

# Special Audit Assessment of VicForests' Harvesting Activities Against the Allocation Order

## Response from the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions

The Allocation Order 2013 (as amended in 2014 and 2019) (AO) is the order made by the Minister for Agriculture that allocates and vests timber resources to VicForests and permits associated timber harvest activities. The allocation order is made by the Minister under Part 3 of the *Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004*.

The objectives of this Order are:

- a. to allocate specified timber in State forests to VicForests for the purposes of harvesting and selling, or harvesting or selling, timber resources
- b. to permit VicForests to undertake associated management activities in relation to that allocated timber
- c. to specify the conditions and limitations that apply under this Order.

The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) administers the AO on behalf of the Minister.

In 2019 the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) undertook a special audit into allegations aired by an ABC investigation in November 2018 that thousands of hectares of State forest appear to have been, or were to be, illegally harvested.

On 23 October 2019 a copy of *Special Audit: Assessment of Vic Forests' Harvesting Activities Against the Allocation Order* was supplied to DJPR. The report outlines observations regarding harvesting and the allocation order and provided recommendations to DJPR. The recommendations address suggested improvements to the administration of the AO.

DJPR also notes that on 24 April 2019, the Minister for Agriculture amended the AO. This amended AO addresses issues that contributed to a lack of clarity for the area where the timber resources were allocated to VicForests. The amended AO identifies the spatial data layer that defines the Allocation Area and specifies where this spatial data layer is located in the Victorian Spatial Data Library. The AO spatial data is also at the same scale as the spatial data for forest management zoning scheme.

Assessment's recommendations relevant to DJPR	DJPR response and actions
<p>2. VicForests provides biannual updates of timber harvesting spatial data to both DJPR and DELWP.</p>	<p><b>Response</b> N/A. VicForests to respond.</p> <p><b>Actions</b> Noting that the AO requires annual recording of timber harvest spatial data, DJPR will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make public details confirming all harvesting since 1 October 2013 has been acquitted against the harvest area limits specified in the AO.</li> <li>• make public details listing the status of all areas harvested since 1 October 2013 at the time of harvest with regard to the forest management zoning scheme.</li> </ul>

<p>3. DJPR considers the appropriate timescale for the update of relevant, centrally-held spatial data library within a reasonable time of receipt.</p>	<p><b>Response</b> Agreed</p> <p><b>Actions</b> DJPR will work with VicForests to ensure the lodging of commercial timber harvesting information in the spatial data library in a timely manner.</p>
<p>4. DJPR and VicForests work with DELWP to develop and improve procedures to ensure robust end-to-end data curation and governance practices including data validation, version control and registration</p>	<p><b>Response</b> Agreed</p> <p><b>Actions</b> By 28 February 2020 DJPR will implement improved information management processes and document control procedures.</p>
<p>5. DJPR consider an annual reconciliation between the Allocation Order and key datasets (i.e. the FMZ schema) and a subsequent gazettal, so as the Allocation Order accurately reflects timber resources available to VicForests via the Allocation Order.</p>	<p><b>Response</b> Agree in principle. It is the Minister for Agriculture who amends or changes the AO not DJPR. The Minister will direct DJPR regarding any amendments or changes to the AO and the requirement for any subsequent gazettal.</p> <p><b>Actions</b> DJPR requests that DELWP provides up to date and timely spatial data regarding changes in the land base which is zoned as available for timber harvesting.</p>
<p>6. DELWP and DJPR continue to improve spatial data relating to the zoning of forests and the allocation and use of timbers.</p>	<p><b>Response</b> Agreed</p> <p><b>Actions</b> DJPR will formalise existing inter-agency working arrangements regarding administration of the AO.</p>