

Forest certification

An important part of sustainable forest management.



Forest certification is a process that ensures forests, and the wood products derived from them are managed sustainably.

It includes Forest Management Certification (assessing forest management practices) and Chain of Custody Certification (tracking certified wood products from forest to market). Certification is conducted by independent third-party bodies against internationally recognized standards, such as those from the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Certification applies to both native forests and plantations, with audits ensuring compliance with environmental, social, and economic sustainability benchmarks. This provides assurance to consumers and stakeholders that the forest or product meets rigorous sustainability criteria.

What is certification?

Forest certification includes Forest Management Certification and Chain of Custody Certification.

Certification is a process whereby the quality and sustainability of forest management, or of a product supply chain from forest to market, is assessed and certified by an accredited, independent third party, against the criteria and requirements of a credible and recognised forest management standard.

To have a forest certified as being sustainably managed, an audit is undertaken by an independent third-party certification body. The audit assesses the forest management practices of a forest manager or owner against the standard for certification. Both native forests and plantations can be certified.

Why do we need certification?

International forest certification networks provide recognition standards that encompass industry best practice and measure performance against principals that ensure operations are environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable.

The awareness of the importance of forests non-production values, such as biodiversity and carbon, is increasing and ensuring that forests are certified as sustainable will be viewed more favorably by all stakeholders.



CERTIFICATION BODIES

The two major global forest certification bodies in Australia are the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) schemes and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

Both the PEFC and FSC are internationally recognised forest certification networks that provide recognition of regional and national standards that encompass best practice for sustainable forest management.

CHAIN OF CUSTODY FOCUS

Wood and wood-based products sourced from certified forests can also be tracked (via labelling) through the supply chain using chain-of-custody certification provided by both forest certification schemes.

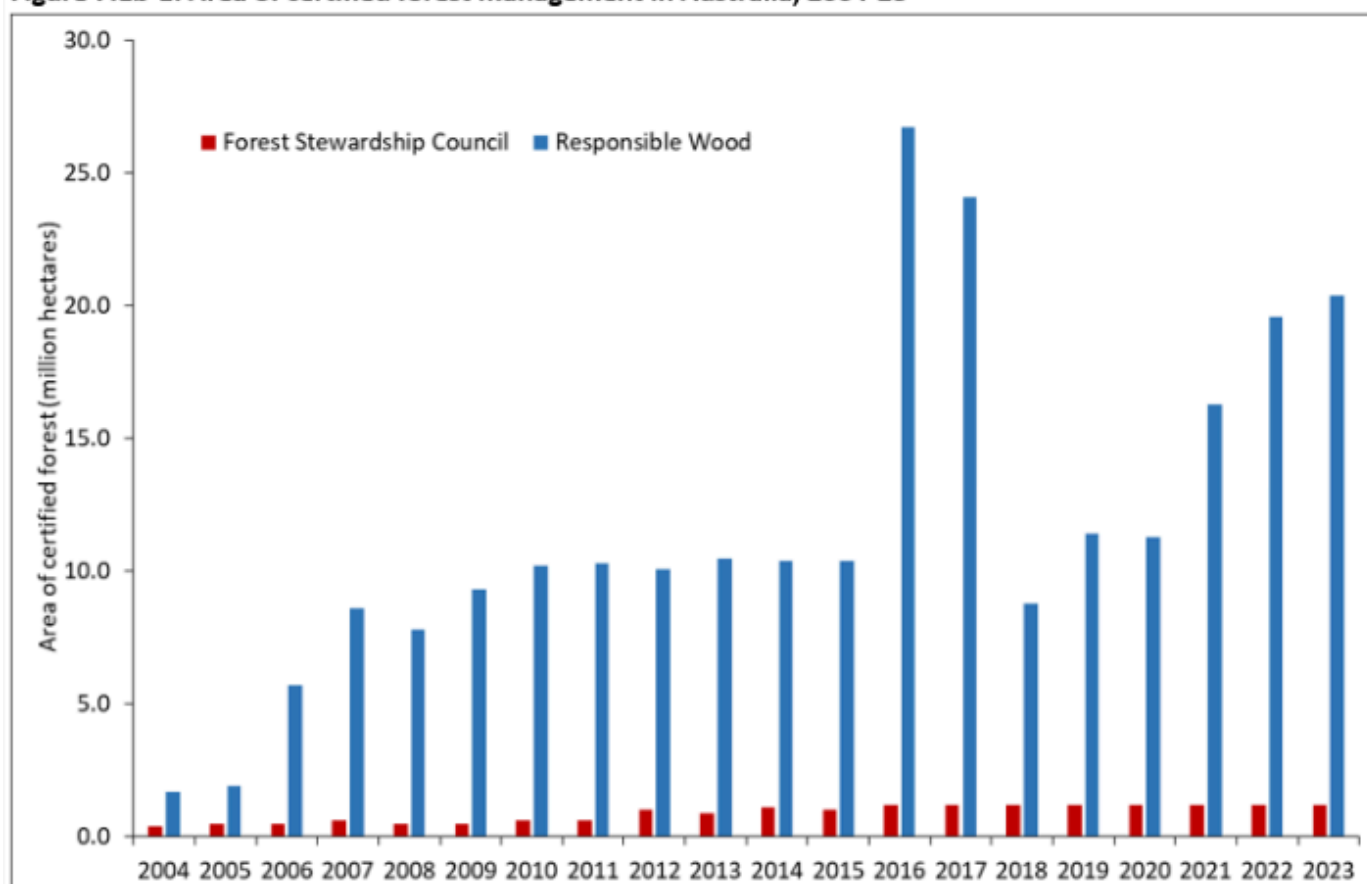
This provides consumers with an assurance that the wood product they are purchasing comes from a sustainably managed and certified forest. Large processors have defined forest areas and processing contracts which makes it easier to manage certification chain of custody requirements by controlling their resource base for their market.

DEMAND

Consumers are increasingly requiring an assurance that the wood products they are purchasing are derived from a sustainably managed and certified forest. The amount of forest area in Australia under one, or both, of the major certification schemes is continually increasing with;

- 20.4 million hectares - certified for forest management under the Responsible Wood Certification Scheme at June 2023.
- 1.2 million hectares certified for forest management under or the Forest Stewardship Council scheme at June 2023.
- 1.06 million hectares is the area of Australia’s native forests and commercial plantations estimated in mid-2023 to be certified for their forest management under both schemes.

Figure 7.1b-1: Area of certified forest management in Australia, 2004-23



Forest Stewardship Council areas are from the Forest Stewardship Council database and at 01 July for each year. Responsible Wood areas are for each year. The Responsible Wood areas for 2016 and 2017 are considered anomalous, resulting from certification then removal of largely forested areas. Source: Australian Forestry Standard Limited, Responsible Wood, Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, Forest Stewardship Council (International). Responsible Wood areas from 2003-04 to 2014-15 were supplied by the office of the Australian Forestry Standard Limited.



TASMANIA APPLICATION

Company-managed forests have independently achieved forest management certification through at least one scheme, resulting in all of Tasmania's estate-owned forests being certified. Large forest managers have the sophistication and resources needed to independently achieve and maintain certification.

Only small areas of independently managed private forests are certified as the majority are not large enough to justify going alone with certification with only a few thousand hectares of small to medium woodlots being certified. However, some smaller growers are certified by default when large forest owners have retained a legally definable management control over the forest on their land and include it within their total certified forest management area. A typical example would be share farms, in which industrial companies have management control as well as an equity interest in the trees in conjunction with the landowner.

Tasmania is also fortunate to have some smaller forest management companies who have forest management certification and landowners who engage with these private sector organisations will become certified under their multi-site wood broker 'umbrella'.

LEGAL VS CERTIFIED WOOD

Tasmania's forest management system is a comprehensive system for delivering ecologically sustainable forest management across all land tenures. The system comprises an overarching legislative and policy framework, and associated planning and operational systems.

Tasmania's forest management system consists of three primary elements, a:

- Policy for maintaining a permanent native forest estate;
- Reserve system that securely protects forest conservation values; and
- System for managing forests outside reserves in a manner that contributes to sustainable environmental, social and economic outcomes.

The legal instrument for demonstrating operational compliance against these elements is a Forest Practices Plan (FPP). Forest products created through FPP operations are considered legal and may be sold into markets irrespective of certification status.

All certified forest management systems within Tasmania have the requirement of an FPP underpinning their certification as the forest practices rigorous planning processes adhere to a significant percentage of both major forest certification scheme requirements.

There are circumstances, prescribed in Regulation 4 of the Forest Practices Regulations 2017, where legal forest products can be obtained without an FPP.

These products can be sold as legal wood, but most markets now demand evidence of sustainability that is assured through an independent certification scheme.

This system does create a market barrier to entry for small scale operations but also prevents large volumes entering sustainable certified forestry markets that are legal under alternative legislations (urban development, dams, or mining infrastructure) and would be considered deforestation.

The positive for Tasmania's smaller growers, is that an FPP is a benchmark that will enable a landowner to sell their wood products through a certified processor or timber broker via an umbrella scheme.

These processors/brokers apply their own due diligence to an FPP to ensure certification requirements are aligned and are then able to market the wood through their certification systems.

Umbrella certifications schemes often manage multiple properties or large estates and have contracts within established markets which make the access and returns for small owners' fluid and potentially volatile. Some forest companies opt for a closed certification scheme by controlling their resource base and market contracts which are generally inaccessible for smaller growers.

Growers may also access markets requiring certification by collaborating with certified mills/suppliers. The chain of custody aspect of both certification schemes can allow a modest proportion of non-certified wood from non-controversial sources to be included under a 'mix claim' where a mixture of certified and non-certified wood is sold.

The availability of this option depends on the chain of custody arrangements of the wood purchaser who has either ownership or management control of sourced wood.



What is group certification?

Group Certification is a mechanism through which groups of small forest landholders can organize themselves, pool their resources, and work together to achieve certification. This makes certification accessible for small-forest owners like Tasmania's company-manage forests.

Unlike umbrella schemes, group certification requires that all group members commit themselves to complying with the requirements of the certification body. Group members must be organised under an entity that can enter an agreement with a certification body on the group's behalf.

What does it deliver?

Participation in group certification enables full market control for landowners and access to potential markets that would otherwise be restricted or require a third-party timber broker. Group certification is a recognised option under both PEFC and FSC schemes.

In group schemes it is the 'group manager' that is certified rather than individual forest owners (or 'group members'). Group members' forests become a component of the total certified forest area of the group manager and only a sample of members' forest is audited annually. The group manager establishes and oversees processes and procedures, maintains group records and overall manages the membership and their performance.

An independent group scheme, ideally owned and controlled by the group members, also ensures certification costs are fully transparent and kept to a minimum. Once established, additional forest owners, including owners of smaller forests would find it easier to join, allowing the high fixed cost of certification to be reduced by spreading the certification costs over more hectares.

What is the process to obtain?

Both PEFC and FSC websites contain detailed instructions on the process and requirements of establishing or joining a group scheme. Group forest management certification requires establishing a specific management structure that includes the individual forest owners/managers. This entity represents the individual owners/managers in forest certification to ensure the correct implementation of the sustainable forest management standard and provide confidence in sampling-based certification activities.

References

Forestry Australia, www.forestry.org.au/forest-certification

Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, www.pefc.org

Responsible Wood, www.responsiblewood.org.au

Forest Stewardship Council, www.anz.fsc.org

Forico, www.forico.com.au/certification Sustainable Timber Tasmania, www.permits.sttas.com.au/forest-operations-management/our-operations/certifying-our-operations

Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/forestry/australias-forests/certification

Forest Practices Authority, www.fpa.tas.gov.au

Next Step



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Tasmania is one of the best places in the world to manage forests for sustainable and profitable outcomes. To learn more about your options for renewable native forest management, contact the team at Private Forests Tasmania on their Tree Alliance hotline or through their general enquiries.

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