

Thanks to our IRG

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Chris Mangan	Mangan Haulage
Damian Paull	FSC ANZ
Ian Reid	Austimber
Malcolm Hatcher	Midway Limited
Melissa Hayward	HR Forestry
Michael Clancy	G and J Groves
Simon Dorries	Responsible Wood
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Success is all about the people

Setting the standard for the forest industry in Australia

The concept brainstormed across the whiteboard had been attempted before. The difference this time around was everyone involved knew what was being proposed would need to be recognised by industry nationally to succeed.

Securing funding and bringing together the right people was the focus for Stacey Gardiner, Nick Roberts and Nick Milham in 2018 as they set about turning their brainstorming into a project that would develop and pilot a national certification for forest contracting businesses, and training to support the leaders of these businesses.

“We were already working with key stakeholders and AFCA members to look at the benefits and opportunities across the supply chain for certifying forest contracting businesses,” explains Stacey Gardiner, formerly of Australian Forest Contractors Association.

“The emphasis for me was around developing and formalising business management practices, which we believed would contribute to further strengthening risk management and contribute to auditing consistency for businesses”

The work that was being undertaken by the forest industry was already being noticed by Nick Milham, NSW Department of Primary Industries. “DPI were seeking opportunities to improve environmental outcomes,” says Nick.

“When Stacey, Nick (Roberts) and I were working on the concept we knew the success of the project relied heavily on it being led by industry and while that was my main focus, I knew it would need to encompass more than just the environment.”

With the NSW Government showing their support for the future of their forest industry and the industry nationally by funding the ForestFit project, it was now time for industry to take the lead.

Representatives from forest growers, contracting businesses, processors, industry associations and existing industry certification bodies volunteered their time and expertise.



“The inaugural meeting of the industry reference group was December 2019,” says Dionne Olsen, ForestFit Project Manager.

“The time and commitment that everyone has contributed throughout the process has been significant, particularly considering the added challenges such as bushfires and COVID. The outcomes that have been achieved are a result of full supply chain engagement for the entirety of the multi-year project.”

The time commitment was lengthy, though did not seem to be a deterrent as Malcolm Hatcher, Midway explains, “We were looking at the bigger picture when we expressed our interest in participating on the IRG.

As a grower and processor we spend considerable time undertaking internal and external audits. We could see the benefit of streamlining these processes for our business and our contractors. The project’s core focus to deliver national outcomes was really important to us.”

Leveraging the connections and experience of member organisations internationally who have developed similar programs was a great starting place to understand what could work in Australia.

“Many businesses like ours have used other independent or private training or certification programs, but this was an opportunity to participate in the development of purpose built programs for our industry,” says Michael Clancy, GJ Groves.

“Establishing a set of agreed national standards for the industry provides a clear path forward as we adapt to more complex and demanding business process changes, reporting and compliance requirements.”

The diversity of knowledge and adaptability required for business owners, leaders and emerging leaders became the focus of the ForestFit Training Program.

The IRG wanted to ensure the training provided practical guidance, both strategic and operational, to improve business, safety and environmental outcomes.

IRG members worked closely for months reviewing draft after draft of training materials to ensure they were contextualised to meet the needs of the industry and were applicable for small to medium sized businesses.





ForestFit

“One of the reasons it was successful was the continuous opportunities to express your point of view, as part of group discussions and individually, on every aspect of the training and certification development,” explains Ian Reid, Austimber.

“The feedback was always valued, and it never felt like what was presented was cursory even though there were times that we ended up with a different result than what was proposed. Which is to be expected when developing something new.”

Expert regulatory input was provided by the NSW Environmental Protection Authority, NSW Local Land Services and NSW DPI’s Plantation Regulation Unit. Training Services NSW contributed their expertise in vocational training.

With the successful completion of a training pilot in June 2021, it was time for the IRG to turn their attention to developing the certification.

“Getting the criteria right for the standards so that it is credible without being onerous takes time, particularly when striving for consensus,” explains Simon Dorries, Responsible Wood.

However, the process of creating these standards would have been considered onerous by some, particularly during the word by word walkthroughs of the criteria.

“It was a fair amount of time during the past couple of years,” says Chris Mangan, Mangan Logging and Haulage. “Though it was worth it to ensure we have a set of national standards that reflect how serious we are about our work and businesses.”

Recognition of forest contracting businesses’ professionalism is what kept business owner Melissa Hayward, HR Forestry, contributing to the development of ForestFit.

“ForestFit Certification is another way for us to demonstrate and reinforce to industry the amount of expertise, knowledge and experience that underpins forest contracting business operations and drives our decision making and continuous improvement,” says Melissa.

ForestFit Certification has been further strengthened by achieving Deemed to Comply status with Responsible Wood. This process will be finalised with the JAS-ANZ endorsement of ForestFit.

“We are very excited about the tangible and practical outcomes of ForestFit for recognising the good systems and professional practices of forest contracting businesses and to drive improvement,” says Simon.

The multi-year work of the IRG will be celebrated with the national launch of ForestFit on 14 June 2022.

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