

4 April 2014

Land Management Policy Division  
Department of Environment and Primary Industries  
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Email: forestry.code@depi.vic.gov.au

**Re: Proposed Code of Practice for Timber Harvesting Operations 2014 (COPTHO)**

VicWater welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the COPTHO.

The water industry's major focus is potential impact of timber harvesting on water quality and quantity and the potential impact on our business: provision of 'fit for purpose' potable and industrial water supply across the state of Victoria. Poor water quality increases the risk to the provision of safe drinking water.

The majority of water supply catchments outside the Melbourne metropolitan area are 'open' catchments (as described in, 'Protect our waters; protect our health', Department of Health Nov 2010). Timber harvesting is a permitted land use in many of these catchments. The land affected by the COPTHO supplies water to Victorian towns, industry and agriculture. Victoria's brown coal power generators and Victoria's only paper mill relies on the water sourced from catchments in which timber harvesting is a major land use.

VicWater acknowledges the importance of the timber harvesting industry to the Victorian economy. Bushfire in forested catchments is a major threat to water quality and quantity across Victoria. We recognise the role the timber industry, native and plantation-based, contributes to bushfire suppression in forested land, through provision of road infrastructure for access, suppression and the combination of in-forest machinery coupled with experienced and skilled forest personnel.

We have reviewed the draft Code of Practice for Timber Harvesting Operations 2014, Draft for Public Consultation, and provide our comments and critique on potential water quality and quantity impacts for Section 2: Code Application – State Forest (Attachment A).

We have also noted VicForests' published reports and audits make no mention of potable and agricultural catchments, or associated water quality considerations, outside Melbourne's metropolitan area. VicWater will make representation direct to VicForests for better exchange of information about the location and consideration of all potable catchments. VicWater will also make representation to DEPI, as the author of the planning and management standards that govern Victoria's State forest timber harvesting, for greater inclusion of the above mentioned issues.

We provide the following comment on Section 3: Private Native Forests and Section 4: Plantations. These sections of code reinforce Section 1.2.2 Purpose of the Code. Further to this, the introduction of, 'Management guidelines for private native forests and plantations' as a supplement to the code is a practical and productive approach which will give better guidance to private owners and harvesting operators.

Compliance with the Code is the responsibility of the municipality (responsible authority, under the Planning and Environment Act) in which the native forest or plantation is situated. The inconsistency of monitoring of compliance is the weakness in the implementation of the code on private land. Municipal Councils are generally not engaged with compliance operations of forestry on private land. They are generally not staffed for monitoring or not resourced for the costly engagement of consultants to undertake the work on behalf of the municipality. As forestry is a specialisation it is suggested DEPI be responsible for assisting municipalities in monitoring compliance on private land. Further to this a targeted percentage of compliance monitoring is suggested.

Clarification or discussion of the information provided from VicWater's submission can be made by contacting Fiona Pfeil, Catchment Scientific Officer, Gippsland Water: [pfeilf@gippswater.com.au](mailto:pfeilf@gippswater.com.au).

Yours sincerely



**Tony Wright**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

## Section 2: Code Application – State Forests

Section (page)	Direct quote from COPTH0	Comment	Intent
Compliance on Private Land (10)	1.2.6 The Code must be complied with to the satisfaction of the responsibility authority (usually local government), whether or not a permit is required.	Municipal councils struggle to monitor compliance, with the exception of where third party certification schemes of products require audit of compliance.	Resources, both financial and knowledge base to monitor compliance are generally not held in responsible authorities.
Water Quality, River Health and Soil Protection (16)	2.1.1.3 (iii) Additional measures to protect water...must be adopted...due to: (iii) the location of the timber harvesting operation in a declared Special Water Supply Catchment area or water supply protection area.	'water supply protection area' need to be written with capitals and a definition provided. Where and what are the, "additional measures"?	This Mandatory Action is not clearly cross-referenced and as a result in ambiguous and not enforceable.
Maintaining soil productive capacity (17)	2.1.1.20 Minimise the time soil is left exposed without vegetation, except at long term infrastructure sites.	"long term infrastructure sites" <u>should not</u> be left as exposed soil. They should be surfaced with appropriate material: gravel, seal, rock etc. and appropriate drainage installed.	Section 2.1.1.20 should be made redundant and emphasis placed on suitable conditions for a 'long term' should be installed.
Long-term Strategic Forest Management Planning (20, 4 <sup>th</sup> paragraph)	2.2.1 The FMZS (forest management zoning scheme) identifies three management zones within State forest.	Special Management Zones have plans written that permit timber harvesting under special conditions. This may be a better way of recognising and implementing, 'additional measures' in water catchments.	This would potentially reduce red tape and ambiguity
Short-term Operational Planning (21)	2.2.2 ...Short term planning includes...proposed timber harvesting operations such as regeneration, tending, harvesting, haulage and associated roading.	It is suggested 'commercial thinning' be included in the list that expands examples of 'timber harvesting' in this section.	Inclusion of commercial thinning is important when Section 2.2.2 is read in conjunction with the requirement for a Forest Coupe Plan, in Section 2.4 Timber Harvesting.

Section (page)	Direct quote from COPTHO	Comment	Intent
Short-term Operational Planning (21)	2.2.2.4 In addition to the requirements outlined in this code, Forest Coupe Plans for salvage harvesting operations must complement and additional recovery strategies and rehabilitation plans established for environmental values.	In previous dot-point (2.2.2.3), it lists, "...safety, water quality and other environmental values." Suggest 2.2.2.4 be expanded to list all 3 values.	Provides consistency in language and emphasises water quality, as well as environment and safety. Current wording implies safety and water quality can be 'dropped' in salvage.
Road Maintenance (25)	2.3.4.4 Blading off roads is only permitted and must be recorded in the coupe diary where measures are in place to prevent potential adverse impacts on water quality and where effective drainage can be maintained.	A road, as opposed to a track, is for vehicle access. Blading off should not be required if Suspension of Haulage, Mandatory Action 2.3.5.1 is complied with.	Timber roads should be built, maintained and used correctly; therefore blading off of a road should never be required.
Road Closure (26)	2.3.6.2 Roads no longer required for timber harvesting operations or other forest management purposes, must be permanently closed and effectively drained following completion of the timber harvesting operation.	Historically this is known to consistently not be achieved; due in part to the need for access post-harvest for regeneration (burning, seeding, surveys) and the lack of machinery available to secure real closure (i.e. similar to post-fire rehab of suppression tracks with earthwork and placement of rock and tree debris: an attempt at visual closure of tracks).	The result is regular breach of closures by off-road recreational vehicles resulting in ongoing compromise of the first 4 objectives of the Code Principles (pg 12).
Timber Harvesting (27)	2.4 Timber harvesting operations are conducted in accordance with a Forest Coupe Plan (section 2.2.2)	Refer to comments about commercial thinning in Section 2.2.2 above.	
Operational Restrictions (29)	2.4.3 – five Mandatory Actions are listed (2.4.3.1 through to 2.4.3.5)	It is suggested that 2.4.3.3 be listed prior to 2.4.3.2, as a hierarchy of suspension of operations is implied.	Current order implies non-machine work must be suspended if machinery will cause rutting, which does not seem logical.

Section (page)	Direct quote from COPTHO	Comment	Intent
Operational Restrictions (29)	2.4.3.3 – Timber harvesting operations must be suspended when water begins to flow along tracks, threatening stream water quality or soil values, unless appropriate remedial actions can be taken.	Examples of “remedial actions” should be expanded at this point, or be included as a definition: i.e. prior planning and set-up of cording and matting sections within a coupe and/or heavy duty road surfaces for truck loading pads.	Suggested change recognises the intent and benefit of well-planned coupes, set-up prior to wet weather, for ongoing protection of water and soil, while allowing some level of timber harvesting to continue. Current wording implies lack of planning leading to inappropriate actions for the sake of ongoing production.
Tending (31)	2.5.2.2 Tending must comply with all relevant mandatory actions for timber harvesting operations.	Tending should comply with the whole of chapter 2	There is no value in the ambiguity of including the words, “all relevant” mandatory actions. Make the whole of Chapter 2 mandatory to tending. It will be obvious where it does not apply.