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| Forest Audit Program 2015/16    Environmental Compliance Response |

Each year, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) commissions an environmental audit to assess compliance of VicForests’ timber harvesting operations with the *Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014* (the Code) and the incorporated *Management Standards and Procedures for Timber Harvesting Operations in Victoria’s State Forests 2014* (MSPs). In 2015, DELWP introduced its *Timber Harvesting on Public Land Risk-Based Compliance Strategy (April 2015)* to focus DELWP’s environmental compliance and enforcement efforts on areas where the relative risks to the environment associated with non-compliance are greatest.

The highest priority audit themes identified by DELWP for the 2014/15 Forest Audit Program were:

1. managing environmental impacts from the construction and maintenance of in-coupe roads;
2. managing environmental impacts from the construction and rehabilitation of waterway crossings; and
3. protection of mandatory exclusion areas from the impacts of timber harvesting.

Three separate and independent environmental audits were conducted to examine each of these audit themes. The audit reports identified issues and made recommendations for improvement to both VicForests and DELWP. Each report scored VicForests’ environmental compliance against the regulatory framework for timber harvesting conducted on public land with an overall average of 82% compliant. Copies of these audits are attached.

As the environmental regulator DELWP will:

1. Investigate specific findings of potential non-compliances against the Code.
2. Work collaboratively with VicForests’ to improve current approaches to apply the current regulatory framework, including:

* developing better guidance and designs for waterway crossings for a range of aquatic fauna;
* developing better road closure measures, road drainage and weed management controls; and
* implementing improved systems for effective and efficient zoning applications and amendments.

1. Add the audit findings and recommendations to our register of possible changes and improvements to the current regulatory framework and continue to collaborate with VicForest’s to improve systems to track, review and monitor audit findings and recommendations over the long term.
2. Seek opportunities to undertake projects and other work to inform VicForests’ approaches to complying with the current regulatory framework, and foundational work to inform possible changes to the regulatory framework.

DELWP is developing a systematic and practical approach to the Forest Audit Program that reflects our role as the environmental regulator to optimise environmental outcomes for all timber harvesting operations on public land.

For further information please visit our [DELWP website](https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/) or contact us on 136 186. If you wish to report a concern about timber harvesting activities on public land please email Forest Reports on [forest.reports@delwp.gov.vic.au](mailto:forest.reports@delwp.gov.vic.au)