

This guideline aims to assist planners and Forest Practices Officers (FPOs) responsible for visual landscape planning and evaluation of proposed forestry operations during the preparation of a forest practices plan (FPP).

The *Forest Practices Code* sets out the requirements for visual landscape management in the forest practices system. General principles include:

- *Forest practices will have regard to the sensitivity of visual landscapes and amenity values to alteration by forest practices.*
- *The impact of forest practices on visual landscapes will consider public sensitivity, the distance of forest practices from the viewer, and the scenic quality of the local area.*
- *Forest practices generally cannot, and need not, be hidden from view.*

The *Visual Landscape Evaluation Sheet* sets out the considerations and recording to be followed during planning. All operations evaluated will consider potential viewpoints and landscape management objectives, with some operations requiring further work based on their visibility or potential impact on scenic quality.

The stages of visual landscape evaluation, described in detail in following sections, are:

1. Viewpoint identification and objectives
2. Visual review
3. Predictive visual analysis
4. Management and adopted objectives
5. Prescriptions.

An Appendix contains a quick-reference summary of relevant definitions and ratings.

1. Viewpoint identification and objectives

Begin by searching for locations, called viewpoints, where the proposed operation area could be seen from. Look especially for sites of high public use that will require less impactful visual outcomes.

Local knowledge and research can locate promoted scenic lookouts, recreational facilities, roads and towns as potential viewpoints. Useful electronic tools include a GIS seen area or viewshed analysis generated from a range of points within an operation area (low/high elevation, midpoint and outer ranges of operation), or a 3D visualisation program's bird's-eye view out from the operation area.

It is important to thoroughly canvas the range of viewpoints at this stage, and an on-ground check of potential viewpoints is really effective to understand the viewer. Record an accurate viewpoint location using coordinates, give it a name for quick reference, and note its distance from the proposed operation. Also photograph the view of the operation and its panoramic context for use in any later analysis.

Selecting a viewpoint representative of a particular viewing experience (e.g., midway along a road's viewing length) is usually adequate to evaluate the potential issues, but sometimes a complex viewpoint could be analysed with multiple sample points (e.g., closest/furthest points, winter/summer use).

Each viewpoint will be evaluated against a series of criteria.

a. Distance zone

Categorise the viewpoint's distance from the proposed operation.

Foreground (fg): 0 to 1 km - Colour contrast and textural detail are most clearly perceived.

Middleground (mg): 1 km to 6 km -Links between different parts of the landscape become clearly apparent (e.g., a series of hills is seen as a range, or riverine plant communities signify the drainage pattern of a broad valley).

Background (bg): 6 km to 16 km - Textures are no longer visible, but mountain and valley forms, skylines and ridgelines and shades of blues and greys become important. Background may extend to 25 km for remote, mountainous, natural country viewpoints.

Source: Visual Landscape Manual pp.52–3

b. Public sensitivity

Public sensitivity ratings are affected by the observer's expectations, the number of observers and the duration of viewing.

Public sensitivity level criteria

Level 1 – High sensitivity

- Primary transportation systems of national and state importance. These include state highways, classified tourist roads and routes, and tourist railways
- Other roads with more than 200 vehicles per day and cultural, historical or scenic significance
- Roads to recreational destinations with over 100 vehicles per day in peak seasons or on peak weekends
- Primary recreational waterways and routes (i.e. rivers, lakes, reservoirs, ocean)
- Walking or cycling tracks, roads and use areas of national or state significance in National Parks, State Reserves and wilderness zones
- Primary, high-use recreational areas such as camp grounds, picnic grounds and visitor centres
- Cities, towns and residential areas/regions with sensitive communities and high levels of concern for scenic quality and landscape change.

Level 2 – Moderate sensitivity

- Secondary roads with 100 to 200 vehicles per day
- Secondary roads to recreational destinations (such as trailheads or camp grounds), including forest access roads, with 25 to 100 vehicles per day in peak seasons, or on weekends
- Recreational, cultural or scenic sites and viewpoints of regional significance
- Walking or cycling tracks of regional significance
- Secondary waterways, areas and routes for fishing, boating or recreation
- Secondary, low-use recreational areas, such as camp areas and picnic areas
- Villages or residential areas with moderate concern for scenery and landscape change.

Level 3 – Low sensitivity

- Forest and other roads with up to 25 recreational vehicles per day on weekends in peak seasons
- Walking or cycling tracks of local significance
- Recreational areas with only very occasional use and of local significance.

Level 4 – Very low sensitivity

- Roads with fewer than two recreational vehicles per day
- Seldom-used forest tracks.

Source: Visual Landscape Manual p.51

A viewpoint may feature sensitivities from different levels and is generally categorized according to the most prevalent use. Use differences identified here (e.g., a level 4 residential road that becomes a level 1 site during an annual public festival weekend) might indicate that a duplicate viewpoint analysing a specific use difference will add value to the analysis.

c. Scenic quality

This rating evaluates the context or scene around the proposed operation as a baseline to any potential change. It recognizes that complexity in a scene tends to be well-regarded, and that moving or distinctive visual elements attract attention.

Factors affecting scenic quality include:

- Variety and diversity of features in the seen area
- Features with contrasting, moving or distinctive elements that attract attention
- Naturalness of the landform, vegetation and waterform that prompts expectations.

Note that naturalness and scenic quality are not always equivalent; highly altered landscapes may still have high scenic quality.

Detailed ‘frame of reference’ descriptions are given in the *Visual Landscape Manual* for Landscape Character Type regions around Tasmania. Identify the region from p. 160 and then review the relevant scenic quality rating descriptions for this in Appendix B (pp. 172–183). Where a scene contains multiple features of different ratings, choose the most common rating.

General definitions of the **scenic quality rating** categories are:
High — feature areas with more outstanding, unusual or visually diverse aspects
Moderate — areas with features and variety commonly present in the character type
Low — extensive areas lacking in features or variety
Source: Visual Landscape Manual p.49

d. Skyline affected

Use field observation or computer analysis to identify whether the operation reaches or crosses a skyline, this being the visible boundary between canopy and sky, influenced by a depth of vegetation growing from before, atop and beyond the ridgeline. Further information is available in FPA’s *Tech Note 07-04 Management of Skylines in Dry and High-altitude Forests*.

e. Landscape Management Objective

Using the following table, cross-reference the ratings developed in steps a–c above to identify a Landscape Management Objective (LMO) category for each viewpoint. This guides the management of any change to the quality of the scene.

Landscape Management Objective		Distance Zone & Sensitivity Level								
		fg 1	mg 1	bg 1	fg 2	mg 2	bg 2	fg 3	mg 3, bg 3	all 4
Scenic quality class	H	Inevident	Inevident	Inevident	Inevident	Apparent	Apparent	Apparent	Apparent	Dominant
	M	Inevident	Apparent	Apparent	Apparent	Apparent	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant
	L	Apparent	Apparent	Apparent	Apparent	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant

Source: Visual Landscape Manual p.54

This LMO category recommends the degree to which alteration in the landscape may be visually evident to the casual observer from a public viewpoint, as per the definitions following.

Landscape Management Objective (LMO) definitions:

Inevident – fully retain scenic quality (achieve within 1 year). Changes will be:

- (i) Difficult to see
- (ii) Small in scale and or muted in contrast
- (iii) Natural in appearance.

Apparent – partially retain scenic quality (achieve within 2 years). Changes will be:

- (i) Easy to see
- (ii) Small to medium in scale
- (iii) Natural and not rectilinear or geometric in shape.

Dominant – scenic quality may be modified. Changes will be:

- (i) Very easy to see
- (ii) Large in scale and natural in its appearance and design, or
- (iii) Small to medium in scale but with strong angular characteristics

Source: Visual Landscape Manual pp 42-43, 54

Visual review, potentially with predictive visual analysis, will need to be completed for any viewpoints with an affected skyline or an Inevident or Apparent LMO – continue the evaluation process for these viewpoints. For any viewpoint with a Dominant LMO and an unaffected skyline, consideration of visual review and predictive visual analysis is not required, and these viewpoints can continue their evaluation in the Management section of the Evaluation Sheet.

2. Visual review

The stage of visual review seeks information to understand the factors contributing to visual outcomes for the proposed operation, which include the scene or context of the surrounding landscape, the sensitivity and experience of the viewer at the viewpoint, and the potential visual effects created by the forest practices of the proposed operation. Further information on factors to consider is available in the *Visual Landscape Manual*.

a. Viewer

Describe the opportunity and conditions affecting the viewer(s), including their familiarity and expectations, position relative to the operation (above, level, below), viewing time available and any variables like season or weather that could influence viewer attention.

b. Scene

Describe the appearance of the current landscape, noting features that contribute to its scenic quality (landform, vegetation, waterform) and elements of the scene (line, form, colour or texture).

c. Forest practice operational effects

Describe the potential visual effects of the forest practice(s) on the proposed operation area, including shape and lines, scale, soil colour, canopy texture change, understorey removal, skyline thinning or steps, and colour or movement of machinery.

3. Predictive visual analysis

Viewpoints with an Inevident LMO should have predictive visual analysis completed to enable confident prediction of the visual effects of the proposed operation, and evaluation of potential management options. Viewpoints with an Apparent LMO may also benefit from additional analysis.

Predictive visual analysis uses sketches on photos and/or 3D simulations from key viewpoints to help predict the expected visual change from the proposed operations. This illustrates aspects such as viewing

exposure, lines or rectilinear shapes, scale, strong visual contrasts etc. Care should be taken to verify the appearance of simulations (e.g., modelled tree heights may not be accurate) using comparison with photographs taken from the same viewpoint. Effects may also change over time (e.g., greening up of site, contrasting canopy colours).

This document does not explain the detail of predictive visual analysis as there are various technologies available. Seek advice from the Forest Practices Authority for resources.

After visual review and analysis has identified the factors influencing the visual outcomes at each viewpoint for the time during and after the operation, management options are explored. The aim is to achieve or better the level of change recommended by the identified LMO for each viewpoint.

Factors detracting from a LMO can be addressed using a wide variety of techniques to improve visual outcomes. References assisting with these include the *Forest Practices Code*, Chapter 6 of the *Visual Landscape Manual* and *Technical Note 07-04 Management of Skylines in Dry and High-altitude Forests*. FPA also conducts training on Visual Landscape Management as part of its FPO Course.

4. Management and adopted objective

Reviewing potential landscape management techniques using predictive visual analysis or in-field checks can allow confidence to incorporate these into FPP prescriptions (e.g., boundary location, screening retention) or strategic planning (e.g., scheduling, sectioning of an operational area).

Often a practice or measure can be adopted with confidence for a suitable outcome. Where an operational aspect could have significant visual implications, it may be prudent to incorporate monitoring or progressive checks to ensure a management prescription achieves its intent.

The *Forest Practices Code* has specific requirements for some types of operations, as follows:

Forest Practices Code requirements for visual landscape:

- Is the proposed operation located within landscape protection provisions under a planning scheme (check LISTmap at www.thelist.tas.gov.au and relevant Scheme at www.iplan.tas.gov.au)?
→ Consult local government
- Is the proposed operation a road, quarry or permanent firebreak?
→ New roads and quarries in visually sensitive locations (level 1 or 2 public sensitivity) and/or in steep country should be located and designed to limit their visual exposure. Permanent firebreaks and access tracks will have minimal visual impact.
- Is the proposed operation in steep country >20 degrees?
→ Clearfell coupes in native forest should be dispersed in space and time, in the context of local topography, to manage the impact on the visual landscape
- Is the proposed operation a clearfell?
→ Consider the strong visual contrast with surrounding forests that is created by clearfelling, and plan visibility, shape and size of coupes to be guided by existing patterns and features in the surrounding landscape. Avoid straight edges and box-like shapes especially in native forest. Minimise skyline disruption. Minimise the level of visual change from sensitive viewpoints from highways, lookouts, walking trails and townships. Disperse in space and time.
- Is the proposed operation establishing new plantation?
→ Reduce the prominence of new plantations in the surrounding landscape and maintain visual variety.

Note that trees which will remain after adjacent harvesting under an FPP will need to be evaluated through an FPA *Risk Assessment Form* prior to FPP certification.

For each identified viewpoint, explain the expected visual results from the operation with planned management practices and measures in place, and record the resulting LMO category (definitions as per p. 4 above) as an Adopted LMO (ALMO).

A more visible ALMO than the initial LMO may be acceptable to the FPO certifying an FPP, but would need to remain consistent with the *Forest Practices Code*. If an Inevident LMO is planned as a Dominant ALMO (two levels of change) then CFPO advice must be sought by contact through the Notifications Database with supporting information provided. A CFPO response will be provided.

5. Prescriptions

Record all prescriptions developed to manage visual landscape values for FPP or other management in the final box of the *Evaluation Sheet*.

Note that some visual management prescriptions may apply beyond the boundary of the FPP and are included to record non-FPP management that facilitates a planned outcome for the FPP, for example those applied through the sequencing or timing of Three Year Plans or in viewer or viewpoint management activities.

Landscape evaluation sheets and accompanying information and analysis will demonstrate planning processes and be kept as part of FPP documentation.

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	L	Apparent	Apparent	Apparent	Apparent	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant	Dominant