

Certification of Sustainable Forest Management

Forest Committee

The issue

Forest certification provides assurance that wood used in products comes from responsibly managed forests, taking equal account of economic, environmental and social impacts. The concept was invented in the wake of a rather disappointing “non-legally binding authoritative statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests” adopted in 1992 at the Earth Summit of Rio.

Environmental organizations established the first certification scheme under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) banner. Several other schemes followed focusing on specific regional conditions and other factors. Today, the second most prevalent system is the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

While certification was initially created to combat deforestation in the tropics, most certified forests are located in the Northern hemisphere, of which nearly 100 million m³ in Europe. In total, 8.3% (approximately 300 million hectares) of the world forests are certified and the annual actual supply of certified wood is close to 400 million m³. Chain of Custody certification makes it possible to trace the raw material along a chain from the forest to the end product, allowing the manufacturer to label the product as certified.

In addition to an increasing demand for certified goods from market players (e.g. publishers, printers), some policy developments have led governments to be increasingly involved in the certification arena, e.g. through FLEGT and Green Public Procurement.

Impacts on the industry

Forest certification is a contentious issue, particularly between the supporters of the different operating schemes.

This creates confusion and as a result companies are left with the following possibilities:

- Choose one scheme, with the risk of being criticised and/or not having sufficient supplies of certified raw material.
- Choose more than one scheme. This creates a better chance of meeting demand, but at a higher cost (double certification of chain of custody, double labelling etc.).
- Choose not to use any scheme until the conflict is sorted out.

Policies aimed at combating illegal logging (FLEGT), as well as the EU Directive on Green Public procurement, and the very recent renewable energy and biofuels policies of the EU, have placed forest certification at the core of Member States’ forest and wood-related products policies. There is a real risk that governments will take preferential positions vis-à-vis one or another system, hence restricting fair competition.

CEPI’s position

- Mutual acceptance. Stakeholders recognise that the certification schemes are different. However, CEPI advocates “fruitful coexistence” between the systems with the single, common goal of promoting sustainable forest management.
- CEPI supports all credible certification systems, notably FSC and PEFC. Having two fairly competing schemes is the best option to provide better forest management, continuous improvement of the systems, as well as stable procurement and operational conditions for the industry.
- CEPI does not support any discrimination between fibres certified through any particular system.
- Based on ICFPA’s Comparative Matrix of Forest Certification, there are many more similarities between the certification schemes than differences.
- There are well-managed forests that are not and will not be certified. Legislation, forest management plans and similar mechanisms aimed at assuring a certain level of sustainability should be recognized.
- The industry has a role to play to bring certification to parts of the world where it is the most needed.

Additional information

- Information on the Forest Certification at www.forestrycertification.info
- Position paper on Sustainable Forest Management (FOR/090/05 final)
- Position paper on Forest Certification (FOR/063/05 final)
- Position paper of ICFPA on Sustainable Forest Management and on Forest certification
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