

FSC FOREST MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION STAKEHOLDER BRIEFING NOTE

1. INTRODUCTION

This note aims to provide information for people who are involved in, or affected by, the management of a forest, which is being assessed by SGS QUALIFOR

2. WHAT IS FOREST CERTIFICATION?

Forests provide a wide range of products and services. Forests have important environmental functions, such as preserving soil and water resources. They may be essential for the livelihoods of rural communities who rely on forests for meat, fish, medicines or other products. They also support the forest industry, which provides jobs and income in rural areas and government revenues.

Forest certification is a process of assessing and identifying well-managed forests, where management is environmentally sound, socially beneficial and economically viable.

Products which come from a certified forest area, may carry a label identifying them as coming from a well-managed source. This provides reassurance to consumers, retailers, governments and investors. Major retail outlets in Europe, North America and elsewhere have committed themselves to specifically marketing wood and wood products, originating from well-managed forests.

3. WHAT IS THE FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL?

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation. It was founded in 1993 by a diverse group of representatives from 25 countries worldwide, including environmental and social groups, the timber trade and the forestry profession.

The FSC has developed a set of **Principles and Criteria of Forest Management (P&C)** which define good forest management. Forests whose management is independently assessed as complying with the P&C can be certified as 'well-managed'. All certifications to FSC standards must involve local, national and international **stakeholders**. This includes people who are involved in, or affected by, forest management: people who live in or near forests; people concerned by environmental or social issues to do with forests; people who work in forestry; and many others.

4. SGS AND THE QUALIFOR PROGRAMME

Forest certification against the FSC P&C is carried out by **certification bodies**. To make sure that evaluations are carried out consistently and that the certificates are credible, certification organisations are **accredited and monitored** by the FSC.

QUALIFOR is a part of the SGS Group, the world's largest inspection and verification organisation. **QUALIFOR** is SGS's forest certification programme, which has been accredited by the FSC.

5. QUALIFOR EVALUATION PROCEDURES

A QUALIFOR evaluation has five phases:

- i. **Pre-evaluation:** This is a brief visit to the forest area by a QUALIFOR assessor. Major gaps between the current management and the requirements for certification are identified.
- ii. **Local standards development and stakeholder consultation** National and local forestry codes of practice, legislation and guidelines are examined and incorporated into the standard QUALIFOR requirements to develop a local standard of forest management. The current

QUALIFOR standard is permanently available on our website and the local standard that will be used in this evaluation will be made available on the website, or hardcopy, if so requested.

A range of **stakeholders** is contacted to obtain their views and comments on the documents used for the local standard and about the forest management operations. Any other documents suggested by stakeholders will be studied. Where stakeholders wish to discuss issues, arrangements are made to meet with the QUALIFOR assessors during the main evaluation. All major issues raised by stakeholders must be addressed before certification can continue. Any comments/information received will be handled in confidence and the identity of stakeholders that do participate in this process will not be made known to the organisation that is being assessed nor in the public summary, that SGS Qualifor will publish if a positive certification decision is made.

- iii. **Main evaluation** QUALIFOR assessors, assisted by local technical specialists, visit the forest. Forest management operations are assessed for compliance with the local standard. Forest management documentation, such as the forest management plan and operational procedures is reviewed. Field operations are **audited** by visiting a random selection of sites.
At the end of the main evaluation, the QUALIFOR team decides whether to recommend the forest management for certification.
- iv. **Peer review:** A report describing the evaluation and results is sent to one to two peer reviewers (determined by the size of the operations that are being certified) who are recognised and respected in their fields. The peer reviewers check the evaluation team's methods and conclusions and endorse the recommendation if appropriate.
- v. **Certification and surveillance** If the result of the evaluation is positive, SGS QUALIFOR awards a certificate. A summary of the report is made publicly available and a programme of regular surveillance is begun. Stakeholders can raise issues at any time by contacting SGS QUALIFOR.

6. WHY IS SGS QUALIFOR CONTACTING YOU?

We have started the consultation of stakeholders about the forest area described in the covering letter. We would like to know:

- your views on the documents we are using in developing the local standard; and
- any comments, issues or information we should take into account when assessing the forest management operations.

We have attached a form which can be filled in, but please feel free to send other information. It is very helpful if you can provide **objective evidence** to back up any points you raise: for example, a claim that "Company X has a very bad safety record" could be supported by facts such as the approximate dates of recent accidents and details of what happened. We may contact you if further clarification is necessary.

7. HOW WILL YOUR COMMENTS BE CONSIDERED IN THIS PROCESS

All comments received from stakeholders will be recorded in the Public Summary of the certification evaluation, but your identity will not be revealed. A copy of this report can be obtained from the website <http://info.fsc.org> or you may request a hardcopy of this by contacting the Programme Director at the address given at the bottom of the first page.

TWO FINAL POINTS:

First, if you have any positive things to say about the forest management, please let us know about these too.

Second, if you know of any important stakeholders whom you think should be contacted, then **please let us know**.

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR HELP

More information about the QUALIFOR Programme and the FSC is currently available in English, French and Spanish from the addresses on the covering letter.