

FOREST PRACTICES RELATED TO WOOD PRODUCTION IN PLANTATIONS:

NATIONAL PRINCIPLES

PREAMBLE

Wood production is an accepted major commercial use of Australia's forests and is the primary purpose for establishing and managing plantations. In addition, plantations can provide a range of commercial, environmental and aesthetic benefits to the community. In pursuing a vision of ecologically sustainable management of Australia's forests, Australian Governments, through the National Forest Policy Statement, have enunciated a national goal for plantations:

"to expand Australia's commercial plantations of softwoods and hardwoods so as to provide an additional, economically viable, reliable and high quality wood resource to industry".

In this context, the establishment of plantations for wood production should be determined on the basis of economic viability and international competitiveness, and market forces should determine the extent of resource use and the nature of industry operations. In essence, plantations established for wood production should be treated in the same way as any agricultural productions.

To achieve greater investment in plantations, it will be necessary to ensure that the impediments to plantation development are minimal, that clear and consistent policies for resource development are established across all levels of government and that there is security of access to established resources. Provided that social and environmental objectives are met, Governments will keep regulations to a minimum. For example, the Commonwealth will remove controls over the export of unprocessed public and private plantation wood subject to the application of codes of practice to protect environmental values. Furthermore, it is not intended that controls be imposed on the plantation industry that would not apply to other agricultural activities.

In accordance with the National Forest Policy Statement, the Ministerial Council on Forestry, Fisheries and Aquaculture, representing the States and the Commonwealth's forestry authorities, has prepared this statement of national principles to be applied in the management of plantations.

These principles set the framework for a consistent and scientific basis for sound plantation management to which all States and Territories subscribe. Codes of practice for plantations, conforming to the national principles, will be developed by the States and Territories taking into account the range of plantation types, conditions and situations applying due to natural and cultural variations. Several States and Territories already have such codes in place.

The principles have been structured into several sections relating to different activities associated with plantation production. The principles apply to both public and private plantations.

1. PRINCIPLES OF ENVIRONMENTAL CARE

- 1.1 Native forest should not be cleared for plantation establishment where this would compromise regional conservation and catchment management objectives. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to clear forests that have been severely degraded by impacts such as disease, weed invasion, wind and fire so as to enable rehabilitation through replanting.
- 1.2 Values such as intensive recreation, high scenic quality, significant geomorphic, biological, or cultural heritage sites, should be recognised in the planning of plantation forest operations.
- 1.3 Plantation management should comply with State and regional conservation and catchment management objectives, relevant planning schemes and legislation.
- 1.4 Water quality (physical, chemical, or biological) should be protected by measures controlling change resulting from plantation activities
- 1.5 Water yield should be managed as required by careful planning of operations.
- 1.6 Soil stability should be protected by measures, which regulate site disturbance.
- 1.7 Soil, water catchment, cultural and landscape values should be protected by the careful location, construction, and maintenance of roads and tracks, and regulation of their use.
- 1.8 Fauna, floristic, and landscape values should be protected by the careful planning of plantation layout establishment operations and the reservation and protection of appropriate areas of native vegetation; such values should be recognised in subsequent plantation management.
- 1.9 Plantations and adjacent native forests should be protected from the adverse effects of fire and from the introduction and spread of plant, insect and animal pests and plant diseases.
- 1.10 Operators will be trained in the principles of environmental care.

2. SAFETY

- 2.1 All plantation establishment, management and utilisation activities will be conducted to comply with relevant occupational health and safety legislation and policy. In particular, all operators should be trained to designated standards in the safe and efficient use of equipment and machinery, and be responsible for safe working practices.

3. PLANNING

- 3.1 State and Local Governments should, with appropriate public involvement, pursue planning policies that provide secure zoning for commercial planting with the objective that tree planting and subsequent harvesting for commercial wood production should be an "as of right" use.

- 3.2 State Governments will establish a sound legal basis for separating the forest asset component from the land asset for tree plantings. The Commonwealth Government will consider similar action re taxation, capital valuation etc.
- 3.3 Plantation strategic planning should be developed in conjunction with regional development plans.
- 3.4 The environmental, social and economic effects of all plantation operations envisaged for an area will be considered during the planning process.
- 3.5 Individual plantation operations will be conducted in accordance with relevant codes of practice.

4. ACCESS

- 4.1 Planning of road systems in plantations will be based on both the economic principle of minimising the combined cost of roading and extraction and on the Principles of Environmental Care.
- 4.2 Road design will be to standards consistent with the purpose for which the road is to be used, and capable of carrying the anticipated traffic with reasonable safety.
- 4.3 Construction and maintenance of roads and associated works will be undertaken in a manner, which will ensure compliance with the Principles of Environmental Care.
- 4.4 Roads will be closed in wet conditions when unacceptable damage would occur or when such other conditions may warrant.

5. ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE

- 5.1 Plantation establishment methods should be economically and environmentally appropriate for the particular requirements of the species to be planted and the specific site conditions.
- 5.2 Establishment of plantations may involve introduction of selected species, provenances or populations to increase productivity or value. However management of these plantations should aim to constrain or prevent the introduction of these species into surrounding areas.
- 5.3 Intensive management practices, such as site preparation, fertilising, weed control, pest and disease control and other operations will be carried out in accordance with codes of practice, and consistent with the Principles of Environmental Care.

6. TIMBER HARVESTING

- 6.1 Timber harvesting will be planned and carried out under codes of practice to meet the Principles of Environmental Care.
- 6.2 The harvesting plan will consider factors such as harvesting unit size, slope and location of harvesting units; design and location of landings and snig tracks; harvesting equipment; areas excluded from logging; and areas specified for protection and reforestation.

- 6.3 Harvesting operations should not be conducted in a manner which compromises the Principles of Environmental Care, or where the safety of workers is at unacceptable risk.
- 6.4 Soil and water values should be protected by progressive rehabilitation and drainage of snig tracks, temporary roads, log dumps and any other earthworks associated with harvesting operations.

7. FOREST PROTECTION

- 7.1 Fire protection planning should be undertaken on a regional basis in co-ordination with relevant land management agencies and with local bush fire control organisations.
- 7.2 Plantation health surveillance should be undertaken on a regular basis.
- 7.3 Where weeds, pests or diseases cause significant damage, decline, or deaths of trees, prompt specialist advice should be sought to address the problem.
- 7.4 Use of chemicals, such as herbicides and pesticides, and other pest control methods in plantation operations will be in accordance with State policies, procedures and approved usage.

8. MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 8.1 Where practicable, plantation operations should be supervised and monitored by qualified persons and be subject to audit.
- 8.2 The National Principles should be reviewed and evaluated after three years.