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CoC is nothing more than SOP

Two merchants find certification an easy task

TWO Queensland timber merchants who have converted to chain of custody certification want to send a clear message to the wood supply trade: the system is simply SOP – standard operating procedure.

“Not now, but soon, merchants will face an increasing demand for certified wood; already we are quoting ahead on commercial contracts that specify chain of custody,” says Peter Watt of Watts Wood and Mouldings Pty Ltd at Salisbury, a Brisbane southside suburb.

Justin Lanyon, managing director of 5 Star Timbers at Stapylton on the Brisbane-Gold Coast corridor, agrees, adding: “It wasn’t that hard at all, to be honest. Certification involved very little extra work for us; the requirements were simply the standard operating procedures of any business.”

Both merchants were certified for AS 4707 chain of custody after auditing by Simon Dorries, general manager of the Engineered Wood Products Association of Australasia.

“There was little disruption to our business; Simon completed the approval in half a day and reckoned it was one of his easiest audits,” Peter Watt said.

“This was because all our systems were in place and we’d done the lead-up work first, which was always my principle aim of achieving certification with a minimum of fuss.

“If you have a basic auditing system and follow the normal accounting procedures, it’s pretty easy to track along the supply chain.”

Watts Wood and Mouldings, a compact five-man operation, stocks a wide selection of hardwoods and softwoods, mostly for the furniture and commercial building trades.

“Most of our hardwoods are AFS certified, like spotted gum drawn from a sustainable resource by our suppliers the Parkside Group and Hurfords. In fact, all of our Australian eucalypts, including Victorian ash and jarrah, are certified.”

Mr Watt said South African plantation timbers, backed by forest certification papers, had also earned an Australian CoC brand, because of their alliance with the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

“Although we don’t have a lot of inquiry for certified wood yet, four new clients in recent months placed orders knowing we were taking on chain of custody.”

Mr Watt said his timber stocks were not physically separated as certified or non-certified wood, but all packs were tagged appropriately. “It’s the way we structure our system in each storage bay.”

Justin Lanyon said it was easy to adapt to a chain of custody system.

“We had everything pretty well set up before the audit. We only needed to change the computer’s descriptions of our timber, so we can now easily determine certified from non-certified packs at the click of a button,” he said.

Mr Lanyon admitted hardwoods, which were sourced from several mills, might not have AFS certification. “A problem with the smaller milling operators, who do sell good wood – and it’s about as ‘green’ as you can get – is that they just don’t have the time, manpower or resources, and perhaps neither the inclination, to certify their product. They are happy enough to cut board for anyone.

“But although risk assessment shows it is coming from legal sources, we must be careful this doesn’t become the normal practice. There needs to be some kind of branding, but chain of custody is the best way to go.”

Mr Lanyon said an important point about chain of custody was that his timber operation had the policies and procedures in place and could assure exacting customers it had aspired to certification to give them peace of mind.

"We are aware some timber merchants avoid CoC certification 'because of the extra work' and because they are buying timber from an already certified supply source, so I can see where they are coming from. As more and more suppliers get certified there is going to be a belief that there is less need for merchants to get certified.

"But we are going to end up with a situation where those at the top of the 'food chain' are going to be certified, and they will reap the benefits from government work.

"So I go back to the whole concept of chain of custody and why we adopted it – that is the chain doesn't get broken and this removes the possibility for entry of any illegal product along the stream.

"Right now, we can give a guarantee that this chain has not been broken – and it can't be tampered with. I am sure this message will be pushed down to merchants from suppliers at the top of the chain.

"But, honestly, for our operation, there was very little extra work for us in the CoC audit and little cost. It takes only a short time to set up and it pretty well feeds on itself with an occasional re-visit through the audit process. It's a living, breathing document."

[Independent third-party certification bodies, such as EWPA, are quoting auditing fees of about \$800 a day with an annual fee of \$1000 per certified site].

Set up 2½ years ago, 5 Star Timbers is a relatively new player in the timber retail market supplying landscape, structural, flooring, doors and mouldings along the eastern seaboard to Coffs Harbour and up as far as Mackay in north Queensland.

Owner-directors include Justin Lanyon's wife Jenny, father Colin, and Wayne Culph.

The staff of seven are thankful to be linked into Colin Lanyon's 45 years in the industry which includes hardwood and softwood sawmill management, preservation plant management, and timber merchandising.

Chief executive of the Australian Forestry Standard Kayt Watts said both Peter Watt and Justin Lanyon had shown foresight and achievement in obtaining chain of custody certification for their companies.

"They are correct when they say CoC is nothing more than standard operating procedure," Ms Watts said.

"While CoC may still not be considered by many as standard procedure, these two merchants have shown best business practice by engaging in the process now and demonstrating their corporate and social commitment to sustainable forest management."

Ms Watts said her on-going visits to merchants and explanation of the process had made many of them aware that CoC fitted into their normal operations at no greater cost than any other business improvement.

Note: Chain of custody (CoC) is the process of tracking wood and forest products that originate from certified forests and pass through all phases of ownership, transportation, and manufacturing from the defined forest area to the final product and delivery to the end consumer.

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NOTES

Australian Forestry Standard Limited is a Standards Development Organisation and a not-for-profit public company registered in July 2003. The company owns the standard development functions and manages the elements of the **Australian Forest Certification Scheme**. The Australian Forest Certification Scheme (AFCS) will:

- provide Australian and overseas consumers with an independent, internationally recognised third-party certification scheme for forest management in Australia
- promote a culture of 'continuous improvement' of the sustainable forest management practices in Australia
- support a market for forest products that are a result of sustainable forest management practices and value adding processes that maintain the integrity of the source forest certification and promote the broader environmental benefits of using wood-based
- products.

PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes) PEFC is a framework for the mutual recognition of credible national or regional forest certification schemes that have been developed based on internationally recognised requirements for sustainable forest management. Since its launch in 1999, PEFC has become the largest forest certification umbrella organisation covering national schemes from all over the world, delivering hundreds of millions of tonnes of wood to the processing industry and then on to the market place from over 200 million hectares of certified forests. PEFC has strong grass roots support from many stakeholders including the forestry sector, governments, trade associations, trade unions and non-governmental organisations.

Forest Certification Forest certification is a process, which provides an assurance mechanism to purchasers of wood and paper products that the wood used in the products comes from sustainably managed forests. Sustainably managed forests are those whose management implements performance standards based on internationally agreed environmental, social and economic requirements.