



Forest Certification

(IFA Forestry Policy Statement No. 2.1)

Key Statement

Independent certification of forest management and timber supply chains are valuable tools to demonstrate sustainability of forest management and forest products, to consumers and the community, and efforts should be enhanced to achieve their full adoption and promotion within the Australian forest industries.

The Issue

The community is increasingly seeking assurance that forest products are obtained from legal and sustainable sources. Certification schemes can provide a powerful incentive for sustainable forest management and continuous improvement. The development and application of these schemes should be based on the best science and knowledge of forest management and recognise and reward best practice management in native forests and plantations.

Background

Certification and labelling has emerged as a market mechanism for monitoring and promoting sustainable management practices in various resource-based industries, including agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Forest certification was introduced by environmental NGOs in 1993, but has been incorporated into mainstream forest policy with more than 100 initiatives worldwide. Forest certification complements forest and environment legislation, codes of forest practice, criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management and environmental management systems.

Forest certification is a process that involves an independent third-party certifying that a particular forest is managed in accordance with agreed standards on a sustainable basis and that any timber from it has been produced in accordance with best practice forest management and environmental standards. Certification schemes include product labels and chain-of-custody systems that are designed to give consumers an assurance that the timber they are purchasing has being sourced legally from a sustainably managed forest.

Markets for certified forests products are mainly in Europe and North America, where there is a demand from hardware retailers and publishing houses. Markets for certified forest products are also beginning to emerge in Asia and Australia.

There are two forest certification schemes operating in Australia - the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) scheme and the Australian Forestry Certification Scheme (AFCS). To date around nine million hectares of forests in Australia have been certified under these two schemes, including plantations and native forests.

The FSC scheme requires the involvement of environmental, social and economic stakeholders in the development of the forest standards, which must be consistent with the FSC's 10 principles and criteria. Forests are certified either under Interim or National FSC Standards. FSC's product labels include labels for 100% certified product, mixed source product and recycled product.

The AFCS includes a national forest standard called the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS) and a chain of custody standard, which is applicable to both native and plantation forests. The AFS was developed under the Standards Australia process and included the participation of social, environmental and economic stakeholders. The AFS has been endorsed by the Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC) which facilitates international mutual recognition of forest certification schemes.

Key Elements of Forest Certification

- Development of agreed standards for sustainable forest management
- Accreditation of certification bodies by an independent body
- Auditing and certification of forest management practices
- Statement of Certification and period for review
- Principle of continuous improvement

Key Criteria of Forest Certification Schemes

- Credible to consumers
- Includes all types of wood and non wood products
- Applicable to small and large forest estates on public and private land
- Objective and measurable standards
- Independent third party auditing by independently accredited auditors
- Transparent to external stakeholders
- Voluntary in participation
- Cost effective
- Practical to implement
- Result in net benefits to the forest manager

Policy

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates the use and promotion of independent third party forest certification schemes and associated chain of custody schemes as the most effective way to demonstrate to consumers that forest products have been sourced legally from sustainably managed forests.

The IFA supports and encourages:

- forest certification schemes that are based on the best science and knowledge of forest management and which foster best practice management in native forests and plantations.; and
- appropriate stakeholder engagement in the development of the forest certification standard.

The IFA considers that:

- efforts should be enhanced to ensure that all Australian forests which are used for timber production achieve forest certification and all Australian forest industries achieve Chain of Custody certification;
- the development, implementation and promotion of forest certification schemes within Australia will promote continuous improvement in sustainable forest management; and
- the IFA has a key role to play in promoting these key criteria within Australian forest certification schemes as this is critical to sustainable forest management and the long-term role of forests in delivering wood and non-wood benefits.

The IFA will support both the AFS and FSC where they embody the above key criteria and do not impose arbitrary restrictions on forest use and management. They should also:

- be scientifically based, consistent with relevant legislation, practical and cost effective to implement, focused on desired outcomes rather than processes and recognise the diversity of forest types and ownership; and
- promote mutual recognition of other Australian forest certification schemes and relevant international schemes.

Further Information

Bigsby, H and Ozanne, L. (2005) Perceptions of Forest Certification and Wood Use Through the Australian Value Chain. Proceedings of the 22nd Biennial Conference of the Institute of Foresters of Australia. Mt Gambier SA, 10-14 April 2005. pp 306-315.

Crawford H (2006) A Review of Forest Certification in Australia. Forest & Wood Products Research & Development Corporation. Sustainable Forest Management Project No. PN05.1025. 30pp.

Edwards, M (2005) Who put the Forester in Forest Certification? Proceedings of the 22nd Biennial Conference of the Institute of Foresters of Australia. Mt Gambier SA, 10-14 April 2005. pp293-298.

Mason, J. and Jones, L. (2007) FSC Certification in Australia and New Zealand. Is it making a difference? Paper presented to the 2007 ANZIF Conference held at Coffs Harbour NSW 3-7 June 2007. pp 244-254.

Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification- <http://www.pefc.org/>.

Australian Forestry Standard at <http://www.forestrystandard.org.au/> .

Forest Stewardship Council Australia at <http://www.fscaustralia.org/> .

(Policy approved 8-11-2007)
Institute of Foresters of Australia
PO Box 7002, Yarralumla ACT 2600
Australia
Ph: 02 - 6281 3992
www.forestry.org.au