Forest certification includes Forest Management Certification and Chain of Custody Certification. Certification is increasingly required to access markets, however it is expensive to achieve and then maintain, adding costs to forest managers. There are several certification options available to Tasmanian private forest growers and while all industrially managed forests are certified, only small areas of non-industrially managed private forests (NIPF) are certified. There are certification options available to NIPF owners that PFT promotes, and PFT is supporting the development of a group certification option not yet widely available in Tasmania.

Forest management certification is a system of private voluntary standards for sustainable forest management developed and managed by independent bodies (i.e. ‘third-parties’). Owners of forests with certified forest management accreditation agree to abide by accrediting forest management standards. An enterprise’s compliance with the standard, regularly audited by accredited certifying bodies, flows through to on-ground practices. Chain of custody certification schemes operate in conjunction with forest management certification. They allow custodianship of certified wood to be tracked from the forest to the products being sold through harvest, manufacture and retail stages. A label on the end-product provides independent assurance to consumers that a wood-based product has come from sustainably managed forests.

In Australia, we have two main performance based forest certification schemes, Responsible Wood (previously the Australian Forestry Standard) or AS 4708, and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification. Responsible Wood is, in turn, recognised by the international mutual recognition scheme ‘Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification’ (PEFC). Both these schemes have a chain of custody component. Participation by forest owners and processors in either scheme is voluntary.

Tasmania’s industrial forest owners have independently achieved forest management certification by one or both schemes, resulting in all of Tasmania’s industrially owned forests being certified. Industrial forest managers have the sophistication and resources needed to independently achieve and maintain certification.

Few NIPF owners in Tasmania are large enough to justify going alone with certification with only a few thousand hectares of NIPF being certified. However, some NIPF owners are certified by default when industrial forest owners have retained a legally definable management control over the forest on their land and include it in their total certified forest management area. A typical example would be share farms, in which large forestry companies such as Norske Skog or Forico have management control as well as an equity interest in the trees in conjunction with the landowner. Tasmania is also fortunate to have some smaller forest management companies who have forest management certification and the forests of owners who engage with these private sector organisations will become certified under their multi-site wood broker umbrella.

NIPF owners may also access markets requiring certification by collaborating with certified mills/suppliers. The chain of custody aspect of both certification schemes can allow a modest proportion of non-certified wood from non-controversial sources to be included under a ‘mix claim’ where a mixture or certified and non-certified wood is sold. The availability of this option depends on the chain of custody arrangements of the wood purchaser who has either ownership or management control of sourced wood.

Responsible Wood has the capacity to allow wood to be sold as Responsible Wood Controlled Sources, but not with the Responsible Wood/PEFC logos, where the wood purchaser confirms that wood is sourced from uncertified but non-controversial sources. A due diligence process must be undertaken to demonstrate such wood is sourced from non-controversial sources.

FSC has a Controlled Wood standard that requires FSC Chain of Custody to support the Controlled Wood standard. FSC Controlled Wood cannot be sold as a certified final product but needs to be mixed with FSC...
Forest Management Certified wood and sold as a mixed claim. FSC Controlled Wood is a preliminary step toward FSC Forest Management Certification.

The above options, which relinquish a component of forest or wood sales management, does not suit some owners of private forests who are ‘hands-on’ and capable managers and marketers of their estate’s forest products. For such individuals, an independent group scheme can allow them to become certified while maintaining management and marketing control of their estates (albeit within the constraint of the schemes policies and procedures, and wood marketing that they require), which is a gap in the current Tasmanian certification market. In group schemes it is the ‘group manager’ that is certified rather than individual forest owners (or ‘group members’). Group members’ forests become a component of the total certified forest area of the group manager and only a sample of members’ forest is audited annually. The group manager establishes and oversees processes and procedures, maintains group records and overall manages the membership and their performance.

An independent group scheme, ideally owned and controlled by the group members, also ensures certification costs are fully transparent. Once established, additional forest owners, including owners of smaller forests would find it easier to join, allowing the high fixed cost of certification to be reduced on hectare per hectare basis by spreading the certification costs over more hectares.

PFT has largely completed the template documentation needed for a Tasmanian independent group forest management certification option under Responsible Wood. This documentation is available to any party, through PFT, who are interested in exploring establishing an independent group certification scheme.

Please contact PFT for any additional information.