

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT AROUND THE WORLD

Responsible Forestry

PEFC is often asked about the similarities and differences between the two global forest management certification schemes – the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

This publication aims to help answer these questions and we therefore hope that it will provide a useful resource to both Chain of Custody certified companies, and those specifying certified products in their corporate procurement requirements, such as retailers and brand owners.

Worldwide, there are two internationally recognized systems for the certification of sustainable forestry management and its supply chain – the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Both the PEFC and FSC labels appear on a wide range of products that use wood as a raw material: timber for the construction industry, energy and DIY sectors as well as paper and packaging products.

But what are the differences and similarities between these two global forest certification programmes?

Firstly, there are far more similarities than differences, with both systems working towards the implementation of sustainable forest management practices around the world. While PEFC and FSC share the same goals, they choose different routes to get there.

Both systems focus on conserving the natural habitats of plants and animals and respecting the rights of forestry workers and local communities. Growing and harvesting timber sustainably provides valuable income and work opportunities whilst conserving the forest for the future generations. This means that there is an on-going incentive to manage the forest responsibly, with equal emphasis on the social, environmental and economic aspects. More and more forest owners are **opting for certification to demonstrate responsible forestry and they can choose either PEFC or FSC.**

The 1990s – The Origins of PEFC & FSC

Both PEFC and FSC are committed to achieving the same objectives – the certification of forests to credible, independently verified standards of responsible forest management. For historical reasons, the two schemes approach this shared objective using different processes.

FSC was established in the early 1990s – principally with the support of environmental organisations such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), as well as UK companies such as B&Q – to address consumer concerns about the indiscriminate and often illegal logging of tropical hardwoods, and the knock-on effects on climate change.

However, as the demand for certified sustainable forest management became global, a standard that had originally been developed primarily for a tropical environment was considered unsuited to boreal and temperate forest practices and ownership structure in

Europe and North America – specifically, large numbers of individuals owning small areas of forest.

FSC was initially unsuited for this, as it could not accommodate ‘group certification’ so every individual owner would have to be separately certified (this would mean 350,000 separate certifications in Finland alone). This meant that many private forest owners considered the certification costs prohibitive.

However, they wanted to be able to demonstrate that they were managing their forests sustainably and wished to be able to sell their products under an internationally recognized label. As a result, PEFC was formed in 1999 and quickly developed a group certification model that made the certification of small forest areas possible and more cost-effective.

The existence of two competing international certification schemes has resulted in continuous improvement and both PEFC and FSC have significantly modified their schemes over the past ten years. PEFC is now competent to deal with tropical forestry and plantation regimes, just as FSC has developed a group certification process to accommodate small-scale landowners. Both are fully compliant with national procurement policies such as CPET¹ in the UK and assist in meeting global objectives such as the EU Timber Regulation.

Standards & Definitions

- FSC

FSC has developed its set of Principles and Criteria at international level. They apply to all forests, temperate, tropical and boreal, natural forests and plantations. There is a common misconception that because FSC has defined a standard, all national FSC standards are the same. However, to take local conditions into account FSC encourages the development of national standards of forest management in each country or region which interpret the international Principles and Criteria.

Therefore, physical geography, climate, land ownership structures, tree species and national legal and commercial infrastructures all impact on how any standard is applied. In the same way, each national standard has to reflect the differences in forest regimes, for example plantations vs. semi-natural forest.

FSC was also originally established as an accreditation body, i.e. it accredited the independent certification bodies that conduct forestry and Chain of Custody audits against the FSC standards. This is no longer the case: a company called **Accreditation Services International (ASI)**, a **subsidiary of FSC**, now oversees the accreditation function. ASI is a member of ISEAL (**International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance**).

- PEFC

PEFC is an umbrella organization and mutual recognition scheme of national standards – e.g. UK Woodland Assurance Standard in the UK or the USA’s Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). PEFC was set up as an endorsement process, to assess independent national forestry management standards against internationally recognised criteria for sustainable forest management. PEFC bases its Sustainability Benchmarks on globally recognised principles, guidelines and criteria

¹ CPET - Central Point of Expertise on Timber <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/central-point-of-expertise-on-timber>

developed by international and inter-governmental bodies with broad consensus from interested stakeholders.

Any national certification system seeking to obtain PEFC endorsement must submit to a comprehensive and rigorous assessment process, including independent evaluation and public consultation.

A full final report of this process is then made publicly available, and national systems are required to revise their schemes every five years. **PEFC uses internationally recognised requirements for certification and accreditation defined by the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO) and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF).**

One material difference between the two operational processes is that PEFC has an additional check process before a national scheme is endorsed. The assessment, prepared by an independent consultant with input through a global stakeholder consultation, is submitted to a panel of experts prior to being submitted to the PEFC Board of Directors and General Assembly for endorsement.

Standards Development

- **Certification Bodies**

Certification bodies that undertake forest certification and/or chain of custody assessments are often accredited to provide the service for both the PEFC and FSC schemes. Only these independent third party auditors can determine whether forest owners and the supply chain meet strict criteria and guidelines. In this way, certification bodies must be 'accredited', in other words authorized and judged competent to conduct such audits.

PEFC requires the certification bodies to comply with the international standards of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), thereby avoiding any potential conflicts of interest when deciding upon and verifying the criteria and requirements of the standards. Certification bodies maintain complete independence from PEFC. For FSC, its subsidiary company, ASI (Accreditation Services International), approves certification bodies to conduct audits. ASI then checks the work of the certification body.

- **Governance & Decision making**

FSC has a defined three-chamber system. These three chambers represent the social, environmental and economic issues related to sustainable forestry management. Forest owners have a seat in the economic chamber, but naturally forest owners have concerns other than purely economic ones. FSC strives for consensus, meaning that all three chambers have to agree in majority with proposals as a minimum requirement.

PEFC decision-making is by consensus and seeks to achieve balanced representation. In order to identify all relevant issues, PEFC uses the nine stakeholder groups as defined in Agenda 21 by the United Nations². This involves all stakeholders concerned with sustainable forest management including forest owners and managers, representation from indigenous peoples, trade unions, trade groups and organisations and NGOs. No individual stakeholder group can block a decision or drive one through, either internationally or in any given country. PEFC's General Assembly is attended by national member systems (National Governing Bodies) as well

² **Agenda 21** – at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the United Nations agreed that the best starting point for the achievement of sustainable development is at the local level. Each local authority has had to draw up its own Local Agenda 21 (LA21).

as representatives of the Agenda 21 stakeholder groups. These are also represented on PEFC's Board of Directors.

- **Stakeholder Engagement**

Both PEFC and FSC take account of social, economic and environmental aspects in their standards, but PEFC takes a bottom-up approach. PEFC endorses national standards and each national standard has to comply with the internationally recognised PEFC International Benchmarks, which takes account of inter-governmental agreements on sustainable forestry management. These national standards are reviewed and re-endorsed every five years.

A broad range of stakeholder groups (from the fields of forestry, business, NGOs, unions, trade associations) are involved in the national standard setting processes. As a starting point for setting the national standard, PEFC complies with existing local laws and regulations for sustainable forestry management. Each stakeholder group in this forum has an equal voice. In this way, the standards that are created remain rooted for the long term in their country of origin and appropriate to the culture and ideals of that country.

FSC sets its own requirements and standards and operates on more of a top-down basis. Therefore, forest owners are expected to meet the FSC Principles and Criteria, as interpreted by the national standard, when applying for forest certification.

Chain of Custody & Labels

Both FSC and PEFC operate a Chain of Custody process that traces material through the supply chain from the forest to the end-user in a robust and transparent way. This is a hugely important and key facet of sustainably managed forests worldwide. FSC and PEFC both apply rules for the use of their labels with a logo on products.

PEFC recognises two labels to be used on certified products: the **Certified** and **Recycled** labels. In order to qualify to use either of the labels, at least 70% of the material has to be certified or recycled. This also applies to paper and chipboard. PEFC Ireland does not require certified companies to pay separately for use of the logo or label. The necessary labels and logos are easy to download via PEFC's label generator with a dedicated login code. The certification body carries out checks on logo use retrospectively at the point of annual audit.

FSC recognises three labels: **100%**, **Mix** and **Recycled**. FSC Mix can be used on a certified product if at least 70% of the material in timber products comes from FSC-certified forests and/or reclaimed (post-consumer) material. Exceptions – that are due to be phased out – are in place for products made of wood chips and fibres as well as paper and chipboard. Anybody wishing to use the logo or labels can apply to their certification body. If the label or just the logo is used, any new reproduction must be approved by the certification body issuing the Chain of Custody certificate.

Recycling makes a contribution to sustainable forestry management. It allows wood fibres to remain in use for longer and means that less wood harvesting is required. Recycled paper and wood are deemed sustainable by both PEFC and FSC. Post-consumer is the material delivered for recycling by businesses and consumers after use. Pre-consumer material comes from offcuts, waste processing and remnants from carpentry shops and envelope manufacturers etc. **For products with the PEFC Recycled label, PEFC requires at least 70% of the product to be recycled.**

What can you do?

The more certified wood, packaging and paper bought, the greater the incentive for forest owners to opt for sustainable forest management. By developing an inclusive procurement policy that gives preference to certified forest products, you are supporting forest owners that have invested in certification and crucially, excluding those that haven't.

Both public and private sector organisations including European Union, the UK government and industry initiatives such as the Consumer Goods Forum, Banking Environment Initiative and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development consider both PEFC and FSC certification as providing evidence of sustainable forest management.

PEFC firmly believes that competition between the two global schemes encourages continuous improvement, ensures cost effectiveness, delivers efficiency and helps prevent a monopoly forming. The principle of free competition by having two competing global schemes ensures that the interests of all stakeholders are best protected.

For further information and guidance on the PEFC and FSC Sustainable Forest Management programmes visit: www.pefc.org and www.fsc.org.

PEFC's distinctive 'two trees' logo transcends language barriers making it a truly global brand. For further information about the PEFC programme in Ireland visit : www.pefc.ie