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South West native forest planning process

Producing sustainably sourced timber from Western Australia's native forests requires years of planning, a comprehensive legislative framework and management procedures with ongoing independent checks and balances. This ensures the forest ecosystem is protected and future tree growth promoted.

What areas are available to FPC for harvest?

There are approximately 2.25 million hectares of native forest and woodlands in the South West of Western Australia under the 2014–2023 Forest Management Plan (FMP).¹ A huge expanse of that is protected in national parks, reserves and other areas not available for harvest including all old-growth forests.

Of the total, 38 per cent or approximately 850,000 hectares of regrowth forest is available for timber harvesting with strict limitations on the volume of timber to be extracted.¹ Less than one per cent of the native forest is harvested annually.

The area available for sustainable harvesting is governed by a ten-year FMP. The FMP is based on ecologically sustainable forest management principles and takes a whole of forest, landscape and operational management approach.

Under the FMP framework, the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW) develops three-year harvest plans showing where harvesting can take place. The Forest Products Commission (FPC), in consultation with DPaW, then prepares its annual harvest plans. FPC makes the one-year harvest plans available to the public for comment.

How are harvest areas identified?

Areas of forest suitable for harvesting are identified by specialist staff in DPaW and FPC following rigorous planning processes.

The planning process begins with a review of forest records to identify likely candidate harvest areas called 'coupes'. This review includes consideration of such things as previous harvest history, fire history, forest type and quality, ecological values and distance to customers.

Following the identification of candidate coupes, field inspections are undertaken to confirm their suitability for inclusion into the harvest plan. Finally, candidate coupes are selected to make up the harvest plan in accordance with the specified log volumes allowed by the FMP.



Regrowth karri forest near Pemberton.

1. Appendix 6 - Conservation Commission of Western Australia. 2013. Forest Management Plan 2014-2023 Conservation Commission of Western Australia, Perth.



Regular audits and checks of operational activities ensure compliance with strict environmental and safety requirements.

Harvest coupe planning

Once coupes are identified on the harvest plan, detailed coupe level planning can commence.

Coupe level planning is guided by relevant codes of practice, manuals, and guidelines in the following areas:

- disease and hygiene management;
- water and hydrology;
- silvicultural practices; and
- occupational safety and health.

Some of the key components of the coupe level planning requirements include:

- *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (dieback) disease mapping and the development of hygiene management plans to prevent spread of the disease.
- A review of the presence of old-growth forest and any relevant management considerations.
- A review of any sensitive flora and fauna values that require specific management actions.
- A review of sites of cultural significance – both indigenous and European.
- Consultation with traditional owners, neighbours and stakeholder groups.
- Development of road management plans to identify which roads heavy vehicles are permitted to use.
- Completion of a pre-harvesting checklist which ensure that all values are considered prior to harvesting so that they can be effectively managed.

The pre-harvesting checklist and final coupe level plans are passed on to DPaW for comment and approval before any operations can begin.

How are the plans translated into action?

Once approved by DPaW, the coupe level plans are implemented by the FPC. Initially this involves the field demarcation of harvest boundaries, stream zone buffers and any other management zones. These boundaries are marked in the field using white painted crosses.

Within the harvest areas, trees to be retained are marked with white painted rings. A number of other habitat elements are also retained such as logs and understorey. Habitat trees, which are retained to ensure birds and other animals have sufficient places to live and nest in the future, are marked with a large white 'H'.

The FPC is responsible for employing and managing trained contractors to undertake harvesting operations. Contractors are also engaged for road construction and maintenance as well as post-harvest treatments to regenerate the forest.

The contracting crew is provided with relevant information contained in the coupe level harvest plan and must work within its requirements. FPC staff perform regular monitoring and audits to check that all requirements are being followed.

At all times the safety of people working or visiting the harvest coupe is of paramount importance. For this reason access to active harvest coupes is restricted.

Following the completion of harvesting operations the FPC then plans for and completes all forest regeneration requirements.

Who ensures FPC adheres to the management actions as outlined in the coupe plan?

All FPC activities undergo rigorous internal and external auditing to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation, regulations, codes of practice, manuals, plans and guidelines.

The FPC is certified to the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS) and the international standard for Environmental Management Systems (EMS ISO 14001). These certifications are received after thorough, ongoing auditing and assessment by an external, licensed and independent auditing firm.

Additionally, DPaW conduct compliance checks and audits on both FPC's systems and operations on a regular basis.

The FPC produces and publishes an annual FMP Compliance Report on its website.

