

Responsible Wood Statement on Deforestation & Forest Degradation


Responsible Wood stands for the principle that certified forests remain as forests and the products derived from these forests can be managed sustainably for generations to come.

Managing Forests Sustainably for a Resilient Future

In an era marked by environmental consciousness, the impacts of climate change and concerns about deforestation and forest degradation, we have prepared this statement to outline our commitment to developing globally recognised standards for the certification of sustainably managed forests.

It is imperative to dispel the common misconception that logging of certified forests, (the harvesting of trees) equates to deforestation and forest degradation. Rather, through the Responsible Wood Certification Scheme (RWCS) we promote the implementation of forest management practices that prioritise the longevity and health of forests.

Our standard *AS/NZS 4708-2021 sustainable forest management* has been developed through an open process of consultation and consensus in accordance with international norms, which contains clearly defined cultural, economic, environmental, and social criteria and indicators in line with established environmental management systems such as *AS/NZS ISO 14001:2016*, the Montreal Process criteria and indicators, and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) standard for sustainable forest management (*PEFC ST 1003:2018*).



When consumers purchase products with the Responsible Wood label, they can be assured that their product is sourced from a well-managed forest.

Defining Terms: Deforestation and Forest Degradation

As identified by the United Nations specialised agency, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) forest degradation is difficult to quantify but is a serious global problem.

The term "logging" often gets wrongly associated with deforestation, contributing to a misunderstanding of the forestry and forest products industry. *AS/NZS 4708-2021* requires that the harvesting of forest products involves carefully planned and executed harvesting activities (*AS/NZS 4708-2021 Section 6*), followed by meticulous regeneration efforts (*AS/NZS 4708-2021 11.1.5*). In contrast, deforestation is the permanent clearing of a forest, which results in a land-use change for non-forest purposes, such as urban expansion and infrastructure development.

When it comes to the harvesting, sourcing and use of forest products (like timber, cardboard and paper for example) we do not support products that have been harvested from land subject to deforestation or harvested inducing forest degradation. Our Standard sets requirements preventing conversion (*AS/NZS 4708-2021 11.1.4*) and rehabilitating forest degradation (*AS/NZS 4708-2021 11.2.9*).

When a forest is degraded it still exists as a forest (the land use hasn't changed), but over time the primary functioning of the forest has changed or been adversely affected. Depending on the context of the forest, this could present a range of symptoms whether it is poor health (through invasive species and disease), reduced productivity, a change to species dominance or damage to other ecological and biodiversity indicators.

Illegal logging and poor forest management are frequently identified as leading global causes of forest degradation. In addition to the most obvious consequences of forest degradation, such as the impacts on forest biodiversity, the impact on the health of soil and water in the forest and surrounding landscapes can be significant; resulting in soil erosion and the pollution of waterways.

Forest products can be harvested in a variety of ways using a range of tools from chainsaws to state-of-the-art modern machinery. Sometimes forests are selectively harvested with trees retained for habitat, seed sourcing and ground cover and other times forests are clearfall harvested, not dissimilar to an agricultural crop. Importantly, products from sustainably managed forests have been sourced from forests (whether they are selectively harvested or clear-felled) that identify, protect and monitor Significant Biodiversity Values (SBVs) and other important features to control and minimise impact on these ecosystem values. It goes without saying that these forests stay forests.

When it comes to forest degradation *AS/NZS 4708-2021* has strict requirements around protecting and enhancing the protective functions of soil and water (*AS/NZS 4708-2021 11.4.2 & 11.4.3*). There are also strict requirements around operational control (*AS/NZS 4708-2021 8.1*) and forest health, including invasive species (*AS/NZS 4708-2021 11.2*). We support sustainable forests and their products through independent third-party certification. We do not support illegal logging and poor forest management.

Industry-Leading Standards: PEFC Endorsement

Under the requirements of PEFC endorsement, we must adhere to stringent processes for the development of sustainable forest management standards that transcend industry practices and regulations.

Our commitment to sustainability is captured in our adherence to the PEFC International standard for sustainable forest management (*PEFC ST 1003:2018*). The global endorsement and mutual recognition of our standard ensures that we have prohibitions on land conversion, requirements to protect biodiversity, soil, and water, and mandates for successful regeneration post-harvest.

Organisations that are certified to *AS/NZS 4708-2021* are subject to annual audits by independent qualified experts to ensure conformity with these requirements.

Addressing Global Threats: Urban Expansion and Infrastructure Development

While our focus remains on sustainable forest management, it's crucial to acknowledge the dominant global threats to deforestation: land clearing for urban expansion and infrastructure development. The balance between economic development and environmental preservation is delicate, and our standard strives to demonstrate a pathway that supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our certification standards are an important tool needed to stop deforestation and protect biodiversity; however, we do acknowledge that certification is not designed to solve issues like deforestation and forest degradation by itself.

Forests in the Climate Change Equation

As governments and private enterprises worldwide move towards net-zero targets, the role of forests in capturing and storing carbon becomes paramount. Well-managed forests actively sequester more carbon than unmanaged ones. When this premise is challenged dissenters frequently disregard the advantages associated with active management in lessening vulnerability to wildfires, pests, and diseases, as well as offering economic incentives that discourage the conversion of forests into urban developments.

Timber from sustainably managed forests, used in construction and other products, also offers a lower embodied carbon footprint compared to alternatives like concrete and steel.

Certified sustainable forests have multiple dimensions of sustainable development. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recognises that sustainable forest management of both natural and planted forests is essential to achieving sustainable development. It is a means to reduce poverty, reduce deforestation, halt the loss of forest biodiversity, reduce land and resource degradation, and contribute to climate change mitigation. The IPCC recognises that in the long term, a sustainable forest management strategy that maintains or increases forest carbon stocks, while producing an annual sustained yield will generate the largest sustained mitigation benefit. Our Standard sets requirements for both carbon (AS/NZS 11.1) and growth and yield estimates (AS/NZS 11.5).

Protecting Significant Biodiversity Values in Sustainable Forestry

Our standard has requirements to identify, maintain and prevent adverse impacts to SBVs, (AS/NZS 11.3.1). AS/NZS 4708-2021 recognises the regulatory frameworks, databases, evidence-based scientific information, expert knowledge, and research, that support forest inventory and the mapping of forest resources. Many certified organisations have embraced cutting-edge technologies, and employ advanced software, datasets, and survey methods to support the identification of SBVs. These tools are pivotal in identifying, protecting, and monitoring forest values throughout their lifecycle. From pre-operational field assessments to active management and post-operation monitoring, our commitment to supporting precision and preserving ecologically important features is paramount.

Global Collaboration and Regulatory Compliance

Acknowledging the immense diversity in forest ecosystems worldwide is fundamental to our approach when it comes to standards development. From natural forests to planted forests, or from plantations to native forests (depending on where in the world you're from), the spectrum is broad. It's also important to recognise that trees outside traditional forest definitions play a pivotal role in ecological balance. We acknowledge that the strategic management approach changes from region to region, based on a whole range of factors including forest type, species, climate, soil types, land ownership and the available markets for forest products.

We also echo the sentiments of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), recognising the significance of sustainable forest management in ensuring a delicate balance between economic, social and environmental values of all types of forests for the benefit of present and future generations. Sustainable forest management aims to ensure that forest products are managed and sourced in ways that meet both present-day and future needs, whilst contributing to the sustainable development of communities.

Our standard is intended to support the regulatory framework within which a forest manager operates, at the local, regional, national and international levels. We support strong governance and regulatory frameworks. We do not

support illegal logging and the associated negative impacts on forest ecosystems, communities, and economies. Under Australian law, illegal logging means 'the harvesting of timber in contravention of the laws of the country where the timber is harvested' (refer to [Illegal Logging Prohibition Act 2012](#) and the [Illegal Logging Prohibition Regulation 2012](#)). This includes a wide range of activities, such as the logging of protected species, logging in protected areas, logging with fake or illegal permits, and using illegal harvest methods.

Our commitment to sustainable forestry aligns with Australia's well-established legal framework governing the sourcing of forest products. Certified organisations operating within this framework, must adhere to stringent requirements aimed at ensuring responsible and ethical practices. Particularly noteworthy are the additional regulations about the protection of important biodiversity in areas where timber is sourced. These regulations underscore our dedication to not only meeting legal standards but exceeding them in our efforts to safeguard the significant biodiversity of the regions in which certified organisations operate.

Chain of Custody: Due Diligence and Controlled Sources

Our standard AS 4707-2021 *Chain of Custody of Forest and Tree-based Products* sets requirements for the sourcing of forest and tree-based products. Organisations that are certified to our standard must meet requirements relating to sourcing products from certified suppliers, and the fair treatment of workers. There are additional due diligence requirements for organisations that source products that are not certified; these are called controlled sources.

Organisations certified to our chain of custody standard must ensure that forest and tree-based material does not include controversial sources (see AS 4707-2021 1.3.12). These requirements include ensuring the capability of forests to produce a range of wood and tree-based forest products and services on a sustainable basis is maintained and that harvesting levels do not exceed a rate that can be sustained in the long term. There are also requirements around the preservation of ecologically important features, carbon stock and activities where native forest conversion occurs.

For More Information on the Responsible Wood Certification Scheme

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