

Each month TimberTrader News' editor Helen Hatty will take a look at one aspect of the Chain of Custody topic.

Australian Forestry Standard

As we said last month, the first step in the Chain of Custody (CoC) is the certification of the forest, ensuring that forestry practices fit into the criteria for sustainable logging.

The second certification scheme in Australia comes under the auspices of the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS), the company that owns the standard development functions and manages the elements of the Australian Forest Certification Scheme (AFCS).

According to CEO of AFS, Kayt Watts, the AFCS has the only Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) and the only CoC certification process that are Australian Standards - Australian Forestry Standard - SFM - AS 4708; and Australian Forestry Standard - CoC - AS 4707.

But we must firstly explain how the AFS was formed. The company as we know it today was formally established in 2003, following the formation of the Australian Forestry Standard Steering Committee in 1999.

The Steering Committee was a partnership between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, National Association of Forest Industries, Plantation Timber Association of Australia, Australian Forest Growers and the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

The company, Australian Forestry Standard Limited (AFSL), is a Standards Development Organisation¹ and is a not-for-profit public company registered in July 2003.

The company, as mentioned earlier, is an accredited Standards Development Organisation, with its initial accreditation being awarded by the Standards Accreditation Board of Standard Australia on January 27, 2004.

"There are five Accredited Standards Development organisations and we're one of them," Kayt commented.

"It was all about sustainable forest management and ensuring there was consistency of supply in Australia," she continued.

"The Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) were already in place; what they needed

was a national Australian Standard. As a result the two Standards were developed - one for Forest Management and one for Chain of Custody."

Kayt said she believes Australia has very good forest practices and some people would question as to why we needed to move to CoC.

"The problem is that a log can come from a forest that has been assessed as complying with the Standard but the minute that wood goes to a mill, it can be mixed up with wood that has come from another source, be it a certified forest or not.

"Other wood may even have been imported from an illegally logged forest and it is can be all mixed up together. That's becoming even more topical today. Where does a mixed source come from? And CoC can address that."

She said there are 11.3 million hectares of multi use native forests and plantations available for use by the timber industry around Australia. "Of that 8.7 million hectares are certified through our AFSC system."

Kayt said certification of the forests is done by independent bodies who themselves have been accredited under the JAS-ANZ guidelines.

PEFC

The PEFC Council is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental international organisation founded in 1999, which promotes sustainably managed forests through independent third party certification.

PEFC is a global umbrella organisation for the assessment of and mutual recognition of national forest certification schemes developed in a multi-stakeholder process. There are now 35 countries around the world involved.

Kayt said AFSL is a member, and the Australian governing body, of PEFC and are independently audited to ensure they're aligned with the PEFC Standards. AFSL is PEFC Australia.

"In Australia forests can be certified under AFSC or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC); or both - there is very little difference between the two schemes.

"When it comes to Chain of Custody,

we're focused very much on transforming the product and FSC is about following 'ownership'."

She continued; "The most important part of the auditing process is the inventory control, which has to clearly state where the product was bought, how it was stored and who it is being sold to - the exchange in the sales process has to all be shown on the invoicing.

"I can understand the confusion shown by the timber merchants, who may buy from multiple sources and store all their timber in one yard. With certified product, it has to be clearly identified as coming from a certified source.

"All they have to do is be able to identify which product came from where.

"If a wholesaler offers broken packs, they have to become certified as well so that the 'chain' is not broken.

"Should a furniture manufacturer buying from a timber merchant wish to say that the timber used in his product came from a fully certified, sustainable resource, every link in the chain must become AFS certified.

"In other words whoever is 'transforming' it needs to be certified, whether it goes into a wooden bowl, a piece of architrave or whatever - whoever is 'changing' the timber in some way or another needs certification for the 'chain' to continue along the line.

"Even the truss and frame manufacturer would need to hold AFS certification to be able to say to the builder or the owner builder that the timber comes from a sustainable source, should it be requested."

Kayt said that since she has been involved in promoting AFS to the merchant sector, about five companies have become certified under AFCS.

"The more certified, well managed forestry we have the better; and its only CoC that can ensure that.

"Don't wait for the demand because you'll be too late. The smaller player who doesn't want the 'big' order doesn't have to get involved but I believe that over time consumer demand for certified products will increase, and if you haven't embraced it already, you'll certainly be behind the rest."