

Sustainability Charter



for Victoria's State forests

A Victorian Government initiative



Introduction

Covering 3.4 million hectares (or 15% of the total land area in the State), Victoria's State forests are an important part of the landscape. They are the origin of many of our creeks and rivers, and are some of our favourite places to explore, learn and have fun. State forests also contain diverse and outstanding natural values. They contribute to scenic landscapes and provide habitat for a wide range of plants and animals.

Victoria's State forests are often at the doorstep of our regional and rural communities. Access to these forests provides opportunities for reflection and recreation and allows us to explore our cultural heritage. State forests also provide a wide range of products to the Victorian community. These products include timber, firewood and honey.

The policy initiatives *Growing Victoria Together* (2005), *Our Forests, Our Future* (2002) and *Our Environment, Our Future - Victoria's Environmental Sustainability Framework* (2005), combined with the *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004* demonstrate and strengthen the Victorian Government's commitment to regional communities and the sustainable management of Victoria's State forests.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment manages State forests on behalf of the Victorian community. VicForests is the state-owned enterprise that is responsible for the sustainable harvest and commercial sale of timber from State forests in Victoria. The Minister for Agriculture, and therefore, the Department of Primary Industries provides guidance to VicForests on operating in a framework that is consistent with Victorian government policy and priorities.

The objectives set out in this Sustainability Charter are consistent with the Montreal Process for sustainable forest management and the principles of ecologically sustainable development. Ecologically sustainable development is defined as development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends. The Montreal Process applies this concept to the forested landscape and is an international agreement between twelve member countries, including Australia, that are committed to the conservation and sustainable management of forests.

As a global citizen, Victoria has a responsibility to sustainably manage its forests and to minimise impacts on threatened forest communities in other, less regulated, jurisdictions. It should be recognised that timber sourced from Victoria's public forests is of high quality and should be promoted as a sustainable, durable and often unique product.

Purpose

This Sustainability Charter sets objectives for the sustainability of public native forests and the sustainability of the timber harvesting industry on public land in Victoria. It promotes involving the community in how we manage State forests to enhance their diverse values and uses, while reinforcing the importance of accountability and transparency.

Vision for Victoria's State forests

In partnership with the community, the Victorian Government will protect the environment and promote social and economic development for all Victorians. We are committed to ensuring the long-term future of our forests, regional communities and the timber industry, so that future generations have the same opportunities to enjoy and appreciate our forests as we do today.

Objectives

Through this Charter, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Primary Industries and VicForests will manage Victoria's State forest in accordance with the following objectives:

1. To maintain and conserve biodiversity in State forests
2. To maintain and improve the capacity of forest ecosystems to produce wood and non-wood products
3. To promote healthy forests by actively managing disturbance
4. To maintain and conserve the soil and water resources of State forests
5. To maintain and better understand the role of Victoria's State forests in global carbon cycles
6. To maintain and enhance the socio-economic benefits of State forests to Victorian communities
7. To ensure Victoria's legal, institutional and economic frameworks effectively support the sustainable management of State forests

Performance Monitoring, Reporting and Review

This Sustainability Charter will be reviewed every five years to ensure that it reflects new issues, developments and opportunities for the management of Victoria's State forests.

The *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004* requires VicForests to develop initiatives and targets that respond to and support the objectives set out in this Charter. It must include these initiatives and targets in its statement of corporate intent (required under the *State Owned Enterprises Act 1992*) and report on the status, performance or achievement of the initiatives and targets in its report of operations (required under the *Financial Management Act 1994*).

Progress towards achieving the objectives will also be evaluated using the framework of sustainable forest management indicators. Performance will be communicated through five-yearly 'State of the Forests' reports and regular third party auditing. The results, over time, will provide important information about how we can continually improve our forest management practices.



Hon. John Thwaites
Minister for Environment



Hon. Bob Cameron
Minister for Agriculture

Objective 1:

To maintain and conserve biodiversity in State forests

Biodiversity refers to the different plants, animals, micro-organisms, their genes and the ecosystems they form. The conservation of biodiversity is a key element of ecologically sustainable development. Managing native forests to protect biodiversity and maintain ecosystem processes via the conservation of habitats and ecosystems is essential to the ongoing survival of all species.

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring 'Flourishing biodiversity in healthy ecosystems' through *Victoria's Environmental Sustainability Framework – Our Environment, Our Future*. Continued planning and management for threatened species, recovery and threat prevention is essential to the application of the precautionary principle in the management of biological diversity. Accordingly, increasing our knowledge of forest processes and resources to ensure identification and understanding of biodiversity priorities and issues in State forests is also necessary.

Well-informed forest management planning will ensure that appropriate areas of State forest are set aside to safeguard threatened species and sensitive elements of our forest ecosystems, both aquatic and terrestrial. Monitoring the effectiveness of biodiversity programs will be an important part of delivering species conservation in Victoria.

The Victorian community can make a vital contribution to managing our forests to conserve biodiversity. Encouraging community participation in biodiversity conservation programs in State forests will improve biodiversity outcomes, by helping Victorians to feel more directly responsible for their forested landscapes.

Objective 2:

To maintain and improve the capacity of forest ecosystems to produce wood and non-wood products

Victoria's State forests provide a diverse range of jobs, goods and services that contribute to our quality of life. These range from timber for building and firewood for heating our homes, through to access to forests for inspiration and exercise. Victoria's State forests also provide essential ecosystem services like clean drinking water and clean air.

The Victorian Government, through *Our Forests, Our Future*, has recognised that the use of Victoria's State forests must be at a level that can be sustained without impairing the ability of the forest to regenerate and to continue to provide employment, products and services for future generations. Monitoring the extent of forest use is essential to identifying any impacts on the long-term sustainability of our activities.

Informed management and careful utilisation of the existing timber resource in regrowth forests, combined with technological innovation, will help us use our forest resources more efficiently, while minimising the impact on forest ecosystems. Third party forest certification to an internationally recognised scheme will verify that Victoria's forest products are sourced from well-managed forests.

Objective 3:

To promote healthy forests by actively managing disturbance

A range of natural and human induced disturbances, such as fire, pest plants and animals, disease, pollution and drought can impact on the health and vitality of forest ecosystems. These disturbances need to be identified, monitored and managed to ensure that the natural assets of State forests are restored and maintained.

Prescribed burning, based on ecological guidelines and principles, is used to promote ecosystem health and vitality through meeting specific habitat needs and encouraging regeneration. Prescribed burning is also used to protect life, assets and to minimise the impact of wildfire. Comprehensive planning and management of prescribed burning and ongoing research to determine appropriate ecological fire regimes will help us to maintain and improve forest ecosystem health and vitality. We will minimise the impact of air pollution and the incidence of fire escapes resulting from prescribed burns. We will ensure that environmental values are considered as an integral part of both our planning processes and field operations.

The active control of pest plants and animals to minimise their spread and impact is another important task, not only for the health and vitality of Victoria's State forests, but also in the Government's role as a good neighbour to adjoining private property. Monitoring our effectiveness in controlling pest plant and animal species will be an important part of promoting the health and vitality of Victoria's State forests.

Objective 4:

To maintain and conserve the soil and water resources of State forests.

Soil and water are two of the most fundamental resources associated with our State forests. We need to ensure that we have clean water coming from our forests and that terrestrial and aquatic processes in forests are maintained. The *Water White Paper, Securing Our Water Future Together* (2004) provides us with an integrated management strategy to help us to conserve the water resources of our State forests.

We will identify the impact of forest-based activities, such as trail bike riding and timber harvesting, on soil and water values. Implementation of innovative timber harvesting techniques will help to protect soil and water in Victoria's State forests. Road construction and maintenance will be managed to ensure that soil movement and erosion are minimised. We will monitor soil and water resources in our forests and report back to the community with our results.

Through careful forest management planning, the Victorian Government will ensure that soil and water resources in State forest are protected.

Objective 5:

To maintain and better understand the role of Victoria's State forests in global carbon cycles

Forests in our landscape have an important role to play in the global carbon cycle. Growing forests harness carbon found in the atmosphere, while timber products store carbon. However, we need to better understand and report on how forests, their biomass and forest products contribute to managing carbon in the atmosphere. This will improve our understanding and management of the potential impacts of climate change.

The Victorian Government will ensure that the extent of our forest estate is maintained and will actively promote the use of timber as a greenhouse friendly, renewable and recyclable building product.

Objective 6:

To maintain and enhance the socio-economic benefits of State forests to Victorian communities

Victorian communities have strong social, spiritual and cultural links to their State forests. These links are often related to traditional forest uses, recreation and the provision of jobs. Recognising and using the valuable experience and knowledge that resides in the community will greatly contribute to the sustainable management of Victoria's State forests.

The Victorian Government is committed to providing Victorians with access to State forests for both wood and non-wood forest products and services on a sustainable basis. We recognise the value that these products and services bring to rural communities through both direct and indirect employment, and to the Victorian community as a whole. We will promote Victoria's native forest harvesting sector as a sustainable and attractive investment option and support forest industries that are socially and economically viable.

As the traditional owners of the land, Victoria's Indigenous communities have a strong interest in the management of our State forests. Many opportunities exist to develop partnerships in managing State forest that will achieve Aboriginal aspirations for land, culture, heritage, family and community. Through respect for, and consideration of, Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, our forests can be sustainably managed. Evidence of both our Aboriginal and European heritage must be carefully managed to ensure that the stories they tell us are protected and passed on to future generations.

Victoria's State forests provide a diverse range of recreation and tourism opportunities. It is important that safe, yet satisfying, activities are provided for visitors to State forests. We must manage visitor numbers, conflicts between uses and demand for particular sites to ensure that the range and extent of these activities can continue for future generations.

We can reduce the everyday impact of our activities on forest ecosystems through educating and motivating the people who use our State forests to do so in an environmentally responsible manner. In addition, a skilled workforce will ensure safe management and use of our forests.

Objective 7:

To ensure Victoria's legal, institutional and economic frameworks effectively support the sustainable management of State forests.

A key component of ecologically sustainable development relates to the legal, institutional and economic frameworks that support the conservation and sustainable management of Victoria's State forests. This includes community involvement in decision-making.

The Victorian Government recognises that decision-making processes should effectively integrate short and long term economic, environmental, social and equity considerations. We acknowledge the need to maintain and enhance market competitiveness in an environmentally sound manner. VicForests will implement market-based timber pricing to ensure that our forest resources are appropriately valued.

Improving the capacity of staff to enforce laws, regulations and guidelines that support sustainable forest management is essential. In addition, consistent monitoring and reporting on the condition of State forests will improve knowledge, understanding and awareness of the values associated with our forests. It will allow us to demonstrate continual improvement in forest management.

The Victorian Government will cooperate with and complement national and international forest research programs by conducting high quality research and development into sustainable forest management. Improved knowledge and expertise will contribute to the credible analysis and expert advice being used in decision-making and policy development for Victoria's State forests.



This is the logo of The Montréal Process Working Group on Criteria and Indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests. The objectives presented in the Sustainability Charter for Victoria's State forests are consistent with this process.

Published by the Victorian Government Department of Sustainability and Environment, Melbourne, May 2006

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Authorised by the Victorian Government, 8 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne.

Printed by XL Colour, 32 Bruce St, Kensington 3031

ISBN 1 74152 415 6

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