



PEFC and FSC

Global Sustainable Forest Management Certification Schemes



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This paper aims to outline the main differences and similarities between the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) as responsible forest management certification schemes.

1. BACKGROUND

Both PEFC and FSC are committed to achieving the same end; 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. However, there is growing consensus amongst key stakeholders, including the forestry industry, government procurement policies, international institutions and corporate customers, that both schemes offer equivalent assurance of well managed forests. Both the European Union and the UK Government recognise PEFC certification as providing proof of sustainable forest management.



2. THE BASIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO SCHEMES

FSC

FSC is a standard setter and sets its own global standards. There is a common misconception that because FSC has defined a standard, all national FSC standards are identical. Any FSC standard has to be “interpreted” at the national level to meet the different local needs for sustainability while interpreting the international Principles and Criteria. Thus, physical geography, climate, land ownership structures, tree species and national legal and commercial infrastructures all impact on how any standard is applied. In exactly the same way, any national standard has to reflect the differences in forest regimes, for example plantations vs. semi natural forest etc.

FSC was originally established as an accreditation body, i.e. it accredited the independent certification bodies which conduct forestry and chain of custody audits against the FSC standards. This is no longer the case and the accreditation function is overseen by a company called Accreditation Services International (ASI), a subsidiary of FSC. ASI is a member of ISEAL (International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance) - www.isealalliance.org.

In structural terms therefore, FSC may be defined as “top down”.



PEFC

Conversely, PEFC is very much a “bottom up” process.

PEFC is not a standard setter but a mutual recognition scheme. It was set up as an endorsement process, to assess independent national forestry management schemes against internationally recognised criteria for sustainable forest management. PEFC bases its Sustainability Benchmarks on globally recognised principles, guidelines and criteria developed by international and intergovernmental bodies with broad consensus from interested stakeholders. These are supplemented by additional requirements developed through multi-stakeholder processes facilitated by PEFC.

Any national certification system seeking to obtain PEFC endorsement must submit to a comprehensive and thorough 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).

Perhaps the main 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 General Assembly for endorsement. PEFC can only operate where satisfactory national standards are in place.

Certification bodies who undertake forest certification and/or chain of custody assessments are often accredited to provide the service for both the PEFC and FSC schemes.

3. GOVERNANCE

FSC has a defined three chamber system, with members being allocated to an environmental, social or economic chamber. These chambers then play a part in the consensus decision-making process.

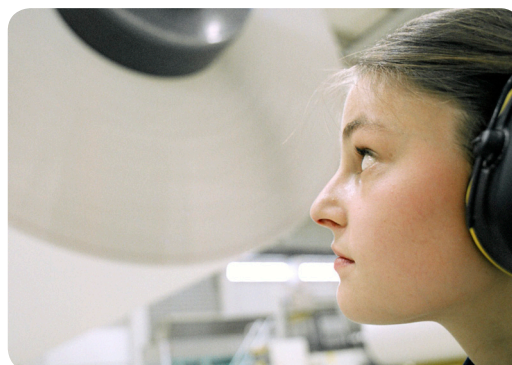
PEFC, on the other hand, is the only global forest certification scheme that seeks to achieve balanced representation through explicit reference to the nine major groups as defined by Agenda 21 of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, as an example of stakeholders involved in and/or concerned by sustainable forest management.

4. WHY DO THE SCHEMES TAKE DIFFERENT APPROACHES

The answer lies in their different origins. FSC was originally established in the early 1990s to address consumer concerns, principally in the UK, about the indiscriminate and often illegal felling of tropical hardwoods to supply the construction and DIY sectors. WWF, together with a number of concerned environmental NGOs and UK retailers set up the FSC.

They identified a number of key issues in tropical forest areas, and it was therefore appropriate that FSC set up an external global standard which could be adopted as a top down process in these countries.

However, as the demand for certified sustainable forest management became global, what had originally been developed primarily for a tropical environment was considered incompatible with the boreal and temperate forest regimes in Europe and North America.



Thus, FSC was initially unsuited to the European and North American environment, particularly as, at the time, it could not accommodate “group certification” i.e. every individual owner would have to be separately certified (this would mean 350,000 separate certifications in Finland alone).

PEFC was therefore developed in the late 1990s to facilitate certification in Europe, designed to give equivalent assurances of sustainability as defined by global society, but with processes that were compatible with infrastructural realities.

The existence of two international certification schemes has resulted in continuous improvement; 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 land owners.

5. SOCIAL ISSUES

PEFC’s International Chain of Custody Standard requires social issues to be taken into account during the audit process. These social requirements are designed to provide an additional layer of confidence for consumers and buyers, that workers’ rights in companies along the supply chain have been respected.

In order to obtain PEFC Chain of Custody certification, companies must be able to demonstrate that; workers are not prevented from associating freely, choosing their representatives and bargaining collectively with their employer, forced labour is not used, workers under the minimum legal age are not used and finally, that workers are not denied equal employment opportunities and treatment.

6. RESPONSIBLE SOURCING

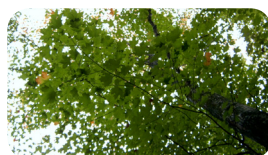
PEFC actively promotes the use of wood and wood products from credibly certified, independently verified, sustainably managed sources believing that both PEFC and FSC provide equivalent assurances of sustainability. In addition, many companies have welcomed the principle of free competition and consider that by having two competing global schemes, the interests of all stakeholders are best protected.

PEFC firmly believes that competition between the two global schemes encourages continuous improvement, ensures cost effectiveness, delivers efficiency and provides a legitimate choice.

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

Framework Conditions in Boreal and Temperate Forests

- land ownership was usually very clearly defined
- forest ownership was clearly defined, but often highly fragmented (around 6 million private commercial forest owners in Europe) and very small scale
- there were, generally, very efficient and often very long standing legal, financial and commercial infrastructures governing forest management practices
- there was clearly a need for better management practices, but the basic tools were largely already in place
- FSC did not initially cover plantations – most of Europe’s productive forests
- there are a large number of very small forest owners.



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