



Forest Certification

The UK paper industry has embraced and supported forest certification as an ideal way of providing independent validation of its commitment to use responsibly sourced raw material.

Background

In an attempt to counteract the alarming rate of tropical deforestation, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) agreed a set of Forest Principles. These were seen as the first step towards the ultimate objective of sustainable forest management of the world's forests. For the first time environmental, social and economic criteria were given equal status.

Witnessing the attention the Conference afforded to forest management issues, the timber products industry quickly developed a range of labels and slogans claiming sustainably managed sources. Some of these claims did not stand up to close scrutiny and consumers, who were initially reassured, became confused and subsequently suspicious of environmental labelling.

The concept of forest certification emerged from the environmental movement and involves the use of independent third party audits that confirm (or not) well-managed forestry practices. The process was extended to Chain of Custody certification which tracks the product back to the forest source and enables verified on-product claims to be made.

Forest certification was given a major boost by the establishment of the UK based 1995 Group. This buyers group, which included a number of major retailers, made a public commitment that by 1995 its members would only purchase timber products from certified forests. The 1995 target proved to be over-ambitious and, as the deadline approached, the Group re-launched itself as the 1995+ Group. The UK has the 5th largest paper market in the world, but it imports over 60% of its paper requirements. The 1995+ Group was therefore able to exert considerable global market pressure and the number of buyers groups mushroomed. This led to the formation of the Global Forest & Trade Network (GFTN) whose participants, as at July 2007, have annual forest products sales exceeding \$42 billion per annum.

Forest certification is also being used by UK and other European governments as part of their timber procurement policies.

In the UK it is stipulated that government departments must buy timber related products only from legal and

sustainable sources. The Central Point of Expertise on Timber Procurement (CPET) has been established and has developed a process for establishing whether or not timber has been legally and sustainably sourced. As part of this process five forest certification schemes were audited to determine whether or not they met the Government's requirements. Initially, two schemes were endorsed as meeting the criteria for sustainability as well as legality: the Canadian National Standard on Sustainable Forest (CSA) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

In August 2005 it was announced that two more certification schemes, the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC) and the North American Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI), had adopted new standards and would be added to the list of schemes endorsed.

This development, together with the robustness of the CPET process, was important and was warmly welcomed by the paper industry. There are two international forestry certification schemes (FSC and PEFC) their advocates come from significant, but different, stakeholder groups. FSC has the support of a number of international environmental groups, most particularly WWF, whereas owners of small forests, who collectively supply a substantial amount of wood to the paper industry, have generally preferred to be housed under the PEFC umbrella.

There has been immense competition for supremacy between the two initiatives which many believe has been a distraction from the original objective of protecting vulnerable forests and has diluted the market potential for certified timber products. The reality is that neither FSC nor PEFC has been able to harness the support of all the major stakeholder groups and, as long as this is the case, papermakers and buyers will need to be certified under more than one scheme if the demand for certified product is to be met. The UK Government initiative has done much to further the role of forest certification and it has demonstrated in a logical, inclusive and transparent way, that it is possible to specify a number of credible schemes.

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) (www.fsc.org)

FSC is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO). It was founded in 1993 with the aim of establishing a single global

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forest certification body. It had the support of the 1995+ Group, a number of environmental organisations and social non-governmental organisations.

FSC does not certify forests; its role is to evaluate, accredit and monitor its overriding international principles and criteria. National standards are developed by FSC working groups comprising representatives from all the relevant stakeholder groups.

FSC has now accredited 16 organisations to certify forests managed in accordance with its principles and criteria in Canada, France, Germany, Italy, South Africa, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Mexico, Russia, UK, and the USA. Over 90 million hectares of forest in more than 82 countries have now been certified by FSC accredited auditors.

FSC offers a range of on-product logos that can appear on products with Chain of Custody certification.

It has also introduced a Controlled Wood Standard that enables companies that mix certified and non-certified wood to demonstrate the probity of the non-certified element.

Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) (www.pefc.org)

PEFC was launched in June 1999 as a forest industry initiative supported primarily by owners of small European forests.

It facilitates the mutual recognition of national forest certification initiatives that deliver a similar level of assurance. It enables countries, or regions, to develop schemes that cater for their own particular forest types, conditions and ownership structures. The PEFC scheme is based on independent third party auditing and on regional certification levels. All member countries and their stakeholders can participate in voting on whether or not they will mutually recognise the applicant scheme.

Certification schemes that seek to be recognised by the PEFC council and use the logo must fulfil all PEFC Council requirements.

33 independent international schemes have signed up to PEFC. Over 201 million hectares have been audited in the 22 countries that have undergone the PEFC assessment process. The remainder are at various stages within the process.

Most national certification schemes are derivatives of either the FSC or PEFC schemes. The following initiatives are the three major bespoke exceptions:

1 UK Woodlands Assurance Scheme – UKWAS (www.ukwas.org.uk)

UKWAS is a certification standard, not a certification scheme, and it can be used to certify to either FSC or PEFC criteria. It was launched in 1999 after a consensus process that involved forestry, environmental and social as well as FSC and PEFC representatives.

It has played a key role in improving forestry management practices in the UK.

The total certified area in the UK in 2007 is 1.21 million hectares (44%). This includes all Forestry Commission woodland.

2 Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) – USA (www.sfiprogram.org)

SFI was adopted by the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA) in 1994 and launched in 1995. It is a system that involves a number of elements including forest principles, responsible practices and measurement.

Participation in the programme became a condition of AF&PA membership from 1st January 1996. A number of members were subsequently asked to leave the association because they were unable to meet the SFI standard.

SFI became fully independent on 1 January 2007 when SFI Inc, a not-for-profit organisation was established. The programme has 219 participants and nearly 54 million hectares in USA and Canada have been certified to its standard.

It has a variety of labels for those with Chain of Custody certification for retailers, printers, publishers, merchants and others.

SFI is a PEFC member.

3 Canada's National Standard on Sustainable Forest Management CAN/CSA – Z809 (www.csa-international.org)

Because Canada's forests are publicly owned this standard underwent a lengthy multi-stakeholder consultation process before it was published in 1996.

The standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognised and accredited standards development processes and is based on the Helsinki and Montreal processes. It also incorporates the Canadian sustainable forest management criteria developed by the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers. Products that have met Chain of Custody criteria can carry one of 3 CSA SFM (Sustainable Forest Management) marks.

By the end of 2006, 73.4 million hectares (approximately 60%) of Canadian forests had been certified against the standard.

The CSA Sustainable Forest Management Program is a PEFC member.

General Developments

National certification schemes are continually being developed.

8% of the world's forests have now been certified, mainly in developed countries. Few in-roads have been made in the areas over which there is most concern, although this is changing.

There is further irony in that the concerns expressed in Rio in 1992 largely related to the depletion of tropical forests, whereas the certified timber products on the market largely come from temperate and boreal regions.

It has been suggested that major certification schemes and buyers should agree that a number of schemes are equivalent in the level of assurance they deliver (mutual recognition). Studies have been undertaken to compare the level of assurance offered by existing certification schemes. None has so far been carried out to the satisfaction of both FSC and PEFC.

What appears to be emerging is an understanding that a number of schemes are similar in that they meet an acceptable, though not necessarily equal, level of assurance.

Public procurement policies are also playing an increasingly important role. It is important both for clarity and indeed cost that criteria, especially throughout Europe are harmonised.

Supply chain issues will not diminish, more evidence will be required and companies will have to be ever more transparent. Forest certification is becoming an indispensable part of a "sustainability tool kit". The UK paper industry supports this approach. It fully understands that customers want to know where the raw materials used to make paper products come from and to this end robust chain-of-custody systems are paramount.

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