

Questions and answers to help clarify application of the Accountability Framework definition of deforestation in Australia

Prepared by the Accountability Framework initiative (AFi) Backbone Team
24 April 2024

[See also the AFi's [Operational Guidance on Applying the Definitions Related to Deforestation and Conversion](#) for additional guidance on applying the Accountability Framework's definitions in different contexts]

Clarification on: If land is used for livestock rearing but also has tree cover that fulfils the definition of forest, is it considered forest or agriculture? In such cases, is tree removal permissible under a no-deforestation policy?

Q: If land is used for livestock rearing but also has tree cover that fulfils the definition of forest, is it considered forest or agriculture?

A: In scenarios where livestock are grazed within a natural ecosystem (including natural forest, savannah, and grassland), the site is generally considered as a natural ecosystem. The AFi's definition of natural ecosystem includes more pristine ecosystems with little human impact as well as those that are human-managed or have suffered light to moderate degradation. A site used for livestock rearing is considered to have been deforested/converted if:

- i) the site has been cultivated or its principal vegetation has been replaced, for example by planting, seeding, or tending of non-native grasses for livestock fodder
- ii) the site has suffered severe and sustained degradation

Deforestation/conversion also occurs when a natural ecosystem is converted for production of annual or perennial crops, including nearly all agroforestry systems that produce commodities for market. Please refer to the AFi definition of agriculture and to Table 1 in the Operational Guidance on Applying the Definitions Related to Deforestation and Conversion.

Clarification on: Is the determination of deforestation done at a parcel level or at the level of a minimum patch size?

Q: If a parcel of land is predominantly under agricultural use, does that mean that tree clearing anywhere on that parcel is exempt from being considered deforestation?

A: No. Forest is identified at the patch level, using a minimum patch size of 0.5 hectares, as indicated in the forest definition. This is also the scale at which deforestation should be assessed. Deforestation occurs when land changes from natural forest to agriculture, or when natural forest suffers severe and sustained degradation. Regardless of the overall set of land uses on any given parcel, plot, or farm/ranch, if any contiguous forest patch in excess of the 0.5 hectare size threshold experiences such a change, it is generally considered deforestation.

Clarification on: What aspects of the generic global definition of forest may be subject to modification by localized definitions?

Q: In what ways may the generic AFi/FAO definition of forest potentially be modified for specific national or sub-national contexts? [Note: the AFi adopted the FAO's standard definition of the term forest.]

A: Quantitative thresholds (eg, for tree height or canopy cover) established in legitimate national or sub-national forest definitions may take precedence over the generic thresholds in the AFi/FAO definition. However, the essential differentiation between forest and agriculture, which is central to the AFi's definition of deforestation, is not subject to modification by context. Other key criteria for context-specific definitions to be considered compatible with the AFi definition are outlined on page 6 of the Operational Guidance on Applying the Definitions Related to Deforestation and Conversion.

It should be noted, however, that even where a context-specific definition is considered compatible with the Accountability Framework, it might not be compatible with other international requirements that use the FAO forest definition without allowance for context-specific adjustment of thresholds. The EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) is one example.

Clarification on: What type of process to develop localized definitions would be considered suitable and legitimate?

Q: What is considered a “legitimate national or sub-national forest definition” for which quantitative thresholds could take precedence over the generic thresholds in the AFi forest definition?

A: Such a definition must be widely recognized and widely used in the context to which it is intended to apply. Examples include definitions that are provided as part of national law or reflected within an official or otherwise sanctioned monitoring system. Context-specific definitions must also align with the Accountability Framework as alluded to in the prior answer.

Clarification on: Is a forest that experiences degradation through natural disasters considered deforestation?

Q: Is a forest that experiences degradation through natural disasters considered deforestation?

A: If a forest has experienced a natural disaster and is then subsequently converted into agricultural land (after the cut-off date), it would be considered deforestation. Conversely, if the affected forest is allowed to regenerate, it would not be deemed deforestation.

Any questions? Contact the AFi Backbone Team:
contact@accountability-framework.org