



# Criteria and Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management

(IFA Forest Policy Statement No 2.11)

## Key Statement

Sustainable forest management involves managing a wide range of economic, social and environmental values in perpetuity. To ensure a consistency in assessing sustainable forest management, forest owners should assess their forest management against appropriate criteria and indicators covering the full range of benefits that forest ecosystems provide.

## The Issue

Sustainable Forest Management should be the goal for management of all forests to maintain their full range of benefits - environmental, economic and social, for both present and future generations. The development of internationally recognised criteria and indicators provides a common understanding for sustainable forest management and an agreed framework for assessing “How well are we managing our forests?”

## Background

The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) recognised the importance of sustainably managing all types of forests and woodlands in order to meet the needs of present and future generations. The UN Non-Legally Binding Instrument (NLBI) on all types of forests recognises that sustainable forest management, as a dynamic and evolving concept, is intended to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental values of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Montréal Process is the Working Group on Criteria and Indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests.. Separate processes were established to develop criteria and indicators for European and tropical forests. These processes all have common ‘thematic elements’ that are now used as a basis for the UN Global Forest Resources Assessment.

The criteria and indicators developed under the Montreal Process provide a common framework for describing, assessing and evaluating a country's progress towards sustainable forest management at the national level. The criteria describe the broad forest values that society seeks to sustain while the indicators are more specific measures that can be used to assess changes over time. They also help provide an international reference for policy-makers in the formulation of national policies and a basis for international cooperation aimed at supporting sustainable forest management.

The Montreal Process criteria and indicators have been used to guide the development of Australia's approach to sustainable forest management. These indicators take into account relevant international agreements, Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation and policies. The State of the Forests Report uses these criteria and indicators to report on forest management in Australia.

Some forest managers, for both public and private forest, have developed and implemented additional sustainability indicators that sit within the Montreal Process framework. These address particular local sustainable forest management parameters.

The approach reflected in the criteria and indicators is the management of forests as ecosystems. It is recognized that no single criterion or indicator is, in itself, an indication of sustainability. Specific criteria and indicators should be considered in the context of the other criteria and indicators.

Changes in the status of forests and related conditions over time, and the direction of the change, are relevant to assessing sustainability. Reporting data on indicators for a single point in time is of

little value and monitoring changes in indicators is essential to evaluating whether and how progress is being made toward the sustainability of forest management.

## Policy

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates the use of internationally agreed criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management. In Australia the indicators need to be adapted to reflect specific regional conditions, forest types and management approaches.

The IFA supports and encourages:

- Forest managers to adopt internationally accepted criteria for sustainability on forest under their management control to enable review of existing practices and promote continuous improvement in forest management.
- The use of internationally accepted criteria for sustainable forest management in certification schemes for Australian forests.

The IFA considers that:

- Criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management should be reviewed and refined on an on-going basis to reflect changing circumstances, new knowledge as a result of research, advances in technology, increased capability to measure indicators, and an improved understanding of what constitutes appropriate indicators of sustainable forest management on all forest lands and tenures.
- The importance of collecting accurate data about forests to support the interpretation of indicators is not sufficiently recognised and that many forest owners, including Governments, are not making sufficient investment in monitoring and data collection.
- Within countries and individual regions, the application and importance of the criteria and their respective indicators will vary between land tenures, forest use and their applicability to native forest and plantations.

## Further Information

Australian Forestry Standard - [www.forestrystandard.org.au](http://www.forestrystandard.org.au)

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (2008) Australia's Sustainable Forest Management <http://www.daff.gov.au/forestry/national/forest-mgmt> and <http://adl.brs.gov.au/forestsaustralia/>

Forest Stewardship Council Australia - [www.fscaustralia.org/](http://www.fscaustralia.org/)

National Forestry Policy Statement (1992). A new focus for Australia's forests. Commonwealth of Australia.

The Montreal Process - <http://www.rinya.maff.go.jp/mpci/>

UN FAO. Global Forest Resource Assessment. UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, Rome. [www.fao.org/forestry/24691/en/](http://www.fao.org/forestry/24691/en/)

## Definitions

Criterion

- A category of conditions or processes by which sustainable forest management may be assessed.
- A Criterion is characterized by a set of related indicators which are monitored periodically to assess change.

Indicator

A measure (measurement) of an aspect of the criterion. A quantitative or qualitative variable which can be measured or described and which, when observed periodically, demonstrates trends.

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