the District Forest Officer's expertise and knowledge of an area to identify landscape protection areas. The development of the Forest Management Zones was a GIS project that occurred within DSE a number of years ago and there are reported to be inaccuracies within the data. Landscape values were supposed to be considered in the development of this project. DSE reports that there are plans for the data set to undergo a review to incorporate greater accuracy.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant. The North-West Region follows the same procedures as those described for the South-West Region.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must meet legal timber supply obligations”

Criterion 16

Is the WUP / TRP consistent with timber supply obligations?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant.

The FMP maximum sawlog supply figures no longer apply. With the absence of any other identifiable maximum sawlog supplies for each FMA, there are no clear permissible sawlog harvesting levels. The SOP – Wood Utilisation Planning in ‘Developing and approving a WUP’ specifies to “Identify coupes to meet anticipated annual Forest Produce Licence and domestic firewood supply requirements for the WUP period”. Timber allocation therefore is determined at a District level based on such data as previous harvesting volumes, requirements of commercial users and estimations of what is sustainable with no definitive guidelines provided. The timber allocation amount is rolled over each year and provides the base for WUP planning. DSE then controls the licensing process for commercial timber harvesting based on the volumes agreed at a district level.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant.

With the FMP maximum sawlog supplies being out of date and the absence of any other identifiable maximum sawlog supplies for each FMA there is no clear permissible sawlog harvesting levels. In the SOP – Wood Utilisation Planning in ‘Developing and approving a WUP’ it specifies to “Identify coupes to meet anticipated annual Forest Produce Licence and domestic firewood supply requirements for the WUP period”. DSE stated that the volume of timber harvested is based on previous harvesting volumes requirements of commercial users and an estimation of what is sustainable.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must specify the location of coupes.”

Criterion 17

WUP / TRP states coupe location and name?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant, as they state the coupe name and address.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant, in that they state the coupe name and address.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must be available for public scrutiny.”

Criterion 20

WUP / TRP is available to the public?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant. The WUPs were released for a 30 day public comment period and identified stakeholders were notified of the WUP’s development and their comments were sought. The WUPs were publicly available at www.dse.vic.gov.au. The Horsham WUP and accompanying maps could be viewed in Horsham and the Midlands’ WUP could be viewed in Ballarat and Daylesford.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant. The WUPs were released for a 30 day public comment period and identified stakeholders were notified of the WUP's development and their comments were sought. They were publicly available at www.dse.vic.gov.au. The Bendigo WUP and accompanying maps could be viewed at Epsom, Heathcote and Maryborough and the Mid Murray West's WUP could be viewed at Epsom and Cohuna.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“Special Plans must be prepared and approved where major salvage operations of timber are undertaken following wildfire, storms or other events, and must address recovery strategies for other forest values.”

Criterion 21

Where salvage operations known to be occurring have Special Plans been prepared, reviewed and endorsed?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

This criterion is not relevant as no salvage operations occurred in the Horsham and Midlands WUPs.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

This criterion is not relevant as no salvage operations occurred in the Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs.

Criterion 22

Do Special Plans adequately address recovery strategies?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

This criterion is not relevant as no salvage operations occurred in the Horsham and Midlands WUPs.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

This criterion is not relevant as no salvage operations occurred in the Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“Minor salvage operations may require modification of the existing Wood Utilisation Plan or Timber Release Plan.”

Criterion 23

Have minor salvage operations necessitated WUP / TRP amendment?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

This criterion is not relevant as no salvage operations occurred in the Horsham and Midlands WUPs.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

This criterion is not relevant as no salvage operations occurred in the Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs.

Criterion 24

Are the associated amendments accurately captured and consistent with the objectives of the WUP or TRP?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

This criterion is not relevant since no salvage operations occurred in the Horsham and Midlands WUPs.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

This criterion is not relevant as no salvage operations occurred in the Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs.

4.2 WOOD UTILISATION PLANNING APPROVAL

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“Wood Utilisation Plan is approved by the DSE Regional Director prior to the release of coupes for harvesting.”

Criterion 25

Has the WUP been approved by the DSE Regional Director (or equivalent)?

South-West – Horsham & Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant.

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant. Approval was granted on the 1st May 2009 and the 4th May 2009 respectively.

Approval was granted by the Land and Fire Area Manager instead of the DSE Regional Director. However DSE advised the Auditor that at that time the Land and Fire Area Manager was the same role as the Regional Director and had the same authority (correspondence received by DSE in July 2012).

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant.

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant, approval was granted by the Land and Fire Area Manager, which has the same authority as the DSE Regional Director, on the 7th May 2009 and the 10th June 2009 respectively.

Criterion 26

Did timber harvesting commence on any coupe prior to being subject to an approved WUP?

South-West – Horsham and Midlands

The Horsham and Midlands WUPs are compliant. A schedule of harvesting dates was provided, with no harvesting occurring before the approval of the WUPs. However some harvesting data was missing from CIS at an operations level. Harvesting data is often maintained in a hard copy form and is not always transferred to CIS.

North-West – Bendigo & Mid Murray West

The Bendigo and Mid Murray West WUPs are compliant. DSE advised that a schedule of harvesting dates was provided, with no harvesting occurring before the approval of the WUP. However some harvesting data was missing from CIS at an operations level. Harvesting data is often maintained in a hardcopy form and is not always transferred to CIS.

4.3 TIMBER RELEASE PLANNING DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004

Part 5 Management of Timber Resources by VicForests

“VicForests must prepare a timber release plan in respect of an area to which an allocation order applies for the purposes of – a) harvesting and selling, or harvesting or selling, timber resources; and b) undertaking associated management activities in relation to those timber resources. 2) A timber release plan is to be for a period not exceeding 5 years.”

Criterion 1

Has a TRP been prepared for allocated timber resources & does the period exceed 5 years?

6AUG09 Amendment

This criterion is not relevant as the 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is an amendment on an existing TRP, 2006 – 11.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments are amendments on existing TRPs, the 2006 – 11 and 2009 – 14.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“Schedules of coupes selected for timber harvesting and associated access roading must be described in the WUP or TRP”

Criterion 2

Does the WUP/TRP adequately describe the schedule of coupes proposed for timber harvesting?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant as it states the year, FMA, District, coupe address (#), gross area (ha), estimated net area (ha), road line length (km), silviculture system / road line type and forest stand description.

7JAN10 Amendments

The 7th January 2010 TRP amendments are compliant as they state the FMA, District, coupe address (#), area (ha) and silvicultural system. These denote less as they detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Criterion 3

WUP / TRP states / shows location of major roads?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant, as it shows the location of major roads on accompanying maps.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the amendment details coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Criterion 4

Have road extensions or upgrades been noted in WUP / TRP or access road leading into coupes?

6AUG09 Amendment

This 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant, since it has noted road extensions or upgrades in the TRP.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE and it does not detail any road extensions or upgrades.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

"The WUP/TRP must be consistent with the Code of Practice for Timber Production (as amended) and with the relevant Forest Management Plan."

Criterion 5

Has the WUP or TRP been prepared for a multi-year period (3 or 5 years respectively) and using appropriate expertise?

6AUG09 Amendment

This criterion is not relevant as the 6th August 2009 TRP is an amendment of the 2006 – 11 TRP.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP are amendments of the 2006 – 11 and 2009 – 14 TRPs.

Criterion 7

Are coupe location and dispersion of coupes within the forest consistent with Forest Management Plan Strategies?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant, whilst the FMPs are no longer specifically referenced in the TRP process no inconsistencies with the broad intent of the FMPs was identified.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

"The WUP/TRP must minimise impact on biodiversity and provide for the maintenance of a range of forest age classes and structures."

Criterion 8

Has the removal of trees as part of road construction activities for timber production been considered within each Plan?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant. One coupe, # 285-516-0006, was identified for road alignment / improvement (over 500m).

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Code Reference: 2.2.2 Conservation of Biodiversity

“Use of wildlife corridors, comprising appropriate widths of retained forest, to facilitate animal movement between patches of forest of varying ages and stages of development, and contributing to a linked system of reserves.”

Criterion 9

Streamside buffers may act as a wildlife corridor however, other topographic features may also constitute wildlife corridors depending on the forest type and fauna present.

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant as wildlife corridors are incorporated into the TRP from the DSE Forest Management Zoning layer, which sets out flora and fauna habitat areas. At a coupe level Special Management Zones (SMZs) are addressed through buffers zones.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must identify and mitigate impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage values, in consultation with Traditional Owners and any other relevant.”

Criterion 10

Have Aboriginal cultural values been identified and mitigated in consultation with Traditional owners?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant.

Aboriginal cultural values have been incorporated into the planning process, occurring after the coupe has been selected by VicForests and has been approved by the DSE review. The coupes that have been approved are sent to Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV) to review and identify significant cultural values. AAV then returns coupes with identified cultural values and specifies their location in the coupe and their proposed management procedures. VicForests then incorporates the data and management suggestions from AAV into CIS.

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment identified eight coupes with Aboriginal cultural values either inside their boundary or within 500m. One coupe had two values: one inside the boundary and one within 100m of its boundary. The coupes identified with Aboriginal cultural values either inside their boundary or in close proximity are:

- 311-516-0003 – within coupe boundary
- 533-507-0011 – within coupe boundary
- 533-507-0011 – within 100m of coupe boundary
- 300-541-0001 – within 100m of coupe boundary
- 464-506-0018 – within 100m of coupe boundary
- 298-527-0001 – within 100m to 500m of coupe boundary
- 311-516-0004 – within 100m to 500m of coupe boundary
- 311-503-0014 – within 100m to 500m of coupe boundary.

The auditor viewed the CIS data three coupes in at VicForests head office in Melbourne, being coupes 311-516-0003, 533-507-0011 and 300-541-0001. The auditor was able to verify that these three coupes had their AAV details correctly incorporated into CIS.

At two of the coupes viewed, 311-516-0003 and 533-507-0011, harvesting had not yet begun and CIS had the pre-harvest as 'incomplete' due to the AAV section being flagged as incomplete. Before harvesting can begin VicForests has a process that requires the conduct of a ground search to define harvesting restrictions imposed on that coupe. In CIS further activities are blocked until the AAV requirement has been resolved.

For the third coupe, 300-541-0001, harvesting had been completed. CIS had two entries relating to AAV requirements confirming that procedures had been carried out appropriately.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must minimise the impact of harvesting on water quality and quantity over a period of time within any particular catchment.”

Criterion 11

WUP / TRP considers seasonal closures within the FMA and coupe being harvested outside of specified closure period?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant. The CIS states the year and season of the proposed harvesting for each coupe.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must take account of forest type, the silvicultural system to be employed, and the needs of the regeneration program.”

Criterion 13

Has each WUP / TRP identified areas where forest stands can be managed more intensively to increase production of timber?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant, the silvicultural methods to more intensively increase timber production employed are; thinning from below, seed tree (includes retained overwood), thinning from above and single tree selection.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Criterion 14

Where selection or thinning silvicultural systems are proposed, has the area of forest to be harvested been determined by the forest type, its stand condition and other relevant environmental factors?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant, the silvicultural system proposed for each coupe is based off the coupe overlay analysis which in turn is comprised of coupe information such as its forest type, stand condition and whether any SMZs are present.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must minimise adverse visual impact and consider effects on areas of landscape sensitivity.”

Criterion 15

WUP / TRP takes account of FMP landscape management guidelines?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant.

The TRP planning process, at the desktop assessment phase, takes into account the Forest Management Zoning (FMZ) set out by the DSE. The FMZ was a GIS project that occurred a number of years ago, which has recently been updated, that sets out all sensitive landscape environs into a SPZ or SMZ overlay. For SMZs, the management actions are taken from the FMP, if none exist VicForests proposes a series of management actions which is based on the characteristics of the landscape and similar landscape values. VicForests then references the FMZ supplied by DSE with the landscape management guidelines identified in the FMP. Prior to harvesting a field reconnaissance is conducted that confirms and potentially identifies sensitive landscape values and if necessary will update the management actions.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“The WUP/TRP must meet legal timber supply obligations”

Criterion 16

Is the WUP / TRP consistent with timber supply obligations?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant. The FMP maximum sawlog supply figures no longer apply but have been replaced with the Allocation Order which focuses on the maximum permissible area for harvesting. In the absence of other references to maximum sawlog levels, the planning process is considered to be compliant.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

"The WUP/TRP must specify the location of coupes."

Criterion 17

WUP / TRP states coupe location and name?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant, as it states the coupe location / address (#), FMA and District. In CIS the coupes do have names but not in the TRP.

7JAN10 Amendments

The 7th January 2010 TRP amendments are compliant, they state the coupe location / address (#), FMA and District. In CIS the coupes do have names but not in the TRP.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

"The WUP/TRP must be available for public scrutiny."

Criterion 20

WUP / TRP is available to the public?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant.

The TRP and accompanying maps were made publicly available at <http://www.vicforests.com.au/timber-release-plans.htm> and at VicForests

regional offices in Healesville, Orbost and DSE offices in Benalla and Traralgon. It was gazetted in the Victorian Government gazette on Thursday 6th August 2009

7JAN10 Amendments

The 7th January 2010 TRP amendments are compliant. The TRPs were publicly available at <http://www.vicforests.com.au/timber-release-plans.htm> and at VicForest regional offices in Healesville, Orbost and DSE offices in Benalla and Traralgon. It was gazetted in the Victorian Government gazette on the 7th January 2010.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“Special Plans must be prepared and approved where major salvage operations of timber are undertaken following wildfire, storms or other events, and must address recovery strategies for other forest values.”

Criterion 21

Where salvage operations are known to be occurring have Special Plans been prepared, reviewed and endorsed?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant. Although VicForests does not name the extra reconnaissance requirements for salvage operations ‘Special Plans’, they did undertake extra reconnaissance and investigation of fire affected coupes. VicForests developed a wildfires salvage reconnaissance plan dated 4th March 2009. It detailed the coupes affected by the recent bushfires, the extent of the damage and their subsequent harvesting priority. Those with a high priority were harvested in March 2009 and that TRP amendment is out of the scope of this audit. Those with a low priority are captured in this TRP amendment.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE and therefore no salvage operations are detailed.

Criterion 22

Do Special Plans adequately address recovery strategies?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant. The wildfires salvage reconnaissance plan detailed the severity of crown damage for the coupes, silvicultural method to be employed and the coupe harvesting prioritisation.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE and therefore no salvage operations are detailed.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

"Minor salvage operations may require modification of the existing Wood Utilisation Plan or Timber Release Plan."

Criterion 23

Have minor salvage operations necessitated WUP / TRP amendment?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant as the TRP amendment was in part necessitated due to salvage operations.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE and therefore no salvage operations are detailed.

Criterion 24

Are the associated amendments accurately captured and consistent with the objectives of the WUP or TRP?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant the salvage reconnaissance plan detailed burnt coupes to be harvested instead of green unaffected coupes to ensure TRP harvesting yields were maintained.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE and therefore no salvage operations are detailed.

Code Reference: 2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans

“Timber Release Plan is prepared in accordance with the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004 and approved by the DSE Secretary in accordance with that Act.”

Criterion 27

Has the TRP been approved by the DSE Secretary?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant, the TRP has been approved by Dr Peter Appleford the Executive Director, Forests and Parks, as delegate to the Secretary on 3rd August 2009.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Criterion 28

Did timber harvesting commence on any coupe prior to being subject to an approved TRP?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant. The auditor verified data for 10 coupes entered into CIS and found that none had been harvested prior to the 6th August 2009. The coupes verified were:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| • 283-503-0013 | • 298-513-0001 |
| • 286-506-0001 | • 299-506-0002 |
| • 286-510-0008 | • 301-553-0001 |
| • 290-527-0003 | • 301-563-0001 |
| • 297-538-0001 | • 306-503-0004. |

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Criterion 29

Did DSE verify a proposed TRP, change to an approved TRP or major modification to an approved TRP as being consistent with the Allocation order, the Code and the Fire Code?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant.

DSE stated that the TRP was approved on the understanding that operations would be conducted in accordance with among others, the 2007 Code and Code of Practice for Fire Management of Public Land 2006.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Management Procedures Reference: 2.1.2 Notification of a Proposed New TRP or Change to an Approved TRP

“The Chief Executive Officer, VicForests must notify the Executive Director, Forests and Parks (as delegate of the Secretary) in writing of a proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP at least 30 days prior to submitting documentation for review. This letter must identify expected dates of submission of documentation for review by Land and Fire Services.”

Criterion 30

Have TRP changes been appropriately documented?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant, with certain elements not relevant.

The CEO of VicForests notified Mr Harris, Secretary of DSE, dated 1st July 2009 of VicForests’ proposed TRP amendment. As the TRP amendment was released prior to the introduction of the 2009 Management Procedures its requirements related to the 2007 Management Procedures. These Management Procedures did not have the requirement of submitting 30 days prior or the expected submission date for review by Land and Fire Services.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE, this criterion relates to a proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP.

Management Procedures Reference: 2.1.2 Notification of a Proposed New TRP or Change to an Approved TRP

“VicForests must notify the relevant Area Manager at least 30 days prior to submitting the proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP for review by Land and Fire Services. The notification must include: i) the date the proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP will be submitted for review; ii) the number of coupes included in the proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP per FMA; and iii) identification of whether a new TRP, a major change to an approved TRP or a minor change to an approved TRP is proposed.”

Criterion 31

Using only a selection of examples, have appropriate notifications of new TRP and/or changes to an approved TRP been made?

6AUG09 Amendment

The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment is compliant, with certain elements not relevant.

As stated in criterion 30, VicForests notified the DSE Secretary on 1st July 2009 of the proposed TRP amendment. As the TRP amendment was released prior to the introduction of the 2009 Management Procedures its requirements related to the 2007 Management Procedures. These management procedures did not have the requirement of notifying the relevant Area manager or review by the Land and Fire Services.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant. Although the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments were developed under the new 2009 Management Procedures, these TRP amendments relate to handing coupes back to DSE control and not to adding new or modifying existing coupes.

Management Procedures Reference: 2.1.3 Review and Approval of a proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP

“VicForests must provide documentation in accordance with Schedule 15 of these Procedures to: 1) The Area Manager; 2) The nominated TRP Coordinator and 3) The Manager, Forestry Standards and Compliance, at the commencement of the review.”

Criterion 32

Refer to Schedule 15 of the Management Procedures and review required documentation. Have procedures been followed for approval of a new TRP and/or changes to an approved TRP?

6AUG09 Amendment

This criterion is not relevant. The 6th August 2009 TRP amendment comes under the 2007 Management Procedures which do not contain an equivalent to schedule 15 of the 2009 Management Procedures. The only requirement that is the same between the two Procedures is that of notifying the DSE of a proposed TRP amendment, which was covered in criterion 19.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant to the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments as Schedule 15 relates to 'documentation required from VicForests for a proposed new TRP and change to an approved TRP' not to handing coupes back to the DSE.

Management Procedures Reference: 2.1.3 Review and Approval of a proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP

"VicForests must provide documentation in accordance with Schedule 15 of these Procedures to the Executive Director, Forest and Parks (as delegate of the Secretary) (and provide a copy of that documentation to the Manager, Forestry Standards and Compliance) at the commencement of the process for the approval of a proposed TRP or change to an approved TRP."

Criterion 33

Refer to Schedule 15 of the Management Procedures and review required documentation. Has appropriate documentation been provided?

6AUG09 Amendment

This criterion is not relevant as the 6th August 2009 TRP amendment relates to the 2007 Management Procedures which do not contain an equivalent to schedule 15 of the 2009 Management Procedures.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant to the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments as Schedule 15 relates to 'documentation required from VicForests for a proposed new TRP and change to an approved TRP' not to handing coupes back to the DSE.

Management Procedures Reference: 2.1.3.2 Coupe Reconnaissance

"The coupe reconnaissance must identify and provide planned management action for all relevant coupe values."

Criterion 34

Are relevant coupe values identified?

6AUG09 Amendment

This criterion is not relevant to the 6th August 2009 TRP amendment as the amendment relates to the 2007 Management Procedures which did not have a similar requirement to that of the 2009 Management Procedures. However VicForests in CIS did outline management actions based upon reconnaissance and desktop studies for coupe specific values.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Criterion 35

Are the proposed management actions appropriate? Do they provide for the protection of those identified values?

6AUG09 Amendment

This criterion is not relevant to the 6th August 2009 TRP amendment as the amendment relates to the 2007 Management Procedures which did not have a similar requirement to that in the 2009 Management Procedures.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Management Procedures Reference: 2.1.4 Modification to an Approved TRP

“VicForests must advise the relevant Forest Management Officer via CIS at least 5 working days prior to the intended commencement of timber harvesting of any minor modification to an approved TRP.”

Criterion 36

Has appropriate notice been provided?

6AUG09 Amendment

This criterion is not relevant as the 6th August 2009 TRP amendment relates to the 2007 Management Procedures where this criterion was not present.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Management Procedures Reference: 2.1.4 Modification to an Approved TRP

“VicForests must obtain the approval of the Area Manager for a major modification to an approved TRP.”

Criterion 37

Has appropriate approval been obtained?

6AUG09 Amendment

This criterion is not relevant as the 6th August 2009 TRP amendment relates to the 2007 Management Procedures where this criterion did not exist.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Management Procedures Reference: 2.1.4 Modification to an Approved TRP

“The information required when submitting a modification to an approved TRP includes; coupe address, type of modification, reason for modifying, modified reconnaissance information and a shapefile.”

Criterion 38

Is all the information available for TRP modifications?

6AUG09 Amendment

This criterion is not relevant to the 6th August 2009 TRP amendment as this is a requirement under the 2009 Management Procedures whilst this TRP amendment comes under the 2007 Management Procedures. VicForests did however supply the following information when submitting the modification; the coupe address, the type of modification, the reason for modifying the TRP and modified reconnaissance information.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

Management Procedures Reference: 2.1.6 Identification of Coupe Boundaries and Exclusion Areas

“VicForests must obtain the approval of the Area manager to convert an exclusion area based on a modelled value to GMZ where that modelled value is determined not to exist in the field.”

Criterion 39

Was required approval obtained and documented?

6AUG09 Amendment

This criterion is not relevant to the 6th August 2009 TRP amendment as this is a requirement under the 2009 Management Procedures, whilst this TRP amendment comes under the 2007 Management Procedures. VicForests did however on the 24th and 25th August request, from the Land and Fire Area Manager, the modification of at maximum 13 and eight coupes for Central and North-East Forest Areas respectively. The letter does not specify the exact number but does this on accompanying maps which were not viewed. The Land and Fire Area Manager reply does not have a date but they did approve two and eight coupes respectively to be changed to GMZ.

7JAN10 Amendments

This criterion is not relevant as the 7th January 2010 TRP amendments detail coupes being handed back to the DSE.

5.1**OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF COMPLIANCE**

The audit has covered four WUPs, relating to 26 coupes, and three TRP amendments, relating to 369 coupes, during the 2009/2010 planning year.

A total of 39 audit criteria from the Code, the Management Procedures and *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004* were applied to the TRP amendments and WUPs.

Many audit criteria were deemed not to be relevant for the following reasons:

- Some criteria did not apply to the specific nature of some of the WUPs and/or TRP amendments
- The 6th August and 7th January TRP amendments fell under the 2007 Management Procedures which did not contain some of the 2009 Management Procedures criteria.

The level of compliance was very high with no instances of non-compliance.

5.2**RISKS TO BENEFICIAL USES**

This audit of the associated 2009/2010 WUPs and TRPs of timber planning has not identified any imminent environmental hazards or unacceptable risks to the beneficial uses defined in Section 2.3 of this report.

The assessment of the risk to relevant beneficial uses has been conducted after consideration of the scope of the audit (i.e. an assessment of compliance with the Code and Management Procedures).

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 WUP PLANNING

There were a few instances relating to the WUP planning and documentation that could be improved. These include:

- Where planned harvesting volumes are made at the discretion of each District, based on such data as previous harvesting volumes, requirements of commercial users and estimations of what is sustainable, then clear documentation should be maintained to show the basis of such decisions.
- DSE should implement measures to ensure that all relevant WUP documentation is maintained and readily accessible, particularly WUP approval and harvesting dates.
- The documentation and the process by which FMP landscape management guidelines are taken into account (even if not relevant) could be improved.

6.2 FOREST AUDIT PROGRAM

This audit is the first to assess Module 3 of the Forest Audit Program. It is therefore the first time that the audit workbook, DSE Module 3 – Tactical Planning, was used for the audit of actual WUP/TRP development and planning.

During the conduct of this audit it was recognised that two audit criteria contained in the audit workbook are not relevant to this stage of the harvesting lifecycle and more readily applicable to module 4: Operational Planning:

- *Criterion 6*

Is the schedule of coupes consistent with the relevant Forest Management Plan?

- *Criterion 12*

Does the WUP / TRP provide for authorisation to utilise felled trees appropriately and efficiently?

It is therefore recommended that these two criteria be removed from the Audit 3 module workbook and transferred to the Audit 4 module workbook.

It is further recognised that criterion 18, 'WUP / TRP states / shows location of major roads?' and criterion 19, 'Have road extensions or upgrades been noted in WUP / TRP or access road leading into coupes?' are a repeat of

criterion 4, 'Have road extensions or upgrades been noted in WUP / TRP or access road leading into coupes?'.

Therefore criteria 18 and 19 should be been removed from the Audit 3 module workbook.

GLOSSARY

Where available, the following definitions have been drawn from the Code.

Code

The Code for Practice for Timber Production, March 2007 (Department of Sustainability and Environment)

Coupe

An area of forest of variable size, shape and orientation from which logs for sawmilling or other industrial processing are harvested.

DSE

Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

Forest Management Area (FMA)

Basic units for forest planning and management in Victoria. Currently Victoria is divided into fifteen Forest Management Areas as defined in the *Forests Act 1958*

Forest Management Plan (FMP)

Forest Management Plans will be produced by Department of Sustainability and Environment to address the full range of values and uses in Forest Management Areas, which have been designated as the units for planning forest management activities.

Special Management Zone

A zone that delineates an area to be managed to maintain specified values, such as flora and fauna habitat or catchment values, while catering for timber production under certain conditions.

Special Protection Zone (SPZ)

A zone that delineates an area to be managed for the conservation of natural or cultural values and where timber harvesting will be excluded.

Timber Release Plan (TRP)

The Timber Release Plan (TRP) is prepared by VicForests in accordance with Part 5 of the *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004*.

The TRP:

- Provides a schedule of coupes selected for timber harvesting and associated access road requirements
- Identifies the location and approximate timing of timber harvesting in the proposed coupes
- Identifies the location of any associated access roads

VicForests prepares a TRP that includes coupe details and maps and covers a set five year period.

Wood Utilisation Plan (WUP)

The Wood Utilisation Plan (WUP) is prepared by DSE. The plan details the type and quantity of wood to be produced statewide and the allocation of wood to processors in western Victoria. The plan is prepared annually and covers a rolling three year period, with detailed specifications for the first year and indicative specifications for the following two years.

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ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT FOREST AUDIT PROGRAM TIMBER PRODUCTION IN STATE FORESTS

FMA: «FMA»

Module 3 Tactical Planning

Workbook 3A: Wood Utilisation Plan & Timber Release Plan
Development and Approval

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan

Assessment

Assessment Methodology:

Assessing compliance with the requirements for Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans will require the assessment of planning related operations, review of documentary evidence and records, and interviews.

Specification source: *Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009, Sections: 2.1 Timber Release Plans and 3.2.1 Wood Utilisation Plans*

DSE SOP 3.1 – Wood Utilisation Planning

DSE Guidelines for the review of a Timber Release Plan

Summary Page

Positive Observations:

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Summary of Non-Compliance and/or Potential Risk of Harm to the Environment:

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Areas for Improvement:

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Further evidence required:

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-

Previous Key Audit Findings

What key findings were observed during the previous environmental audit?

The auditor will require an understanding of previous key findings in order to provide commentary on current practices and improvements over time.

Comments:

Note: If this is the first audit conducted under the new Forest Audit Program then this section can be ignored/deleted.

Forest Audit – FMA and WUP/TRP Information

FMA:	«FMA»	WUP/TRP Under Review:	
Comments:		Date of WUP/TRP:	
People Present:	Auditor and Audit Team: Auditees:	Audit Date:	

General comments and observations

General notes:

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Development and Approval:

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Development

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
<i>Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004 (as amended)</i>	Part 5 Management of Timber Resources by VicForests	<p>VicForests must prepare a timber release plan in respect of an area to which an allocation order applies for the purposes of—</p> <p>(a) harvesting and selling, or harvesting or selling, timber resources; and</p> <p>(b) undertaking associated management activities in relation to those timber resources.</p> <p>(2) A timber release plan is to be for a period not exceeding 5 years</p>	<p>Has a TRP been prepared for allocated timber resources?</p> <p>Does the period exceed 5 years?</p>		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	Schedules of coupes selected for timber harvesting and associated access roading must be described in the WUP or TRP.	<p>Does the WUP/TRP adequately describe the schedule of coupes proposed for timber harvesting?</p> <p>WUP / TRP states / shows location of major roads?</p>		
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	3.2.1. Wood Utilisation Plans	All planned timber harvesting coupes that involve tree felling and roadline coupes in which road construction operations, significant road improvement operations and minor road improvement operations associated with timber harvesting is planned must be included in a WUP	<p>Have road extensions or upgrades been noted in WUP / TRP or access road leading into coupes?</p> <p><i>Note: Coupes designated for the collection of firewood that was fallen during a previous harvesting activity do not require inclusion in the WUP (DSE Management Procedures, 2009).</i></p>		

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Development

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must be consistent with the Code of Practice for Timber Production (as amended) and with the relevant Forest Management Plan.	Has the Wood Utilisation Plan or Timber Release Plan been prepared for a multi-year period (three or five years, respectively) and using appropriate expertise? Are the schedule of coupes consistent with the relevant Forest Management Plan? Are coupe location and dispersion of coupes within the forest consistent with Forest Management Plan strategies?		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must minimise impact on biodiversity and provide for the maintenance of a range of forest age classes and structures.	Has the removal of trees as part of road construction activities for timber production been considered within each Plan?		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.2.2 Conservation of Biodiversity	Use of wildlife corridors, comprising appropriate widths of retained forest, to facilitate animal movement between patches of forest of varying ages and stages of development, and contributing to a linked system of reserves must be adhered to during operations.	Streamside buffers may act as a wildlife corridor however, other topographic features may also constitute wildlife corridors depending on the forest type and fauna present.		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must identify and mitigate impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage values, in consultation with Traditional Owners and any other relevant	Have Aboriginal cultural values been identified and mitigated in consultation with Traditional Owners?		

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Development

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
		Aboriginal groups.			
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must minimise the impact of harvesting on water quality and quantity over a period of time within any particular catchment.	WUP / TRP considers seasonal closures within the FMA and coupe being harvested outside of specified closure period?		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must permit the effective and efficient utilisation of felled trees.	Does the WUP/TRP provide for authorisation to utilise felled trees appropriately and efficiently?		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must take account of forest type, the silvicultural system to be employed, and the needs of the regeneration program.	Has each WUP/TRP identified areas where forest stands can be managed more intensively (thinning and/or fertilising, salvage fellings, pest control and other silvicultural methods) to increase production of timber? Where selection or thinning silvicultural systems are proposed, has the area of forest to be harvested been determined by the forest type, its stand condition and other relevant environmental factors?		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must minimise adverse visual impact and consider effects on areas of	WUP / TRP takes account of FMP landscape management guidelines?		

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Development

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
	Release Plans	landscape sensitivity.			
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.2.2 Conservation of Biodiversity	Modifying coupe size and dispersal in the landscape, and rotation periods, as appropriate must be adhered to during operations.			
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must meet legal timber supply obligations.	Is the WUP/TRP consistent with timber supply obligations?		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must specify the location of coupes.	WUP / TRP states coupe location and name?		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must show the location of major access roading ¹ , including extensions or upgrading of the permanent road network.	WUP / TRP states / shows location of major roads? Have road extensions or upgrades been noted in WUP / TRP or access road leading into coupes?		

¹ Coupe access roads (ie. roads less than 500 metres in length terminating in a coupe) are not required to be identified on the WUP or TRP, except where significant environmental considerations (eg. presence of rainforest) must be planned for.

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Development

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	The WUP/TRP must be available for public scrutiny.	WUP / TRP is available to the public?		
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	3.2.1. Wood Utilisation Plans	A WUP must be prepared to provide the general public with information regarding the location and approximate timing of DSE managed timber harvesting operations and associated road construction and road improvement operations			
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	Special Plans must be prepared and approved where major salvage operations of timber are undertaken following wildfire, storms or other events, and must address recovery strategies for other forest values.	Where salvage operations are known to be occurring have Special Plans been prepared, reviewed and endorsed? Do Special Plans adequately address recovery strategies?		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	Minor salvage operations may require modification of the existing Wood Utilisation or Timber Release Plan.	Have minor salvage operations necessitated WUP/TRP amendment? Are the associated amendments accurately captured and consistent with the objectives of the WUP or TRP?		

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Approval

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	Wood Utilisation Plan is approved by the DSE Regional Director prior to the release of coupes for harvesting.	Has the WUP been approved by the DSE Regional Director (or equivalent)? Did timber harvesting commence on any coupe prior to being subject to an approved WUP?		
<i>Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007</i>	2.1.2 Wood Utilisation Plans or Timber Release Plans	Timber Release Plan is prepared in accordance with the <i>Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004</i> and approved by the DSE Secretary in accordance with that Act	Has the TRP been approved by the DSE Secretary? Did timber harvesting commence on any coupe prior to being subject to an approved TRP? Did DSE verify a proposed TRP, change to an approved TRP or major modification to an approved TRP as being consistent with the Allocation Order, the Code and the Fire Code?		
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	2.1.2 Notification of a Proposed New TRP or Change to an Approved TRP	The Chief Executive Officer, VicForests must notify the Executive Director, Forests and Parks (as delegate of the Secretary) in writing of a proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP at least 30 days prior to submitting documentation for review. This letter must identify expected dates of submission of documentation for review by	Have TRP changes been appropriately documented?		

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Approval

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
		Land and Fire Services.			
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	2.1.2 Notification of a Proposed New TRP or Change to an Approved TRP	<p>VicForests must notify the relevant Area Manager at least 30 days prior to submitting the proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP for review by Land and Fire Services. The notification must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i). the date the proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP will be submitted for review; ii). the number of coupes included in the proposed new TRP or change to an approved TRP per FMA; and iii). identification of whether a new TRP, a major change to an approved TRP or a minor change to an approved TRP is proposed 	Using only a selection of examples, have appropriate notifications of new TRP and/or changes to an approved TRP been made?		

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Approval

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	2.1.3 Review and Approval of a Proposed New TRP or Change to an Approved TRP	VicForests must provide documentation in accordance with Schedule 15 of these Procedures to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Area Manager; 2. The nominated TRP Coordinator 3. The Manager, Forestry Standards and Compliance at the commencement of the review.	Refer to Schedule 15 of the Management Procedures and review required documentation. Have procedures been followed for approval of a new TRP and/or changes to an approved TRP?		
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	2.1.3 Review and Approval of a Proposed New TRP or Change to an Approved TRP	VicForests must provide documentation in accordance with Schedule 15 of these Procedures to the Executive Director, Forest and Parks (as delegate of the Secretary) (and provide a copy of that documentation to the Manager, Forestry Standards and Compliance) at the commencement of the process for the approval of a proposed TRP or change to an approved TRP.	Refer to Schedule 15 of the Management Procedures and review required documentation. Has appropriate documentation been provided?		

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Approval

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
		<p>A letter must accompany this documentation and must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i). a statement regarding the consistency of the proposed TRP or change to an approved TRP with the Allocation Order, Code and Fire Code; ii). a summary of the process used to develop the proposed TRP or change to an approved TRP; iii). a statement regarding compliance with all relevant legislation, the Allocation Order, Codes of Practice and approved TRP in the harvesting and selling of timber resources; iv). a statement that necessary permits, plans or permissions from statutory authorities will be in place before timber harvesting operations commence (where they apply); and v). a statement regarding data quality. 			

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Approval

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	2.1.3 Review and Approval of a Proposed New TRP or Change to an Approved TRP 2.1.3.2 Coupe Reconnaissance	The coupe reconnaissance must identify and provide planned management actions for all relevant coupe values.	Are relevant coupe values identified? Are the proposed management actions appropriate? Do they provide for the protection of those identified values?		
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	2.1.4 Modification to an Approved TRP	VicForests must advise the relevant Forest Management Officer via CIS at least 5 working days prior to the intended commencement of timber harvesting of any minor modification to an approved TRP.	Has appropriate notice been provided?		
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	2.1.4 Modification to an Approved TRP	VicForests must obtain the approval of the Area Manager for a major modification to an approved TRP. A major modifications must be submitted to the District Manager via CIS at least 10 working days prior to intended commencement of timber harvesting	Has appropriate approval been obtained?		

Wood Utilisation Plan / Timber Release Plan Approval

Requirement Name	Section	Prescription	Audit Criteria	Compliance	Auditor Comments
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	2.1.4 Modification to an Approved TRP	The information required when submitting a modification to an approved TRP includes: i). the coupe address ii). the type of modification; iii). the reason for modifying the TRP ; iv). modified reconnaissance information; v). a shapefile showing the coupe location (for major modifications only).	Is all the information available for TRP modifications?		
<i>Management Procedures for timber harvesting, roading and regeneration in Victoria's State forests, 2009</i>	2.1.6 Identification of Coupe Boundaries and Exclusion Areas	VicForests must obtain the approval of the Area Manager to convert an exclusion area based on a modelled value to GMZ where that modelled value is determined not to exist in the field.	Was required approval obtained and documented?		