FSC FM/COC Compliance assessment of SCS Global Services at Hancock Victoria Plantations Pty Ltd, Australia, 2025

ASI Final Assessment Report

	FSC ACCREDITATION PROGRAM
	SCS Global Services - FSC Assessment
	FSC FM/COC
	Australia - June 30, 2025 to July 4, 2025
	Assessment No. A-2025-02-R01-O
Drafted by:	ASI Assessor	July 4, 2025
Reviewed by:	Technical Reviewer	August 19, 2025
Approved by:	ASI Assessor	August 21, 2025
Signed off by:	Program Manager	August 30, 2025

Description

CAB	CAB Global Services
Accreditation Code	ASI-AFR-002
Technical Scope of Accreditation	FSC FM/COC
Geographical Scopes of Accreditation	Worldwide (excluding Belarus, Myanmar and Russian Federation)
Type of Assessment	Compliance
Technical scope of this assessment	FSC FM/COC
Site Visited	Victoria
Applicable Standards	FSC-STD-30-010 (V1.0) 3 Evaluation of stakeholder comments in complaints received by ASI in relation to this CAB and/or operation; and,
Checklist used	5 To provide the full information in the Final Assessment Report as to whether the evidence from the Assessment supports, either individually or collectively, maintaining, suspending, extending or withdrawing the certificate.
Objective	The purpose of this assessment was: 1 Evaluation of the Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) performance in implementing their Certification system in accordance with all relevant Accreditation Requirements; 2 Verification of the adequacy of the CAB's previous audit methods, frequency and intensity, and resourcing and competence to ensure that the CAB is able to effectively verify conformity with applicable certification requirements, in this case, the FSC National Forest Stewardship Standards (FSC-STD-60-010 (V1.0));
Assessment Language	English

Background

Certificate Holder Background	Hancock Victoria Plantations (HVP) the CH is the holder of certificate SCS-FM/COC-00198. This certificate is a single certificate covering the management of plantation forests in Victoria in Australia. It is divided into three management regions (Gippsland, Western and Western), with a total of 9 forest districts within the three regions. The total area in Victoria covered by the certificate is approximately 1.1 million hectares. The majority of the plantations are located in Victoria. The total plantation area is approximately 1.1 million hectares (98,000 ha). The plantations are located in Victoria (98,000 ha), with the majority (94,000 ha) in Gippsland. There is 78,000 ha of plantation in several species of Eucalypts, but these are only in the Gippsland region. The Western and Western regions have 20,000 ha of pine plantations, and 1,000 ha of Eucalypts in the Western region. The CH uses ground based harvesting systems in flat and gentle terrain and cable harvesting including extensively in steep terrain. The CH does not use aerial harvesting. The CH does not use pesticides in maritime, and fertilisers and pesticides are applied in many cable and ground based operations. In 2021, the CH received approximately 4900 ha and thinned 6800 ha. The actual harvest was about 3 million tonnes of which and pulp logs mostly for domestic production. The CH planted about 1500 ha in 2021 and 1500 ha in 2022. The CH replanted about 600 ha annually, with the remainder being coppice. In the north end of the state, the Gippsland region supports about 23,000 ha forest harvested in the 60 km radius of the majority of the environmental and cultural values and communities, and the only plantations with significant harvesting. The CH has 1,000 ha of plantation in the Western region, which is in the south-west of the state, and contains remnants of the once extensive cool and warm temperate rainforest ecological communities. The two rainforest communities are considered threatened ecological communities under the Victoria Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act and protected by the Victoria Vegetation Protection Act and the Victoria Sustainable Forestry Regulations. The managed forest in Gippsland is now predominantly radiata pine (84% of the plantations). Approximately 14% of the plantation area is Eucalypts, and 2% is other softwoods. The Eucalypts are mostly Shining Gum and Tasmanian Blue Gum, which produce sawlogs and veneer. The area of eucalypts is declining annually as the CH prepares planting equivalent to the annual harvest area. The CH does not plant Eucalypts in the Gippsland plantations. There are small areas of Pine in other eucalypts and Pyrocarp of conifers, in the Gippsland region of 1% of the plantation. The other two regions are almost exclusively radiata pine with scattered older trials of eucalypts and exotic species. There are no Eucalypts in the Western region. The CH has 1,000 ha of plantations that are on very steep slopes. These slopes are considered less environmental than Gippsland with fewer planning and operational challenges.
CAB Background	The CH has identified HCV areas in all six categories of HCV with approximately 1,000 ha of HCV in Victoria. The HCVs within the rainforest RECOVERY CH Gippsland Management Unit contains: The CH has been FSC certified since 2006. In 2010 the certification audit there were 2 Observations. In the first annual surveillance audit in 2011 there were 3 NCs. All NCs were closed and no nc's and no OBs in 2012. The CAB is registered in California, USA and has been accredited to provide FSC Forest Management and COC Chain of Custody certification certificate. The CAB currently manages over 1,000 FSC certificates in over 50 countries around the world. The operation is managed from the Emeryville office with Sustainable Buildings Certificate.
ASI Assessment	The ASI competence assessment was a special on-site PMC/COC surveillance audit of the CAB's operation in Victoria. The assessment was conducted by a single ASI assessor (Jeremy Ingram). The assessment was conducted in accordance with the ASI Assessment Manual (ASI-MAN-001). The assessment was a special surveillance audit to assess the CAB's previous audit methods, frequency and intensity, and resourcing and competence to ensure that the CAB is able to effectively verify conformity with applicable certification requirements, in this case, the FSC National Forest Stewardship Standards (FSC-STD-60-010 (V1.0)). The assessment was conducted with the assistance of a local Technical Expert (TE) and was joined by a CAB Observer and an Observer from FSC ANZ. The assessment focused on the evaluation of the CAB in certification audits in November 2020 and the annual surveillance audit conducted in November 2021 and February 2022. The CAB's previous audit reports for the years 2020 and 2021 were reviewed. Both the 2021 and 2021 assessments used the FSC-STD-60-004 (V1.0) and the FSC-STD-20-011 (V3.0) and FSC-STD-20-012 (V3.0). The scope of the audit was for the following clauses: 5.2, 5.3, 5.4.1, 6.6, 6.4, 6.4.4, 6.4.5, 6.4.6, 6.4.7, 7.3, 7.5, 9.2, 9.3, 10.1, 10.1.1, 10.1.2, 10.1.3. The 5.4 and 10.1 clause 10 different sites in 11 different forests in 2 of the 3 FMU's (Gippsland and Western). The forests visited were: Tarwin Forest, Tarwin Forest, Tarwin Forest,

Normative Reference and Requirement FSC-STD-20-001 Ver 3-0 5.1.1

Description The CAB did not investigate the allegations in a complaint.

A complaint was submitted to the CAB on 04 October 2021 by the Chief Executive Officer of Tanda Cayan in Bicolano, Australia. The CAB response was a CAB Investigation Report dated 29 October 2021. The complaint was based on the claim that the CAB conducted fake observations at the coupon on 19 February 2021. The complainant then filed a complaint with the CGMP fully about the CAB investigation. The complaint was based on the claim that the CAB conducted an investigation of 8 indicators of the FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard (FSC-STD-20-001 V3-0) but the consultancy assessment has confirmed the findings of the KSI Investigation Report into the CAB. The CAB Investigation Report into the complaint and the CAB response in the Investigation Report and the Audit Report. The CAB response in the Audit Report indicates 5.2, 5.2.3, 5.4.2, 5.7.1, 7.2, 7.4.1, 8.1.2, and 9.2.1 of the FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard (FSC-STD-20-001 V3-0) dated 01.2019. The CAB investigation of the complaint did not "investigate the allegations in a complaint" and the CAB response and actions to respond to the complaint" as required by Section 1.16 of FSC-STD-20-001 V3-0 and FSC-STD-20-001 V3-0 Annex 2 (FSC-STD-20-001 V3-0 Annex 4.3.1)a. It is a frequency issue in the CAB investigation procedure and is not systematic.

Evidence observed Interviews with stakeholders

Finding No. 256754 **Date detected** July 8, 2021

Grade Minor **Status** Open

Nonconformity

Subject Interviews with stakeholders

Detected by AB Assessor

Normative Reference and Requirement FSC-STD-20-001 V3-0 5.4.4

Description The CAB did not interview a sufficient variety and number of people (including those in receipt of complaints) in forest management.

Evidence observed Given the three-recent assessments (2020, 2022 and 2024) the CAB did not identify CH-conformities in 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3, 5.2.4, 5.2.5, 5.2.6, 5.2.7, 7.1.2, 7.1.3, 7.1.4, 7.1.5, 7.1.6, 7.1.7, 7.1.8, 7.1.9, 7.1.10, 7.1.11, 7.1.12, 7.1.13, 7.1.14, 7.1.15, 7.1.16, 7.1.17, 7.1.18, 7.1.19, 7.1.20, 7.1.21, 7.1.22, 7.1.23, 7.1.24, 7.1.25, 7.1.26, 7.1.27, 7.1.28, 7.1.29, 7.1.30, 7.1.31, 7.1.32, 7.1.33, 7.1.34, 7.1.35, 7.1.36, 7.1.37, 7.1.38, 7.1.39, 7.1.40, 7.1.41,

values. Those components are not proprietary confidential information. The blanket refusal of the CH to provide any information about operational coupe-level Timber Harvesting Plans and Site Values Checklist despite many requests from one interested group of stakeholders is a non-conformity with Indicator 7.5.2. These stakeholders were adjacent property owners who were "affected stakeholders" as defined in the FSC Australia standard. This non-conformity has not been detected by the CAB in the 2022, 2023 and 2024 assessments. Evidence 5. Indicator 7.6.3 of the FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard of Australia Evidence of non-conformity with Indicator 6.2.3 was presented in COMP 926 and was confirmed in this assessment as follows. Interested and affected stakeholders told this ASI assessment that they have not been provided with an opportunity to provide input into the planning processes on coupes that affect their interests. The CH confirmed that their normal process to notify stakeholders of planned activity is to provide form letters notifying of proposed activities including operating dates, hours, and truck routes. Affected stakeholders, including neighbours of the Fellas Track coupe, who sought to provide input about environmental values and to be involved in the planning of the coupe were not provided with that opportunity. As an example, a consulting ecologist with expertise related to Slender Tree Ferns offered to assist two affected stakeholders representing a local environmental group in collecting information about the Fella's track coupe that would be provided to the CH. The CH denied permission to visit the site and advised the group that it "is neither a regulator nor an FSC auditor. It has no wider role in the management of this property". Indicator 7.6.3 requires that these affected stakeholders are provided with an opportunity for engagement in planning and monitoring, but that was denied. The two ecologists who prepared the report titled "Vegetation Survey of Cool Temperate Rainforest Occurring within the Turton's Creek Scenic Reserve" on Livingstone Creek Road that was being planned for harvest in early 2025 offered to provide input into the planning of that site. This was also not accepted by the CH. The South Gippsland Shire Council is also an affected stakeholder and told the ASI assessment team that they also sought to provide input to the coupe level planning at Fellas Track. They wrote to the CAB to provide an expert report and to suggest that an appropriate buffer be established but this input was not accepted. This is a non-conformity with Indicator 7.6.3 which requires: "7.6.3 Affected stakeholders* are provided with an opportunity for culturally appropriate* engagement* in monitoring and planning processes of management activities that affect their interests." As with Evidence 3 above, the CAB auditor did interview the same people and had access to the same documents as ASI but did not detect the non-conformity in the 2024 surveillance assessment. Evidence 6. Indicator 9.1.2 of the FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard of Australia In 2020, the CH retained a consultant to provide a "desktop assessment" of High Conservation Values (HCVs) across the management unit in Victoria. This document – "Assessment of High Conservation Values Across the Hancock Victoria Plantations Estate in Victoria, Version 3, 14/12/2020" – identifies the presence and location of High Conservation Values in each of the 6 main Categories and their sub-categories on the CH estate. There is no evidence that the CH's consultant engaged in any way with any interested and affected stakeholders in the preparation of this "desk top assessment". The Table of Contents does not mention any engagement with stakeholders, and the report does not include a list of parties that were consulted. The CH was unable to provide a list. The statement in the third paragraph on Page 1 of the report states: "This initial desktop assessment results will be augmented based on inputs from stakeholders and relevant experts." This confirms that the assessment was an "initial assessment" and that no consultation occurred. A CAB document titled "HVP Environmental Impact Assessment Management, April, 2025" states as follows: "HVP has conducted an assessment for HCVs across its estate and recorded that information in the document titled Assessment of High Conservation Values Across the Hancock Victoria Plantations Estate in Victoria, dated 22 May 2020. The in-depth, 46-page assessment includes reviews of scientific studies, regional management plans, relevant legislation and water catchment strategies.". There is no mention of that any stakeholders were consulted in this document. The failure of the CH to consider results from consultation with affected and interested stakeholders in the assessment of High Conservation Values is a non-conformity with Indicator 9.1.2 that was not detected by the CAB. Evidence 7. Indicator 9.2.3 of the FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard of Australia Evidence of non-conformity with Indicator 9.2.3 was presented in COMP 926 and was confirmed in this assessment as follows. The HCV assessment – "Assessment of High Conservation Values Across the Hancock Victoria Plantations Estate in Victoria, Version 3, 14/12/2020" – does not identify any management strategies to protect the identified HCVs. Instead, the CH has prepared a number of documents called "Operating Procedures" or "Management Plans", for some of the HCVs identified in the Assessment Report. Indicator 9.2.3 requires that "interested or affected stakeholders and regional experts with knowledge of the conservation of HCVs* are consulted *in the development of management strategies and actions to maintain and/or enhance the identified High Conservation Values*. During the assessment the CAB was unable to provide any information, or a list of stakeholders consulted, or any other evidence that interested and affected stakeholders were consulted in the development strategies. The pre-eminent authority and respected regional expert on rainforest in the State of Victoria told the ASI assessment team that he has not been consulted by the CH since 2010 and was not consulted about management strategies for the Cool Temperate or Warm Temperate Rainforest HCVs during the preparation of, or since, the Assessment Report was completed in 2020. More recently, individuals who have been identifying Cool Temperate Rainforest, Slender Tree-ferns and other HCV species and TECs in gullies adjacent to CH coupes have not been consulted about management strategies for this identified HCV. For example, in 2024, two local expert ecologists surveyed Slender Tree-ferns and Cool Temperate Rainforest in an area adjacent to a coupe on Livingstone Creek Road. The CH was given a copy of the report on 20 December 2024, and a representative attended a public presentation on 22 February 2025, but the CH did not engage in any consultation with these regional experts. The failure to consult with interested or affected stakeholders and regional experts with knowledge of the conservation of HCVs in the development of management strategies is a non-conformity with Indicator 9.2.3 that was not detected by the CAB. Collectively, the CH non-conformities that were not detected by the CAB in audits over the three-year audit period, 2022-2024 are a major non-conformity on the part of the CAB as described in FSC-STD-20-001-V4-0; Section 4.3.13b. These failures have continued over a long period of time and affect the integrity of the FSC system. This non-conformity with Indicator 9.2.3 is quite different from the non-conformity with Indicator 9.1.2. Indicator 9.1.2 refers to the collection of information about high conservation values during the assessment phase of preparing an HCV assessment and required consideration of the results of culturally appropriate engagement with interested and affected stakeholders*. The non-conformity with Indicator 9.3.2 is about the strategies implemented– which is a second important part of the HCV process in P9. The non-conformity with Indicator 9.2.3 is that the CH did not consult with relevant experts and affected stakeholders in the development of strategies.

Finding No.	206756	**Date detected**	July 4, 2025
Grade	Compliance Follow-up	**Status**	Open
Subject	Accident frequency rates		
Detected by	ASI Assessor		
Normative Reference and Requirement	ASI-PRO-20-111-V2.5:9.2.9.3		
Description	The CAB shall follow-up to assess CH conformance with Indicator 2.3.5 in the FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard of Australia (FSC-STD-AUS-01-2018).		
Evidence observed	This ASI assessment determined that the CH incident frequency rate, based on the total number of incidents, and the incident frequency per million hours worked have increased steadily for both the Lost Time Incidents (LTI) and Medical Treatment Incident (MTI) over the period from April 2023 to June 2025. The severity of incidents, measured as lost days per lost time injury, has also been increasing over the same period. The result is that the CH is now above the industry average rate for incidents. This is a non-conformity with Indicator 2.3.5 that requires: "2.3.5 The trend and severity of incidents are generally decreasing over time". In the ASI assessment, the CH explained that some of the increases are due to the introduction of new measures to track incidents and some unique situations, but also stated that, in July 2025, there is a real increase in the numbers of incidents and their severity. The CAB identified this situation in the 2024 surveillance audit report. The audit report states: "2.3.5 Auditor reviewed the Health Safety and Environment report Q1, Lost time injury frequency rate (LTIFR) increased since Jan 2024, HS Manager notes that this is due to a change in reporting to include all injuries involving lost time not only those signed off by a GP/medical officer (as previously). LTIFR high due to one worker having extended period off due to tree/sapling falling on him". This CAB evaluation of CH conformity with Indicator 2.3.5 was conducted on November 25, 2024. Thus, the trend of increasing frequency of accidents that is not entirely related to a reporting change and was reported to this ASI assessment in July 2025 was not observable by the auditor at the time of the audit in November 2024. This is a Compliance Follow-Up. It is a potential duplicate of Compliance Follow-up Finding 204010 but the subject matter is different.		

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