

GUIDANCE NOTE ON CERTIFICATION OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES UNDER AS/NZS 4708:2021 SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Introduction

Sustainably managed forests provide a large number of values and benefits to society in addition to being a source of sustainably grown forest products.

These non-wood forest values and benefits (ecosystem services^{Note 1}) can include:

- Biodiversity conservation (including migration and pollination)
- Carbon storage and sequestration
- Soil and nutrient conservation
- Water filtration and conservation
- Recreational services (walking, camping, horse riding).

The above list is not exclusive.

The Australian/New Zealand Standard for sustainable forest management AS/NZS 4708:2021 (the Standard) supports the responsible management of ecosystem services and allows for the verification, quantification and certification of such services.

AS/NZS 4708:2021 was developed as a management system standard for forest ecosystems as a whole and intended to allow the certification of the full range of values and benefits which forests provide to society, not just responsibly sourced forest products.

Process for Certification of non-wood forest values and benefits under AS/NZS 4708:2021

The process for the management and certification of non-wood forest values and benefits under AS/NZS 4708:2021 is outlined and described in the steps below.

1. Identify the forest values and benefits to be covered by the management system

The forest manager shall identify and document the forest values (non-wood) and benefits that they wish to include in their management system, and within their scope of certification. This can include a broad range of ecosystem services.

To enable certification, the forest manager shall:

- a) Verify that they can exercise management control over the forest value/benefit. **AS/NZS 4708 - Clause 4.3(f)**
- b) Include the value/benefit within the documented scope of their forest management system. **AS/NZS 4708 - Clause 4.3**

2. Consult with stakeholders

The forest manager shall identify stakeholders that are directly impacted by the forest value/benefit and consult with them to identify their needs and expectations. For ecosystem services this could include traditional owners, recreational groups, sporting clubs, native foods and honey producers, 'downstream land managers' (e.g. farmers, managers of conservation areas) or local environmental groups. **AS/NZS 4708 - Clause 4.2**

3. Forest Management System

The forest value/benefit shall be incorporated into the forest manager's management system, which shall include the following aspects: **AS/NZS 4708 - Clause 4.4**

- a) The value/benefit shall be included in the forest manager's sustainable forest management policy and public summary. **AS/NZS 4708 - Clause 5.2 and 7.4.4**
- b) Senior management shall demonstrate leadership commitments to, and establish objectives for the value/benefit ^{Note 2}. **AS/NZS 4708 Clause - 5.1 and 6.2**
- c) The forest manager shall identify compliance obligations (legal requirements) that relate to the value/benefit and ensure that these are met. **AS/NZS 4708 Clause - 6.1.2**
- d) The forest manager shall include the value/benefit in the planning processes, documented procedures and operational control processes. **AS/NZS 4708 - Section 6**
- e) Resources and support shall be dedicated to the management of the forest value/benefit. **AS/NZS 4708 - Section 7**

- f) Any relevant sustainability criteria shall be applied to the forest management value/benefit. **AS/NZS 4708 - Section 11**
- g) The forest value/benefit shall be subject to effective monitoring and evaluation. **AS/NZS 4708 - Section 9**
- h) The forest benefit/value shall be subject to continual improvement processes. **AS/NZS 4708 - Section 10**

4. Audit and Verification Process

The effectiveness of the forest manager's management system, as applied to the specific value/benefit, shall be audited and assessed by an accredited certification body, in accordance with the scheme rules.

The audit team shall include individuals with relevant expertise in the specific forest value/benefit.

Where management of the forest value/benefit is shown through objective evidence collected by the certification body to be effective to conform with all relevant requirements of AS/NZS 4708:2021, the forest value/benefit may be included in the forest manager's certification documentation (e.g., certificates of conformity) to publicly confirm the effective management of the non-wood forest value/benefit.

5. Listing on the Responsible Wood and PEFC Public Databases

Where the Scope of Certification includes non-wood forest values/benefits (ecosystem services), these shall be clearly identified. The Scope of Certification shall be listed on the Responsible Wood/PEFC websites and be made publicly available.

6. Communications and Claims

AS/NZS 4708:2021 certified organisations with non-wood forest values/benefits (ecosystem services) included in their Scope of Certification may make the following claims:

- That the ecosystem service is responsibly managed and certified against AS/NZS 4708:2021, which includes being subject to independent audits by accredited certification bodies.

Where ecosystem service impacts have been reviewed or quantified through monitoring and measurement processes, and validated through internal and external audit processes, the following wording can be used to sell/promote/market the forest values/benefits:

- “Promoting sustainably managed forests with verified ecosystem services.”
- “Promoting verified ecosystem services in sustainably managed forests.”
- Additional verified claims relating to specific ecosystem services may be used, for example “promoting verified forest recreation”.

The certification of the ecosystem services may also be used to demonstrate that a specific objective is well-managed and a specific target is achieved. The Responsible Wood logo may be used in conjunction with ecosystem services claims.

Note 1: A forest ecosystem is a physically defined environment, made up of two inseparable components:

- (i) a particular environment with specific physical characteristics such as the climate, temperature, humidity, elevation, aspect, pH, soil properties, nutrients, etc., (the abiotic) and,*
- (ii) a set of living organisms including trees and other plants, animals, insects, and micro-organisms, (the biotic). The two components are in constant interaction and are interdependent. The ecosystem scale ranges from multicellular organisms such as insects, animals and plants to entire forest landscapes.*

Note 2: This may be demonstrated by a commitment to manage the forest value/benefit in accordance with the Standard, provision of resources, defining management objectives, providing monitoring and measurement resources and ensuring that intended outcomes are achieved.

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