

Video transcript: Regulating Victoria's Native Forests



Audit objective

In this audit, we looked at how effectively the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (or DELWP's) Office of the Conservation Regulator (OCR) regulates timber harvesting operations.

Specifically, we considered whether it monitors and enforces compliance with timber harvesting regulations focusing on its forest report assessments and investigations.

What we examined

We examined OCR's data collection and systems, its operational and investigative processes, and how it reports on and evaluates its performance.

What we concluded

OCR has made progress in improving regulation of timber harvesting operations. However, it has further work to do to address the weaknesses in its systems, processes and reporting to support strong regulatory outcomes and improve its effectiveness in regulating timber harvesting in Victoria's native forests.

Why this audit is important

Victoria's native forests provide environmental, health and wellbeing, cultural, and socio-economic benefits. Effective timber harvesting regulation is crucial to ensure that this resource is protected for future generations.

Background

In response to a 2018 *Independent Review into Timber Harvesting Regulation*, DELWP established OCR in 2019 to regulate timber harvesting.

OCR has not yet sufficiently developed its systems

OCR does not always have access to sufficient data to determine whether noncompliance has occurred in its assessments of complaints.

While OCR is working to improve its intelligence system, there are deficiencies in data quality and completeness of long-term data. These deficiencies mean that OCR's systems do not fully support intelligence-led decision-making.

Operational risks and gaps

Weaknesses in OCR's operations and procedures limit how effectively and consistently it assesses and investigates timber harvesting compliance.

OCR's use of enforcement powers is limited. This is partly because it has not explored all its available options and partly due to the lack of timber harvesting enforcement options, such as infringement notices.

OCR has provided advice to government about the need to improve its regulatory tools.

No comprehensive performance monitoring and reporting

OCR does not adequately monitor the effectiveness of its timber harvesting compliance enforcement actions and does not effectively review unsuccessful cases or identify any limitations it faces to improve its future operations.

OCR does not have a finalised monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework. This means that OCR cannot assure government and the public that it is effectively and efficiently reducing the risk of regulatory failure and achieving its outcomes.

What we recommended

We made 10 recommendations to OCR: 2 about improving its data and its intelligence and management systems; 6 about reviewing and improving its policies and procedures so that they are consistently risk-based; and 2 about implementing a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework and revising its performance indicators.

More information

To find out more, or to read our full report, go to audit.vic.gov.au