

Australian Forest Industries ForestFit™ Memorandum of Understanding

Introduction

ForestFit™ aims to strengthen risk management and contribute to auditing consistency for Forest Contracting Businesses (FCBs) by formalising a risk-based approach to business, health and safety and environmental management systems. The ForestFit™ scheme comprises the ForestFit™ Standard (and contributing criteria), endorsed scheme rules for Certification to the ForestFit™ Standard, and a companion training package.

ForestFit™ is not a management system or program. It is a series of common and agreed criteria that collectively forms the ForestFit™ Standard. The Standard enables a common and consistent assessment of how FCBs manage and mitigate business, health and safety and environment risks. Certification to the ForestFit™ Standard provides assurance, backed by an annual, independent third-party assessment, that FCBs have implemented effective systems, procedures, and practices.

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) sets the terms of understanding between the Forest Grower / Manager (Grower) signatories and Australian Forest Contractors Association (AFCA) (the Scheme Owner). The parties agree that this MOU represents an expression of goodwill and is not intended to be legally enforceable or create legal rights or obligations between the parties. It outlines shared support for the successful implementation and maintenance of ForestFit™.

The parties together will advocate for and where practicable support certification to the ForestFit™ Standard



Background

ForestFit™ has been developed at the request of Growers in response to an increasingly complex, onerous and duplicative series of requirements confronting FCBs. Participants in the co-design process included national representatives from Growers, FCBs, processors, industry associations, existing industry certification bodies and the New South Wales (NSW) government in partnership with AFCA. Expert regulatory input was provided by the NSW Environmental Protection Authority, NSW Local Land Services and NSW Department of Primary Industries Plantation Regulation Unit. Training Services NSW contributed their expertise in vocational training to produce a companion training package for FCB business owners and leaders preparing for certification.

The ForestFit™ scheme fosters continual professional development, increased business competency, operational compliance, risk management and industry sustainability. The scheme presents a consistent approach to certification against an agreed national Standard.

ForestFit™ criteria are consistent with the requirements outlined by international standards ISO 9001, 14001 and 45001. These have been contextualised for businesses undertaking harvest, haulage, civil, silviculture and/or minor forest products operations.

ForestFit™ Certification is backed by independent third-party verification to provide Growers with assurance that FCBs have taken all necessary steps to manage risk and improve work practices. This enables a streamlined approach to compliance and a lowering of costs.

ForestFit™ Certification is provided by independent, third-party certification bodies (CBs) on the basis of annual verification audits. CB's are accredited by the Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JASANZ).

Forest Industries Statement of Intent

Growers and AFCA, on behalf of FCBs, acknowledge that the ongoing operation and maintenance of ForestFit™ is in the overall interest of the production forestry sector. All parties support the future direction of the industry and increase overall confidence of the efficiencies and benefits for FCBs in becoming certified by being a MOU signatory.

Growers

Growers will:

- For the purposes of procurement:
 - Ensure organisational policies and tendering processes reflect a position that ForestFit™ Certified is desirable, beneficial and preferred; and
 - Accept that ForestFit™ Certified meets the same requirements for management systems as certified or aligned to the respective requirements of international standards ISO 9001, 14001 and 45001.
- Work with FCBs to determine businesses where the pursuit of Forest Fit™ Certification will be prioritised (at least to the Mandatory Requirements and Work Health and Safety Standards), with an emphasis on long term harvest, haulage and roading contractors in the first instance; and
 - Provide support to these FCBs to achieve ForestFit™ Certification by 30 June 2025.
- Support FCBs entering new contracts with Growers, after 31 December 2024, to be ForestFit™ Certified to both the Mandatory Requirements and Work Health and Safety Standards.
- Where a FCB is not (or not required by the Grower to be) ForestFit™ Certified, where appropriate, investigate and seek alignment between alternative external health and safety auditing processes and arrangements (such as FOSP or similar) and ForestFit™ Certification in the interest of streamlining audit effort for Growers and FCBs;
- Until the National Optimal Auditing Pathway (National OAP) is resolved, Growers commit that where a FCB is ForestFit™ Certified, the Grower will review their Health and Safety and Environmental inspection regimes to limit duplication/reinspection of items to which the FCB is externally audited, whilst still meeting the Growers due diligence and/or forest certification (e.g. RW/FSC) requirements obligations; and
- Once resolved, Grower's will align their business processes to the National OAP.

Growers acknowledge the benefits of ForestFit™ Certification as a valuable option whilst recognising the policies and approach of each Grower for engagement with its FCBs in relation to their risk-based approach to business, health and safety and environmental management systems remains a matter for each Grower to determine.

AFCA

AFCA will:

- Maintain the currency of the ForestFit™ Certification scheme;
- Maintain ForestFit™ support services, processes, resources, and technology for FCBs to undertake certification.
- Maintain the publicly accessible ForestFit™ Certified Business Register.
- Continue the delivery of the National OAP research pilot and support to the Grower National OAP Steering Committee.
- Assist Growers as required to increase their understanding and maximise the efficiencies of ForestFit™ Certification within their businesses.
- Promote the training program to support participants work their way through the scheme content and prepare for certification.
- Work with Growers to investigate and seek alignment with current external auditing processes and arrangements (such as FOSP or similar) and ForestFit™ Certification.

Participation

The signatories and supporting organisations agree to work collaboratively to deliver on the aims outlined in this MOU. This is being done through the established Growers National OAP Steering Committee, who are responsible for driving the work and success of the initiative. The Steering Committee is convened by Growers and supported by AFCA.

Growers National OAP Steering Committee

The Steering Committee serves as a platform to:

- Develop:
 - A draft National OAP by 31 March 2024;
 - Requirements and strategies for implementation by 31 October 2024; and
 - A finalised National OAP for implementation by 31 March 2025;
- Support Signatories and help drive long-term industry transformation;
- Identify how the forest grower cost savings from reduced assessment activities and management of certified FCBs will be recognised and incentivised for ForestFit™ Certified businesses;
- Explore alignment and streamlining of current audit arrangements with ForestFit™ Certification.
- Cooperate and work together to maximise our efforts and resources; and
- Share consistent information and messages.

Timeline and Review

This MOU is effective as at the date of signing by the Grower Member.

Any Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) Growers Chamber member may sign on to the MOU at any time. Any party may withdraw from this MOU upon written notice to the other parties.

The MOU will be reviewed in May 2024, following this review will take place at 12 monthly intervals, unless there are significant changes to the scheme, the Standards, or other which necessitates an earlier amendment.

Acknowledgements

By endorsing this MOU, signatories acknowledge that:

- ForestFit™ has been co-designed with Growers to address the key domains of risk impacting viability of forest management - business systems, environmental management, safety and people.
- A fully certified forestry supply chain strengthens industry social licence and public confidence that the Australian forest industry operates at the highest possible standards.
- Recognised Standards and consistency of approach across jurisdictions, regions and operators are desirable to create efficiencies and foster broader industry improvement.
- ForestFit™ has been developed as a national industry certification for forestry businesses to address Australian Standards and meet the needs of industry participants.
- ForestFit™ criteria are benchmarked to Responsible Wood and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) criteria.
- There are mutual benefits for Growers and FCBs, as ForestFit™ Certified businesses are 'deemed to comply' with Responsible Wood (AS/NZS 4708) meaning certified business' may be excluded from the sample selection for their AS/NZS 4708 audit, reducing audit duplication.
- FCBs respond to the terms, conditions and requirements determined by Growers. Successful and ongoing adoption of ForestFit™ will benefit from direct and public support by Growers.

Signatories

Signatories to the Forest Industries ForestFit™ MOU support the implementation of ForestFit™ and adoption of ForestFit™ Certification. Organisations signed up to the Forest Industries ForestFit™ MOU are pledging their support for the aims outlined in this MOU and a desire to support, implement and acknowledge ForestFit™ as a nationally recognised Industry Certification.

