



FSC® A000525



PEFC/16-44-917



# SOIL ASSOCIATION CERTIFICATION INTERNATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

## Procedures for International Forest Management Certification

### 1. Enclosures

- Forest Management (FM) Application Information Form
- Soil Association (SA) Certification international generic standard/adapted standard or appropriate Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) approved national standard or Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) endorsed national standard
- Soil Association Group Standard if appropriate.
- Forest management groups Standard FSC-STD-30-005 if appropriate

### 2. Estimate

Please complete the Forest Application Information Form and return this to us so that we can prepare an estimate for the cost of an evaluation, based on the information provided. If you want to go ahead with an evaluation, we will then send you our evaluation contract for you to sign, together with our suggestion of an auditor to carry out the audit. We will arrange an audit as soon as possible after you return the contract. If you have any questions concerning the application process, please do not hesitate to contact us.

**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.

**Note for Romania PEFC Evaluations:** Note that at the application stage a Sustainability Report must be created for the particular forest enterprise or for a group of companies, which also includes measures, or a plan of measures, for achieving the set sustainability goals - drawing up and implementing regulations for stability. Participation has to cover the entire forest area of a forest owner, or the forest owners, in the case of group certification.

### **3. Steps to Certification**

#### **3.1 Pre-evaluation Visit**

We are happy to arrange a pre-evaluation visit to your forest in order to discuss your particular situation, go over the relevant Standard with you, and clarify any doubts you may have about the certification process. For large or complex operations, we recommend a pre-evaluation.

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

For PEFC, pre-evaluations are always required.

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

At the pre-evaluation an auditor will look at your management planning documentation and records, carry out a site visit, and highlight any areas where there are likely to be problems complying with the standard. The auditor will collect as much information as possible that will facilitate a full 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 main evaluation. After the visit, the auditor will write a pre-evaluation report, which records the results of the visit for you.

If you do not have a pre-evaluation, we strongly advise that you look at the Certification Standard and satisfy yourself that the operations for which you are seeking certification are likely to meet the requirements. The Standard is laid out with guidelines for interpretation.

#### **3.2 The Certification Standards**

If there is an FSC approved forest management certification Standard applicable to the region in which the evaluation takes place, then the main evaluation will take place against this Standard. In countries where there is not already an FSC approved standard, we will need to agree with FSC to develop a local standard before an evaluation can take place.

PEFC evaluations will always be carried out against the National Standards endorsed by PEFC.

Groups will also be evaluated against FSC-STD-30-005 Forest management groups checklist or against the PEFC national Group Standard requirements.

#### **3.3 Preparation 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.

The audit team leader will contact you directly to arrange mutually convenient date(s) and time for the evaluation visit. The team leader will discuss logistical arrangements for the visit.

At least 6 weeks before the evaluation visit is due to take place, we will inform stakeholders of the date of the audit. 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**

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

The team will visit key parts of the forest with you, discussing management issues, and looking to see how your management fits the plans and policies described in your documentation.

For Group Schemes, the audit will include an assessment of the Group Schemes policies and procedures against Forest management groups standard FSC-STD-30-005 and assessment of the management of selected sites against the modified Generic Standard/endorsed FSC or PEFC National Standard. The audit team will select sites that they wish to visit based on the Group or Multiple-FMU 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.

### **3.5 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 the requirement is 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 timeframe. If a major non-compliance is found, the requirement must be met before a certificate can be awarded.

### **3.6 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.

- i. If there are no non-compliances, we will issue a certificate immediately;
- ii. 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);

**Note for Romania PEFC FM:** Only Observations are permissible at Main Assessment. Non-compliances are known as “deficiencies”.

- iii. If there are major non-compliances/Pre-conditions, 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.

Once we have finalised your report, and the certification fee has been paid in full, a Certificate of Registration will be issued, usually valid for five years conditional on successful annual surveillance.

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 ‘tick-tree’ logo as well as the Forest For All Forever brandmarks) in accordance with FSC’s regulations for their use. FSC will send you a link to their label generator portal where the Trademarks can be downloaded. Please read the guidelines before using the FSC Trademarks. Please note that you must seek written approval from us for any use of the FSC trademarks before going use.

### **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. You may need to contact the national PEFC office where you are located for permission.

### **4.3. Changes to Your Management**

Your certification is based on our audit of your documentation and premises. If there are material changes to your documentation (e.g. to your management plan, your policies or systems) you must inform us. Equally, if you wish to change the forest area or processes covered by the certificate you 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 your certificate.

### **4.4. Annual Surveillance**

Surveillance audits will take place at least annually and are usually arranged well in advance. The surveillance visit is very similar to the initial evaluation visit and is designed to ensure that forest management continues to meet the standard.

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

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 a non-compliance is identified during a surveillance audit and the non-compliance cannot be corrected immediately then we will issue a ‘Corrective Action Request (CAR)’, which specifies

corrective actions to be taken to comply with the Standard, together with a time frame for completion.

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. See **Section 3.5** Evaluation.

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 a serious non-compliance has been found, we would suspend the certificate with immediate effect. If five or more Major Corrective Actions are issued, this will also lead to immediate suspension.

Note for Romania PEFC FM: Suspension occurs if more than 3 Serious Deficiencies (Major non-conformances) are issued.

#### **4.5.1 Failure to meet a Condition within the agreed time frame**

If you have 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'. 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 appropriate Standard and you will receive notification of suspension of your certificate.

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

#### **4.6 Termination or Withdrawal of a 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, the certificate will be withdrawn.

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

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

#### **4.7 Extensions**

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

## **5. Soil Association (SA) Certification Procedures**

### **5.1. Changes to our Standard**

Whilst we make every effort to minimise changes to our certification Standards, changes may be necessary from time to time. If FSC endorses a regional standard applying to your area, then this Standard will supersede the SA Adapted Standard, and all future evaluations (including surveillance visits) are carried out against the FSC Standard. We will inform you in advance of any such changes and ensure that you have sufficient time to comply with any new requirements (not usually more than 12 months). If you are not able to comply within the timeframe we do however reserve the right to withdraw your certificate.

### **5.2. Soil Association Certification and the Forest Stewardship Council A.C. (FSC)**

Soil Association Certification is accredited by Assurance Services International GmbH (ASI) to carry out FSC certification (Licence Number FSC-A000525). 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.

### **5.3. Soil Association Certification 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.

### **5.4. Our Complaints and Dispute Resolution Procedure.**

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.

However, if we cannot resolve your concern, we operate an Appeals and Complaints resolution system. If you wish to make use of this system please request a copy of our Appeals and Complaints document, IP-GEN-004, or look for these on our website [here](#), and follow the guidance.

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 FSC / ASI or PEFC / UKAS for their consideration.

FSC International contact details are

Phone: +49 (0) 228 367 66 0

Email: [info@fsc.org](mailto:info@fsc.org)

Website: [fsc.org/en](http://fsc.org/en)

ASI - Assurance Services International.

Phone: +49 (228) 227 237 0

Email: [asi-info@assurance-services.com](mailto:asi-info@assurance-services.com)

Website: [asi-assurance.org](http://asi-assurance.org)

In the case of PEFC, you have the right to lodge a formal complaint with the PEFC National Office or PEFC International:

Phone: +41 (22) 799 4540

Email: [info@pefc.org](mailto:info@pefc.org)

Website: [pefc.org](http://pefc.org)

UKAS contact details are on their website at: [www.ukas.com](http://www.ukas.com)

We will cooperate with any further investigation carried out by these bodies.

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