

Policy Framework for Forest Pest and Disease Management

July 2003

1. Background

The Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement 1997 (RFA) includes a requirement that Tasmania commits to:

“Developing and implementing, within the first five years of this Agreement, state-wide policies across all tenures on fire management, nature based tourism and recreation management, cultural heritage management in Forest lands and Forest pest and disease management.”
(Attachment 10, Clause 7)

The commitment is based on the recommendations of the Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM) Expert Advisory Group (1997).

The RFA Attachment 13 specified priority areas of research in relation to pests and diseases as being:

- cost effective detection, evaluation of impacts, identification and control of pests and diseases in native forests and plantations.
- development of integrated management systems for weeds, browsing mammals, and insect pests to reduce or eliminate chemical use.

Whilst the ESFM Expert Advisory Group was clearly thinking in terms of State Policy under the *State Policies and Projects Act 1993*, its final recommendation left open the option of using a different if similar process and instrument. In the RFA, the parties clearly and consciously chose not to proceed with the statutory State Policy option.

This paper is not a policy per se but is a description of the framework of policies that broadly address forest pest and disease management across all tenures. It also details the changes that have occurred since 1997 and demonstrates the extent to which they address the RFA commitment and the specific issues of concern to the ESFM Expert Advisory Group.

2. Objectives

The primary objective of this document is to provide a description of the state-wide policy framework for forest pest and disease management in Tasmania across all tenures.

A further objective is to demonstrate the linkages between different components of the policy set and articulate the processes for their integration.

This document is intended to satisfy the requirements of Attachment 10, Clause 7 of the RFA as detailed above.

3. Policy Framework in 1996

The ESFM Expert Advisory Group found that legislative and policy provisions for pest and disease control in State forests were generally satisfactory. However, it found that forests that were then managed by the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (DPIWE) were less well covered in that many more policies and strategies were in draft form. The Group recommended development of a statewide policy to facilitate coordination of the work of the major agencies involved in forest management.

The ESFM Expert Advisory Group also noted the provisions of the Resource Management and Planning System, and in particular in the *State Policies and Projects Act 1993*, for the creation of State Policies to address matters of State significance requiring a consistent and coordinated approach across the State. It suggested that the Tasmanian Government might adopt this mechanism to address the perceived gap in the strategic framework for forest pest and disease management.

4. Current Policy Framework and Changes since 1997

The Parties on signing of the RFA, decided not to use the mechanism provided for in the *State Policies and Projects Act 1993* for development of a formal State Policy to address this issue. Experience with other State Policies led to a decision to review the form and place of State Policies. The State has instead used existing structures and programs to develop a highly effective strategic framework for delivering a whole of government approach to forest pest and disease management in Tasmania. This is detailed in paragraph 4.2 below.

This framework is itself nested in a broader suite of high level strategic programs which assist in setting the long term direction and also ensuring community, industry, local government and State government involvement in its implementation. This overarching strategic framework is outlined in 4.1 below.

4.1 Cross Government Strategic Directions

Tasmania Together

Tasmania Together is a twenty year social, environmental and economic plan, prepared by the Tasmanian community and representing a vision of where the community wants Tasmania to head.

It contains 212 benchmarks to guide policy and budgets of state and local governments and of the wider community. Progress against the benchmarks is monitored by a statutory authority, the *Tasmania Together* Progress Board, which reports directly to Parliament.

There are a number of goals and benchmarks that relate indirectly to forest pest and disease management but the relevant Tasmania *Together* goal is Goal 24. *Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way now and for future generations.*

The relevant standard and indicators are as follows –

24.9 To reduce the adverse impacts of pests weeds and pathogens

24.9.1 Number of naturalised organisms

24.9.2 Area adversely impacted by *Phytophthora cinnamomi*

24.9.3 Areas adversely affected by other selected naturalised species.

Targets for each of these indicators are to be established.

Two other goals are also relevant to forest pest and disease management -

Goal 21 *Value, protect and conserve our natural and cultural heritage.*

Goal 22 *Value, protect and maintain our natural diversity.*

Goals 21 and 22 have the objective of protecting and conserving our natural and cultural heritage and our natural diversity. The set of policies and strategies outlined in 4.2 below contain measures that will contribute toward attaining these goals.

This policy framework is also in accordance with the objectives of the Resource Management and Planning System of Tasmania and related to national pest, weed and disease programs under the auspices of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council.

Partnership Program

The Tasmanian Local Government Partnership Agreement Program is designed to provide better ways of serving Tasmanian communities, through a cooperative approach by the two levels of government.

A Partnership Agreement is a document that sets out actions and timeframes in which they will be undertaken to address key issues in an area. A Partnership Agreement sets out an agreed framework for action and is therefore able to deliver real outcomes for the community.

There are currently three types of Partnership Agreement:

- Bilateral – between the State Government and one Council;
- Regional – between the State Government and a self-identifying group of Councils; and

- Statewide – between the State Government and the Local Government Association of Tasmania, on behalf of each of the 29 Tasmanian Councils.

Partnership agreements provide an opportunity for formalising the implementation of the relevant forest pest and disease management programs, particularly those involving multiple tenures.

Statutory Framework

A number of key statutes, strategies, policies and agreements relating to the primary land-use in specific parts of the State have a marked influence on the development and implementation of forest pest and disease management programs. These include:

- *Nature Conservation Act 2002*
- *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*
- *Forestry Act 1920*
- *Forest Practices Act 1985*
- *Plant Quarantine Act 1997*
- *Natural Resource Management Act 2002*
- *Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement 1997*
- *State Coastal Policy*
- *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Plan 1999* and
- relevant policy documents of the individual land management agencies and industry sectors.

Institutional Arrangements

The institutional framework for the management of forest pests and disease comprises national and State co-ordination bodies and agency-level management programs.

The Forest Health Advisory Committee (FHAC) was established in 2000 to co-ordinate statewide programs related to forest health. The FHAC provides the opportunity for input from stakeholders into pests and diseases expertise, policy and management and is the prime vehicle for inter-agency co-ordination. Membership of the FHAC includes representatives from Forestry Tasmania and the DPIWE (quarantine and nature conservation) as well as forest industry representatives.

At the national level, the National Forest Health Committee (FHC) is charged with implementing the national contingency plan entitled the

Generic Incursion Management Plan for Forest Pests and Diseases, March 1999.

Policy Instruments

Policy instruments include the draft Reserve Management Code of Practice, the Forestry Code of Practice, the Code of Practice for Mineral Exploration, management plans for land managed by both Forestry Tasmania and the Parks and Wildlife Service within the Department of Tourism, Parks, Heritage and the Arts (DTPHA), the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Framework, and pest and disease threat abatement plans.

4.2 Integrated Forest Pest and Disease Management Framework

The integration of agency programs and initiatives to improve the monitoring and management of pests and diseases in forests across all tenures in the State is being progressively achieved through a number of mechanisms.

Tenure

The FHAC provides the vehicle for inter-agency co-operation and co-ordination on forest health matters across all land tenures in Tasmania. The committee includes representatives from Forestry Tasmania and the DPIWE (quarantine and nature conservation) as well as forest industry representatives.

The FHAC will continue to monitor mechanisms for co-ordination of forest health programs on all land tenures and to recommend appropriate measures to improve integration.

A number of current programs with a statewide focus are being undertaken by agencies.

A monitoring program relating to myrtle wilt on all tenures is being run by Forestry Tasmania in consultation with other agencies. Outcomes from this program will have implications for management of vegetation on reserved land.

The Tasmanian component of the National Threat Abatement Plan for *Phytophthora cinnamomi* is being co-ordinated by the DPIWE (Nature Conservation Branch). The State component has involved the identification of areas across the State free of the pathogen, or areas where its impacts have been minimal, and the development and implementation of management prescriptions for each area.

A draft strategic regional plan for Tasmania, *Conservation of Tasmanian Plant Communities Threatened by Phytophthora cinnamomi*, was completed in June 2003 in consultation with the Parks and Wildlife Service, Forestry Tasmania and Mineral Resources Tasmania.

The strategy addresses Tasmania's obligations under Objectives 1 and 2 of the national threat abatement plan. It extends the application of strategic management areas for threatened species that are susceptible to *Phytophthora cinnamomi* to include highly susceptible communities. This effectively identifies critical habitat for *P. cinnamomi*-susceptible threatened species and communities in Tasmania and focuses on objective-driven management that will provide a mechanism for monitoring and reporting the impact of *P. cinnamomi* on the State's biodiversity for the first time.

The Research Working Group (RWG) 7 (Forest Health) is a subordinate committee of the Primary Industries Standing Committee's Forestry and Forest Products Committee, charged with reviewing forest pests and diseases at the national level (including quarantine and assessment standards). The RWG 7 has five Tasmanian representatives (two each from Forestry Tasmania and University of Tasmania and a private consultant) and meets formally every 2 years. Each year the RWG 7 prepares a national forest pest and disease status report.

The brief of the RWG 7 focuses on the development and implementation of consistent standards for forest health in Tasmania and is currently assessing models that may be applicable in this State.

The Reserve Management Code of Practice (2002) provides an important mechanism to improve forest pest and disease management across tenures in Tasmania.

The Code applies to reserved land managed by both the Parks and Wildlife Service and Forestry Tasmania. Local government and conservation management trusts that manage the balance of reserves declared under the *Nature Conservation Act 2002* may also be required to adhere to the provisions of the Code. Landowners managing private reserves under agreement with the DPIWE may also be required to use the Code.

Provisions relating to plant diseases have been included in the Code to minimise the introduction of alien plant pathogens and minimise the impacts of these pathogens. *P. cinnamomi* and myrtle wilt are identified as the primary plant disease problems in the State and procedures laid down in the *P. cinnamomi Hygiene Manual* and the *Pests and Diseases Management Plan for State Forests in Tasmania* are drawn on.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders are formally involved in forest pest and disease management through the FHAC, the *Phytophthora cinnamomi* Threat Abatement Team and the RWG 7 and were consulted during the development of the Reserve Management Code of Practice.

The importance of involving landowners and managers, industry, community groups and other stakeholders in the development and implementation of management programs has been recognised, and

stakeholder involvement will continue to be an important element of future policy and management activities.

5. Future Developments on Forest Pest and Disease Management

Key areas of concern identified by the EFSM Expert Advisory Group will continue to be progressively addressed through the programs and initiatives outlined above. Their report, as noted above, found that while legislative and policy provisions for pest and disease control in State forests were generally satisfactory, forests managed by the DPIWE (now by the Parks and Wildlife Service, DTPHA) were less well covered.

Improved co-ordination of the work of the major agencies involved in forest management will be sought.

The FHAC will continue to monitor progress and co-ordinate across-agency programs and initiatives.