



Australian Forestry Standard AS 4708- 2013 release

Planet Ark welcomes the latest version of the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS) for Sustainable Forest Management AS 4708 - 2013, which has been released this week.

Planet Ark joined the Standards review committee in mid 2010 and after more than two years the new standard has been released. Planet Ark believes that high quality certification systems are required to provide sustainable timber products and that it is incumbent on all standards to deliver the necessary environmental protection.

Planet Ark and other committee members spent considerable effort in understanding what changes were required and worked to achieve improvements in the Standard. During the course of development of the new standard the committee sought public comment on the changes on two occasions. The feedback was reviewed and where appropriate included in the standard. There were two areas of the standard that received our main focus. These were improving the protection for biodiversity and increasing the opportunity for stakeholder engagement.

Biodiversity protection is a critical element of any forestry standard and considerable effort was spent by the committee to ensure that the correct components are included. A forest manager is required to identify priorities and maintain or enhance a range of significant biodiversity values, which includes threatened and endangered species. The activities further include the need to monitor and review the status of the biodiversity priorities and ensure an effective regimen is maintained to care for the forest. Other developments have taken place in limiting conversion of natural forest to plantation, prevention of the use of GMOs and the protection of habitat during salvage logging.

Improving opportunities for stakeholder engagement in the forestry process was seen as a necessary change for the standard. The new standard now provides opportunities for those stakeholders affected and interested in forestry operations to provide feedback for consideration and have their concerns reviewed.

It should not be forgotten that the new standard applies to both plantation and Australia's natural forest suitable for harvest. We are optimistic that the new standard will improve the quality of forest management. However, we are maintaining a close watch to ensure that adequate outcomes are achieved.