

MEDIA RELEASE

31 July 2025

Overcoming the challenges of implementing a novel innovation in forestry

For immediate release –

Australia became the first country to establish a national Standard and Certification Scheme for forest service businesses, but like any novel innovation it came with challenges.

Whilst ForestFit™ set a new global benchmark for safety, sustainability and commercial management of forest service businesses, it also challenged forest growers and managers to evaluate their internal commercial management process and consider if those processes were delivering the required assurance, efficiency and performance.

Rising to the challenge were 16 forest growers and managers to support the development of a national Forest Services Commercial Management model. The project was funded through multiparty financial contributions from the Australian Forest Products Association's Growers Chamber with matched from the Commonwealth Government through the Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA) Voluntary Matching Program

“This relationship between grower and certified business is critical to achieving strong commercial, safety and environmental outcomes,” said Lachlan Spencer, General Manager of Safety, HVP Plantations. “ForestFit™ has become recognised as the benchmark for sustainable self-managed forest service businesses across Australia. Our ambition is for it to be a prerequisite for all growers nationally.”

ForestFit™ provides independent third-party assurance that certified businesses meet strict standards across safety, sustainability and environmental management. It aligns with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Responsible Wood (RW), giving growers confidence, assurance and certifiability throughout the forestry supply chain.

“After mapping existing sector processes and drafting the initial model, seven forest service businesses with support from growers undertook a pilot to evolve all the stages of the commercial management relationship – engagement, commencement, implementation and reporting and review,” explained Dionne Olsen, Project Manager.

Pilot participant Luke Jones, Managing Director, Jones FM Group, reported, “Becoming ForestFit™ certified has strengthened our relationship with HQ Plantations through increased transparency, trust and continuous improvement.”

Working together, JCH Harvest and Forico are also experiencing the benefits from capitalising on the continuous improvement opportunities from the pilot, even though JCH Harvest is an early adopter and has been certified since 2022.

“ForestFit™ provides a strong foundation for our management systems, improves internal confidence and helps reduce inefficiencies,” explained Lauren Carter, General Manager, JCH Harvest Group.

Ben Roberts, Harvest Operations Manager, Forico added, "ForestFit™ has helped JCH's business grow and in turn has helped Forico with efficiencies, with more to realise still."

As the forest sector is experiencing increasing pressure on the availability of employees and businesses to meet ever increasing demands it is critical for growers to leverage the expertise and maximum capabilities of forest service businesses to meet the grower's commercial needs.

Collaboratively evolving the commercial relationship within the sector can improve risk and liability management and supports all to prosper in the medium to long term. The finalised Forest Services Commercial Management model also underpins the growers' commitments embodied in the Australian Forest Industries ForestFit™ Memorandum of Understanding.

"The biggest value of being ForestFit certified is that I sleep better at night knowing we have the right systems in place that are annually audited by an independent third party," said Ian Reid, Director, Austimber Harvesting and Haulage.

"In a world of increasing compliance, stretched human resources and squeezed margins, maximising the value from your forest service business relationships has never been more critical," explains Mr Spencer.

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Source: Australian Forest Contractors Association

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BACKGROUND

ForestFit™

Launched in June 2022, ForestFit™ is the first national Standard and Certification Scheme developed specifically for forest service businesses in Australia. It was established in response to the forestry sector's desire for an assurance process that demonstrates forest service businesses possess capabilities beyond service delivery, including work health and safety, environmental management and sustainable business practices.

ForestFit™ was codesigned by representatives from across the entire forestry supply chain to certify that forest service businesses meet the evolving needs of the industry and align with international standards. It provides a whole of business approach that supports sustainable, safe and environmentally responsible practices to strengthen future viability.

ForestFit™ meets the international requirements set by International Accreditation Forum (IAF) resulting in JASANZ endorsement. It is owned by AFCA and governed by a nine member Governing Advisory Panel (GAP). The daily administration of ForestFit™ is undertaken by the ForestFit™ team, contracted to AFCA.

Over the past three years, ForestFit™ has worked closely with growers and businesses, supported by a national steering committee representing over 80% of Australia's largest growers. This collaboration has enabled the development of a commercial management model to guide growers in engaging and managing certified businesses through the operational cycle.

In 2024 the scheme successfully underwent its inaugural Scheme Review and Standards Revision process. In addition, to support its continuous improvement philosophy, the scheme is undertaking implementation case studies to understand how businesses new to certification engage with the standard and evolve their commercial relationships with the engaging grower.

Australian Forest Industries ForestFit™ MOU

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlines the shared support for the successful implementation and maintenance of ForestFit™. It sets the terms of understanding between the grower signatories and AFCA, as the owner of ForestFit™ and the national peak body representing forest service businesses. The parties together will advocate for, and where practicable, support certification to the ForestFit™ Standard.

For the purposes of procurement, the growers have committed to:

- Prefer ForestFit™ certified businesses
- Accept that ForestFit™ meets the same requirements for management systems as certified or aligned to the respective ISO standards.
- After 31 December 2024, support businesses entering new contracts with growers to be certified to a minimum of Standard 1: Mandatory Requirements and Standard 3: Work, Health and Safety.

Upon finalisation of the Forest Services Commercial Management model, growers will align their business processes with this national model.