

2nd August 2012

Sally Neighbour
Executive Producer, NSW
7.30 Report
ABC Television

Dear Ms Neighbour

I refer to the story "Planet Ark sails in to timber storm" by Reporter Adam Harvey which aired on your program on Tuesday 31st July 2012. Unfortunately, Australian Forestry Standard Ltd (AFS Ltd) was not contacted about this story. If we had been contacted we could have quickly and easily corrected some obvious misunderstandings and misconceptions about AFS Ltd and the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS).

The AFS, and other credible forest management certification schemes, provide rigorous frameworks within which certified forest managers must conduct their business. Forest certification assures that forests are managed in line with challenging environmental, economic and social requirements. The AFS requires that forest managers protect biodiversity, water and soil and maintain healthy ecosystems. They are also required to safeguard heritage values and indigenous culture whilst protecting the safety of workers, local jobs and communities. Certification systems like AFS, and the forest managers who voluntarily commit to meet the standard, therefore stand for sustainability.

AFS Ltd is a not-for-profit public company and a Standards Development Organisation (SDO) accredited by the Accreditation Board for Standards Development Organisations (ABSDO). As an accredited SDO AFS Ltd develops and maintains two Australian Standards, one for forest management (AS4708) and one for the chain of custody of certified wood and forest products (AS4707). These standards are recognised as Australian Standards because they have been developed and are maintained in accordance with Standards Australia procedures.

The AFS was written and is reviewed by a Technical Reference Committee made up of people with relevant expertise and representing a broad range of organisations with an interest in sustainable forest management. The AFS is currently being reviewed consistent with the Standards Australia procedures which require that all Standards be regularly reviewed to ensure that they are current. We welcome Planet Ark's involvement in the review process but it is just one of some twenty organisations represented on the Committee. The Committee is required to achieve a consensus about the content and wording of the Standard and no one member can dictate the content of the Standard or control the process.

Drafts of the standard are made available for public comment and all comment received is considered by the Committee. The Committee released a revised draft standard for public comment in March 2012 and the comment period closed in May. Approximately thirty detailed submissions were received from stakeholders. The majority of the submissions were broadly supportive of the content of the revised draft Standard but they included more than 500 specific, individual comments or suggestions about how particular clauses in the draft could be further improved. The Committee

met in late June to consider the submissions and is undertaking further redrafting before releasing a refined draft for a second comment period.

The prescribed review process ensures that the Australian Forestry Standard is regularly updated, which means that it recognises environmental, social and economic requirements and reflects best practice in forest management. It is enriched by diverse stakeholder participation from representatives of industry, employee organisations, indigenous and heritage bodies, environmental advocacy groups, scientific and professional bodies and the general public.

The Australian Forestry Standard and the certification system of which it is the key part have also been assessed and endorsed by the international Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), the largest forest certification system in the world. PEFC also requires that the systems which it endorses meet strict requirements with respect to objectivity, transparency, consistency and stakeholder consultation and input.

The AFS is available for use by companies on a voluntary basis. While endorsement and support of the Standard by any particular interested stakeholder group is welcome, this is not necessary or fundamental to the operation of the Standard. Copies of the full Standard are freely available and it can be judged on its merits by any stakeholder.

All certifications against the AFS are issued by independent, certification bodies accredited by the Joint Accreditation System of Australia & New Zealand (JAS-ANZ). All accredited certification bodies and JAS-ANZ have complaints procedures which allow stakeholders to raise complaints about both certifications against the standard, and accreditation of certification bodies.

AFS Ltd welcomes and encourages participation in the development of the Standard.

We would also be more than happy to provide a briefing to any of your journalists and we will endeavour to respond to any questions asked of us provided we are afforded the courtesy of adequate notice and fair treatment.

If you would like to discuss this matter further please don't hesitate to contact me on 0419 628 873 or Richard Stanton, AFS Ltd National Secretary, at richard.stanton@forestrystandard.org.au or 02 6122 9000.

I have taken the liberty of providing a copy of this letter to our members and stakeholders as your program has raised substantial comments and questions from them.

Yours sincerely



Geoff Gorrie
Chairman

Cc: Colin Blair CEO, Standards Australia
Fred Reynolds, Secretary, Accreditation Board for Standards Development Organisations (ABSDO)