

Speech by Mr Geoff Gorrie
Chair, Australian Forestry Standard Limited
The Launch of the 2007 Australian Forestry Standard

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by welcoming the Hon Eric Abetz, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, Martin Ferguson MP, my fellow Board Members of Australian Forestry Standard Limited, members of the AFS Technical Reference Committee, and welcome distinguished guests to this important day for forestry in Australia. You have all had some part in getting us to where we are today.

Indeed, today is a watershed for sustainable forest management as we mark the recognition of the 2007 Australian Forestry Standard as a full Australian Standard.

This recognition means that for the first time, Australia has a truly national standard for sustainable forest management for native forest and plantations, for large companies and small operators alike.

This is great news for the industry, workers and consumers.

The fact that we are celebrating the granting of the full Australian Standard status is due to the foresight, leadership and hard work of many of you in the room today.

It's worth spending a moment to reflect on the work that has gone into getting to today.

Following the release of the 2003 AFS, there has been an extensive 3 year review process aimed at further improving and refining the requirements for forest management practices.

This review process - conducted by the AFS to the guidelines used by Standards Australia - has been the most rigorous process ever undertaken in sustainable forestry management in Australia since the Regional Forest Agreements.

The review focused on: the practical implementation of the standard, a scientific review by the AFS Technical Reference Committee, and had extensive feedback and input from wide range of stakeholders from the forest management, wood processing and manufacturing, unions, contractors, forest users, forestry professionals, environmental and Indigenous groups.

I must acknowledge the particular role that the independent forest and environmental scientists and The Ecological Society of Australia played in this

review. Their intellectual rigour and challenges to the AFS Technical Reference Committee through the process has delivered real and tangible improvements to the 2003 AFS.

These include:

- **That broad-scale conversion of native forests to plantation or non-vegetation cover is now not allowed under the AFS;**
- Restrictions in the use of chemicals are in place;
- Summary reports on certification audits are now publicly available;
- The recognition of environmental, economic, social and Indigenous interests at the forest management plan level;
- There is recognition that forests are part of a wider array of land users in catchments, and,
- There is a more comprehensive listing of definitions to support the nine criteria and forty requirements of the Australian Forestry Standard.

These improvements and the recognition by Standards Australia mean that certification under The Australian Forestry Standard is the most credible way to ensure that wood has been produced to the highest of environmental standards.

But importantly this certification also has international recognition.

The Australian Forest Certification Scheme has been endorsed by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes – in an industry that loves acronyms, commonly referred to as the PEFC – giving it the backing of the world's largest certification scheme with over 204 million hectares of certified forests.

As of July 2007, 8.56 million hectares of Australian native forests and plantations had been certified under our scheme, which as an endorsed PEFC scheme makes us the fourth ranked country in terms of certified forests.

Also, the UK Government's recognition of the PEFC, through its Central Point of Expertise on Timber Procurement, give products that are certified under the AFCS the recognition that they are from sustainable timber and legally comply with the UK Government's Timber Procurement Policy.

This international recognition should give confidence and assurance to domestic producers and manufacturers and encourage them to further increase the amount of certified, sustainable timber.

The expertise that has been demonstrated in Australia has been also recognised by our Asian neighbours, and we are beginning to work with them in projects in Japan and China, and remain firmly committed to further developing the penetration of the PEFC into the Asian and sub-continental nations. We also

look to New Zealand to one day follow our lead for a national forest certification scheme under the PEFC.

But, as important as this milestone today is, there is still much work to be done.

Whilst we have concentrated on the development of the AFCS, it is now time to work with industry to promote the benefits of forest certification in the supply chain.

Consumer expectations of environmental management continue to rise and we can confidently predict that demand in the market will grow for timber from sustainably managed forests.

The development of this Australian Standard means that we are positioned ahead of the market and will be able to respond effectively to this emerging demand.

We need to work with industry to promote the value of the AFCS, so that consumers understand the benefits of buying products made with certified timber and that industry benefits from the potential premium that these products hopefully can expect.

This means that we will need to boost our marketing and promotional efforts and it is likely that we will look to establish a consumer brand.

And whilst we are well aware that we exist in a competitive environment, we will vigorously correct any misinformation that is spread by our competitors.

We firmly believe that the main game is to increase the amount of certified forest area in Australia and globally and this is the one action that will have most benefit for improving environmental standards in forestry and provide consumers with confidence when they purchase timber products.

This is common sense and it's now time for others to acknowledge this.

We are legal and sustainable and those who support legal and sustainable certification schemes should support our scheme.

We also need to ensure that there is understanding within the wider industry of the AFCS – indeed we need to work to ensure that all schemes which seek to promote good building and other promotional practices recognise timber certified under the AFCS.

So, to conclude, I would like to express my thanks again for the support that you as individuals and as organisations have given to the Australian Forestry Standard.

And although we have come far and done much, I promise you that there is still more to do.

Thank You.