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### FEATURE ARTICLE: SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT – AN UPDATE

Sustainable forest management (SFM) is one of the primary objectives of agencies concerned with the management of Australia's forests. The Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Group defined SFM as 'optimising the tangible and intangible social and economic benefits which forests can provide to the community, with the goals of maintaining the functional basis of forested land, biodiversity and the options available for future generations'.

#### AIMS

Through the 1992 National Forest Policy Statement (NFPS), Australia aims for sustainable management of all its forests for present and future generations. As a basis for achieving sustainable management, the NFPS was mindful of the following three values:

- maintaining ecological processes within the forest
- maintaining biological diversity
- optimising environmental, economic and social benefits.

As well as the NFPS, the principles of SFM are supported by the development and implementation of codes of practice for harvesting, certification and environmental management systems. There is also a commitment to research and development, and education and training by various national institutions.

#### NATIONAL INITIATIVES AND STANDARDS

A key initiative in implementing SFM has been the Regional Forest Agreements between the Commonwealth Government and four state governments. The 20-year agreements sought to provide a balance of the environmental, social, economic and heritage values that forests provide. They established a forest conservation reserve system, based on comprehensive, adequate and representative forest areas, and complementary sustainable forest management systems outside reserves. Under the agreements, governments use information from expert assessments to improve processes and practices, and measure and report on their progress.

Five-yearly reviews include reports on progress in sustainable management of forest values.

Forest certification is a process used by companies and state governments to demonstrate sustainable forest management in their production forests. The Australian Forest Standard is an Australian-led certification system for forests that is recognised internationally through the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes. This standard provides a basis for voluntary and independent certification of forest management. It enables Australia to compete in international markets where consumers are increasingly demanding verification that timber products have come from sustainably-managed forests.

## **INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES**

Australia is promoting its SFM interests through a number of international forums and mechanisms. These include the United Nations Forum on Forests, the International Tropical Timber Organisation and the Montreal Process.

## **MONITORING SFM THROUGH THE USE OF INDICATORS**

As part of its commitment under the NFPS and the Montreal Process, the Australian Government is required to report on the state of Australia's forests every five years.

Criteria and indicators are important components of SFM and provide a framework for assessing the sustainable management of forests. They provide a framework for answering the question 'How well are we managing our forests?' The Montreal Process was established in 1994 with the specific purpose of developing and implementing internationally agreed criteria and indicators. The 12 nations on 5 continents that are members of the Montreal Process represent 60% of the world's forests, and 90% of the temperate and boreal forests. These nations have identified 7 criteria (categories of forest values that are desirable to maintain) and 67 indicators (measurable aspects of these criteria) to characterise the state of a nation's forests and assess progress towards the goals of SFM. The criteria are:

- conservation of biological diversity
- maintenance of productive capacity of forest ecosystems
- maintenance of ecosystem health and vitality
- conservation and maintenance of soil and water resources
- maintenance of forest contribution to global carbon cycles
- maintenance and enhancement of long-term multiple socio economic benefits to meet the needs of societies
- legal, institutional and economic framework for forest conservation and sustainable management.

Australia's first **State of the Forests Report** (SOFR) was produced in 1998. The second report, in 2003, was the first to be based on the Montreal Process criteria and indicators. It reported against the 67 indicators of the Montreal Process framework and included an additional 7 indicators to reflect Australia's unique forest environment.

Following the publication of the 2003 SOFR, a wide-ranging consultation process was undertaken by the Montreal Process Implementation Group for Australia to review the indicators used. The group which involved representatives from national, state and territory organisations representing conservation and production forest interests, reviewed the indicators and a refined set of 44 indicators was developed.

The next SOFR, which is due for release in early-2008, will use this revised framework to meet Australia's reporting requirements at both the national and international levels.

## References

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## Websites

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