



FSC® A000525



PEFC/16-44-917



SOIL ASSOCIATION CERTIFICATION INTERNATIONAL GROUP FOREST MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

Procedures for International Group Forest Management Certification

1. Enquiry

When an enquiry about group certification is received, the applicant will be sent a Group Certification Application Pack containing the following:

- Forest Management (FM) Application Information Form
- The Soil Association (SA) Certification Group Standard/national group standard requirements
- The Group Certification Procedures
- The Soil Association International Generic standard (or Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) National/Adapted standard) / Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC™) endorsed National Standards.

2. Estimate

The applicant should complete the Forest Application Information Form and return this to us.

On receiving the completed application form, we prepare an estimate for the cost of an evaluation, based on the information provided. The estimate specifies the cost of three elements of the evaluation: 1) standards development and consultation; 2) systems analysis and initial evaluation of sites; and 3) annual surveillance. We will also provide a quote for the cost of a 'scoping visit' (Pre-Evaluation) prior to the evaluation itself.

The applicant is welcome to discuss the certification process with us.

3. Steps to Certification

3.1 Pre-Evaluation Visit

A pre-evaluation, is required prior to a full evaluation for groups. The pre-evaluation usually takes 3 - 5 days in total to complete, including writing the report, but not including travel. For very large groups a longer pre-evaluation may be required.

For FSC, pre-evaluations are always required for groups and operations of over 10,000ha and where High Conservation Value Forest may be present.

For PEFC, pre-evaluations are always required.

There is no obligation to continue with a full evaluation after pre-evaluation has been completed.

As for all evaluations, the pre-evaluation visit provides the applicant with the opportunity to ask our auditor more detailed questions about certification and the requirements of the standard.

The auditor will run through the requirements of the group certification standard and the generic standard or applicable national standards, and identify any obvious areas in which further work should be completed prior to a main evaluation.

In addition, the auditor will discuss the proposed sampling methodology for an evaluation with the client. The sampling methodology will take into account a number of factors including the homogeneity of management sites and the degree of centralised control exercised by the group manager.

The auditor will collect as much information as possible that will facilitate a main evaluation. The auditor will also ask you to identify individuals or organisations that are familiar with the forest area under management. These stakeholders may be contacted prior to the full evaluation.

After the pre-evaluation visit, we submit a report to the applicant. The report presents the main findings of the visit, and also specifies the sampling regime which would be used to complete the group evaluation. We send the client an evaluation contract and quote for the main evaluation together with the report.

If the applicant decides to go ahead, we then start making the arrangements for the full main evaluation.

3.2. The Certification Standards

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FSC evaluations

If there is a FSC endorsed forest management certification standard applicable to the region in which the evaluation takes place, the main evaluation will take place against this Standard.

In countries where there is not already a FSC endorsed standard, our Generic Standard Checklist will be used as a basis for the local standard, which will be updated in accordance with comments received from stakeholders as part of the consultation process.

In countries where there is an ongoing Standards development process we will contact the group developing the Standard and request information about any draft Standards. We will take account of any such draft Standards in developing a Standard appropriate to the local situation. If translation is required we will liaise with you to ensure that a translation of the Generic Standard and/or locally adapted Standard is available in the local language. On request, we will arrange for the translation to take place and include this in the quote for the cost of the evaluation.

If a Soil Association evaluation has already taken place in the region in which you operate, we will provide you with a copy of the Standard, which is in use.

Group Scheme operations will also be evaluated against our Group Certification Standard or against the PEFC national Group Standard requirements.

PEFC evaluations will always be carried out against the endorsed national PEFC standards and associated Group PEFC requirements.

Note for Norway and Sweden PEFC evaluations: In Sweden, a PEFC **group** certificate may only be issued if the applicant is also certified to ISO 14001 standards. In Norway, a PEFC certificate for **both single-sites and groups** may only be issued if the applicant is also certified to ISO 14001 standards. Soil Association can liaise with you, and other ISO14001-accredited Certification Bodies as necessary, to discuss this process.

3.3 Preparation for the Main Assessment

As for all evaluations, we will inform the applicant of the audit team members, and the audit team leader will contact the applicant to discuss and finalise logistics for the main assessment. To ensure that certification proceeds smoothly, as much information as possible is gathered before the audit takes place. It is useful for our audit team to receive copies of relevant documents such as management plans in advance of the audit. If we feel that additional information would help ensure a successful audit we will contact you before the visit.

At least 6 weeks before the evaluation visit is due to take place we will inform stakeholders of the date of the visit. Our procedures are designed to be transparent, as we believe this is necessary for an effective evaluation, and also to ensure support for the evaluation process itself. Public consultation is also an FSC requirement.

3.4 The Main Assessment

3.4.1 Systems Analysis

The audit team will have an introductory meeting with you, and will go through the relevant standards with you in your office. The team will try to find out as much as possible about the group and the group and forest management, and will look at supporting documents and records.

The systems analysis usually takes 1-3 days to complete, depending on the size and complexity of the organisation and the sites, which are managed. For very large or complex groups the systems analysis may require additional time.

During the visit the auditor systematically evaluates the applicant against our Group Standard and checklist and the FSC standard and checklist, and/or appropriate PEFC standards and checklists, and identifies any gaps in procedures, documentation or record keeping. We will then proceed with arrangements for the site visits.

For Groups, the audit will include an assessment of the Group Schemes policies and procedures against our Group Certification Standard and assessment of the management of selected sites against the modified Generic Standard/endorsed FSC or PEFC National Standards. The audit team will select sites that they wish to visit based on the Group or Multi-site sampling strategy, details of which are given in our certification report template.

If you choose to apply for both FSC and PEFC certification, the assessment against both the applicable FSC and PEFC standards, will be carried out during the same audit.

An important part of our audit is to contact local stakeholders (such as environmental NGOs, academics, local institutions) to inform them about the evaluation and ask them to comment on the forest or its management. Further information about this part of the process is available from our website or from us on request.

3.4.2 Site Visits

The audit team leader will choose sites to evaluate particular aspects of management, especially for larger groups.

The audit team carries out the audit of each site using our generic (adapted) Standard/approved national standards and supplementary checklists as partially completed during the systems analysis, and updated during the consultation process. The procedure for each site visit is otherwise the same as for single site evaluation visits.

The auditor identifies any parts of the standard which are not fully complied with and discusses any such 'non-compliances' with the client. The auditor also consults with a variety of statutory and non-statutory bodies to confirm that the requirements of the standard are being met.

3.5 Evaluation

The team will evaluate every element of the applicable Standard(s) during the visit, and record its observations. For each element the team will determine whether requirements are met or not. The team will identify any parts of the standard which are not fully complied with and will discuss any such 'non-compliances' with you. The team will discuss whether these are 'major non-compliances' or 'minor non-compliances'.

- There is a MAJOR non compliance when performance on a criterion as a whole does not constitute good stewardship of the forest resource. There is either evidence of poor stewardship, or a significant risk that problems will result if corrective action is not taken;
- There is a MINOR non-compliance when the most important elements of the criterion are met, but there are elements that should be improved to ensure that good stewardship is maintained in the long term;

If minor non-compliances are found a certificate may still be awarded, provided that you agree to meet any outstanding requirements within an agreed time-frame. If a major non-compliance is found, the requirement must be met before a certificate can be awarded.

3.6. Group Certification Report

After the main evaluation with site visits, the lead auditor completes a group certification report, which is submitted to our office. The results of the consultation are also included in the group certification report. The team will evaluate every element of the Standard during the visit, and record its observations. The team will identify any parts of the standard which are not fully complied with and will discuss any such 'non-compliances' with you. The team will discuss whether these are 'major non-compliances' or 'minor non-compliances'.

- There is a MAJOR non compliance when the woodland/forest management is failing to meet a relevant requirement, or a failure is repeated or systematic;

- There is a MINOR non-compliance when woodland/forest management is partially failing to meet a requirement, or is entirely failing to meet a requirement but the spirit of the requirement is still being achieved;

If minor non-compliances are found a certificate may still be awarded, provided that you agree to meet any outstanding requirements within an agreed time-frame. If a major non-compliance is found, the requirement must be met before a certificate can be awarded.

3.7. The Certification Decision

After the evaluation visit, the audit team leader will write a detailed report describing the results of the visit. We will send you a copy of the report ([as requested, or as required by the certification scheme](#)) to ask for your comments regarding factual errors. At the same time the report is sent to independent specialist professionals who are asked to review it to make sure it is clear and fair.

When we have received your comments, and the comments of the 'peer reviewers', we will finalise our certification decision. At this stage, we will send you our final report, and you will be invoiced for payment of the outstanding evaluation fees. If there are no non-compliances, we will issue a certificate immediately;

- If there are only minor non-compliances we will issue a certificate on the basis that you agree to take appropriate corrective actions to come into full compliance within a specified time frame (usually one year);
- If there are major non-compliances, we will not issue a certificate until after you have taken appropriate corrective actions and after we have agreed that you comply fully with the relevant part of the standard. If you comply fully within 12 months then a certificate can subsequently be issued without a full re-evaluation.

Once we have received your written agreement to take any necessary corrective actions within the specified timeframe(s), and the certification fee has been paid in full, a Certificate of Registration will be issued, usually valid for five years conditional on the successful completion of annual surveillance audits.

On issue of a certificate, the certification report will be made publicly available in compliance with FSC and / or PEFC requirements.

4. What happens once you are certified

4.1. Use of the FSC Trademarks

Your Trademark Licence Agreement and certificate of registration authorise you to use the FSC Trademarks (the FSC name, initials and logo) in accordance with FSC's regulations for their use. We will send you a link to a website where the Trademark can be downloaded. Please read the guidelines before using the FSC Trademarks. And please note that you must seek written approval from us for any use of the FSC Trademarks before going to press.

4.2. Use of the PEFC Trademarks

On notification of your successful certification, your PEFC certificate entitles you to use the PEFC trademarks in accordance with their requirements.

4.3. Changes to Management

The certification is based on our audit of the documentation and premises. If there are material changes to this documentation (e.g. to the management plan, policies or systems) the certificate

holder must inform us. We will then determine whether any further audit is required. Failure to inform us of such changes could lead to the suspension or withdrawal of the certificate.

4.4. Annual Surveillance

Surveillance visits (audits) will take place at least annually and are usually arranged well in advance. Surveillance includes visits to a randomised sample of sites that have been previously audited, to sites at which non-compliances have previously been identified, and to a randomised sample of sites that have not been previously audited.

For Group Schemes, the audit team will select sites that they wish to visit based on the Group / Multi-site sampling strategy, details of which are given in the certification report template.

Surveillance for sites that have not been previously visited is the same as for other initial site visits. Surveillance for sites that have already been visited is the same as for standard site surveillance visits.

We reserve the right to bring forward the date of the annual surveillance visit or to make an unannounced surveillance visit. In this case the client will be charged for the normal cost of surveillance.

4.5. Non-Compliances at Surveillance Audits

If any non-compliances are identified after you have received your certificate, we will discuss the non-compliance with you. As for the initial evaluation, we will specify whether the non-compliance is 'major' or 'minor'. If the non-compliance cannot be corrected immediately then we will issue a 'Corrective Action Request', which specifies actions to be taken to comply with the standard, together with a time frame for completion. In the case of major non-compliances Conditions are classified as 'Major or Final Conditions' (see below).

Corrective actions taken by the certificate holder in response to Condition(s) are usually monitored at the next annual surveillance visit. If urgent action is required a shorter timeframe will be specified by us.

For Group Schemes the group certificate holder must ensure that corrective actions are taken as appropriate at all sites within the group, and not only at the site at which the specific example of non-compliance was identified.

In exceptional circumstances, for example if it is clear that destructive practices have been taking place, we would suspend the certificate with immediate effect. If five or more Major Corrective Actions are issued, this will also lead to immediate suspension.

4.5.1. Failure to Meet a Condition within the Agreed Time Frame

If the certificate holder has been asked to correct a minor non-compliance and we are not satisfied that appropriate corrective actions have been taken, the non-compliance will be upgraded from a 'minor non-compliance' to a 'major non compliance'. The associated Condition is upgraded from a Condition to a Major or Final Condition, and a new time limit for corrective action to be taken is specified.

4.5.2. Failure to meet a Major Condition within the Agreed Time Frame

If you have been asked to correct a major non-compliance and we are not satisfied that appropriate corrective actions have been taken within the specified time limit we will consider that you are no longer complying with the appropriate Standard. We will provide

a further 30 days for you to demonstrate compliance before then having to suspend your certificate.

If your certificate is suspended you must immediately refrain from all use of the Soil Association, FSC and/or PEFC Trademarks, and refrain from describing your management or products as certified. We reserve the right to require you to remove the FSC and/or PEFC trademarks from previously labelled products.

4.6. Termination or Withdrawal of certificate

All certificates issued are subject to continued compliance with the certification standard. If the certificate holder is in breach of the standard, we will suspend the certificate. We will specify which part of the standard is not complied with and inform the certificate holder. If corrective action is not taken to comply with the standard within a time limit specified by us, the certificate will be withdrawn.

The certificate holder must return their certificate to us at the office address below. All claims, promotional or marketing materials that make use of Soil Association, FSC or PEFC's, name, label, logo, certification mark or Trademark must be withdrawn.

A certificate will only be re-issued following the successful completion of a full audit.

4.7. Extensions

After the certificate has expired it can be re-issued for a further five years upon the successful completion of a Re-Assessment audit.

5. Soil Association (SA) Certification Procedures

5.1. Changes to the Standard

Whilst we make every effort to minimise changes to our certification standards, changes may be necessary from time to time. In the event that the Forest Stewardship Council® A.C. (FSC®) or PEFC™ endorses a new standard applicable to the forest area concerned, we are required to carry out future evaluations to that standard. We will inform our certificate holders of any such changes, and ensure that they have sufficient time to comply with any new requirements (not usually more than 12 months). If certificate holders are not able to comply within the time frame we do however reserve the right to withdraw the certificate.

5.2. Soil Association Certification and the Forest Stewardship Council® A.C.

Soil Association Certification is accredited by Accreditation Services International GmbH (ASI) to carry out FSC® certification. This means that ASI makes sure that our procedures meet FSC accreditation requirements, and monitors us each year to ensure we are implementing our procedures properly. On some issues ASI has authority over us. In particular ASI has the final say as to whether our standards meet FSC's minimum requirements. The FSC Licence Code is FSC-A000525.

5.3. Soil Association and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC™).

Soil Association Certification is accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) for the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) scheme. This means that our certificate holders have the right to apply for a Logo License to use the PEFC logo on their products and off-product claims. UKAS makes sure that our procedures meet their accreditation

requirements, and will be monitoring us to ensure we are implementing our procedures properly.

5.5. Complaints

We do our best to operate an open and effective forest certification system. If for any reason you are not satisfied with our performance, please contact us. We will do our best to address your concern in a timely manner and to your satisfaction.

If we cannot resolve your concern, we operate an appeals and dispute resolution system. If you wish to make use of this system please request a copy of our document IP-GEN-004 'Appeals and Complaints Resolution Procedure', and follow the guidance. It is available [here](#) on our website.

If you are not satisfied with any action taken through our complaints and dispute resolution procedures you have the right to take your concern to the Forest Stewardship Council AC (FSC) or ASI, or PEFC for their consideration.

In the case of FSC, please contact the FSC Accreditation Unit at:

ASI - Accreditation Services International GmbH, Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 69, 53113 Bonn, Germany Phone: +49 (228) 227 237 0 / +49 (228) 227 237 0 ; Fax: +49 (228) 227 237 30 E-mail: asi-info@accreditation-services.com.

In the case of PEFC, you have the right to lodge a formal complaint with the PEFC National Office or PEFC International: **PEFC International**, 10, Route de l'Aéroport, Case Postale 636, 1215 Geneva – Switzerland. Tel: +41 (22) 799 4540, email: info@pefc.org, or the national PEFC body, which can be found via www.pefc.org.

We will cooperate with any further investigation carried out by FSC or PEFC.

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