

FOREST CERTIFICATION: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?



Certification: a global phenomenon

By Craig Norris - NCT FORESTRY & FSC® Africa

Across the globe, the demand for certified products has increased dramatically over the past decade with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) logo becoming a globally recognised and respected brand.

In South Africa, 80% of the commercial timber plantations are certified. Komatiland Forests was the first plantation to gain FSC certification in South Africa, with most large and medium corporate growers following suit. NCT Forestry Cooperative was the first to achieve group FSC certification. Group FSC chain of custody and forest management schemes have been developed to help smaller enterprises achieve FSC certification by reducing the costs of certification per member.

Even still there is concern that small-scale timber growers and family run forestry participants (small-scale farmers) are being left behind with respect to certification. As a result, a national certification agency, the South African Forestry Assurance Scheme (SAFAS) has been established with the aim of developing a system that can be endorsed by the Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

It is hoped, with both systems in place, certification will be opened up to all South African forestry owners and managers. This will help all industry players to meet the future demands for certified timber, as well as realise the social, environmental, cultural and economic benefits that certification brings.

FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (FSC)

Who are they?

FSC is a global, non-for-profit, organisation dedicated to the promotion of responsible forest management worldwide.

As of October 2017, over 195 million hectares of forest has been certified worldwide, almost 7.7 million hectares of this is in Africa.

Globally, this equates to over 1,500 FSC forest management certificates, 20 of those are South African plantations. On top of this 33,000 chain of custody (CoC) certificates have been awarded, 114 in South Africa (figures correct as of October 2017).

FSC represents 800 plus members including Non-Governmental Organisations like World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Greenpeace, paper and paper packaging businesses like Tetra Pak, Mondi and Sappi, social organisations, as well as forest owners and managers, processing companies and campaigners.

These diverse voices define best practices for forestry that address social and environmental issues. With FSC principles and criteria being set by a membership consensus, this ensures the highest standards of forest management.

To ensure no one viewpoint dominates, there are three chambers of membership – environmental, social and economic – all of which have equal rights in decision-making.



What is their objective?

To promote responsible management of the world's forests, management that is environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable.

Why?

Environmental appropriate forest management: ensures that the harvest of timber and non-timber products maintains the forest's biodiversity, productivity and ecological processes.

Socially beneficial forest management: helps both local people and society at large to enjoy long-term benefits and also provides strong incentives to local people to sustain the forest resources and adhere to long-term management plans.

Economically viable forest management: means the forest operations are structured and managed so as to be sufficiently profitable, without generating financial profit at the expense of the forest resource, the ecosystem or affected communities.



Types of FSC certification

Three different types of certificates are issued by FSC, relating to the different stages of production through the value chain:

- **Forest management:** For forest owners and managers who wish to show their forestry operations are socially beneficial, carried out in a satisfactory environmental perspective and economically viable. There are special options for small, low intensity and community forest operations.

For more information see: <https://ic.fsc.org/en/what-is-fsc-certification/forest-management-certification>

- **Chain of custody:** Designed for companies that manufacture, process or trade in forest products, this certification ensures all branded end-products are sourced from certified forests.

For more information see: <https://ic.fsc.org/en/what-is-fsc-certification/chain-of-custody-certification>

- **Controlled wood:** Designed to allow organisations to avoid the categories of wood considered unacceptable in FSC Mix products.

For more information see: <https://ic.fsc.org/en/what-is-fsc-certification/controlled-wood>



Ten principles of FSC certification:

The FSC Principles and Criteria (P&C) describe the essential elements or rules of environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable forest management. In a nutshell there are 10 principles setting out this vision.

Each principle is supported by several criteria to assess whether the principle has been met in practice. For more information see the PDF link: [FSC® International Standard version 5](#) below this case study. All 10 need to be applied before FSC certification is granted.

- 1:** Compliance with laws and FSC principles – Comply with applicable laws, regulations, treaties, conventions and agreements.
- 2:** Workers Rights and Employment Conditions - Maintain or enhance the social and economic wellbeing of workers.
- 3:** Indigenous Peoples' Rights - Identify and uphold indigenous peoples' legal and customary rights of ownership, use and management of land, territories and resources affected by forest management activities.
- 4:** Community Relations - Contribute to maintaining or enhancing the social and economic wellbeing of local communities.
- 5:** Benefits from the Forest - Efficiently manage the products and services of the managed forest area to maintain or enhance long-term economic viability and the range of environmental and social benefits.
- 6:** Environmental Values and Impacts - Maintain, conserve and/or restore ecosystem services and environmental values of the forest area. Avoid, repair or mitigate negative impacts.
- 7:** Align the management plan with the scale, intensity and risks of activities. Ensure there is documentation to guide staff, inform stakeholders and justify management decisions.

- 8:** Monitoring and Assessment - Show that progress towards achieving objectives, impacts of activities and condition of the managed area are assessed and adapted in line with scale, intensity and risk of activities.
- 9:** High Conservation Values - Maintain and/or enhance high conservation values in the managed forest area.
- 10:** Implementation of Management Activities - Select and implement management activities that are in line with economic, environmental and social policies and objectives.

5 steps to certification

Independent certification bodies, not FSC, issue certificates. FSC certificates are valid for five years, although annual reviews are conducted.

- 1:** The owner/manager contacts FSC, which provides advice and support, and directs the owner/manager to an FSC-accredited certification body.
- 2:** The operator signs an agreement with the certification body.
- 3:** The certification audit, where the certification body reviews the operation against FSC standards.
- 4:** The decision process, where the data collected is the basis of the report on which the certification body makes its decision.
- 5:** The decision, if the decision is positive the owner/manager receives an FSC certificate. If not, the owner/manager is asked to make corrections.

PROGRAMME FOR ENDORSEMENT OF FOREST CERTIFICATION (PEFC)

Who are they?

The Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) is an international, non-profit, non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting sustainable forest management (SFM) through independent third party certification.

It works as an umbrella organisation that endorses national forest certification systems developed through multi-stakeholder processes and tailored to local priorities and conditions.

PEFC is currently the largest certification system in the world, certifying over 300 million hectares and endorsing 39 national certification systems.



SAFAS

PEFC includes 49 national members among its membership, which is also open to international stakeholders such as civil society organisations, businesses, government entities and intergovernmental bodies. National members are independent national organisations established to develop and implement the PEFC system within their country.

What is their objective?

Their mission statement is “to give society confidence that people manage forests sustainably” and is achieved by following their seven core values:

- 1: Respect for all forest ownership structures, and the social, cultural environmental and economic values they provide.
- 2: Respect for the social infrastructures of forest based communities.
- 3: Belief in co-operation, openness and transparency.
- 4: Respect for the tenants of federalism.
- 5: Belief in free and fair market systems.
- 6: Belief in multi-stakeholder participation.
- 7: Commitment to excellence and continuous improvement.

At a South African level, the primary objective of setting up a second certification scheme is to manage the risk around certification, the concern that certification could become a trade barrier to smaller management units, and therefore develop a system that enables smallholders to achieve certification.



Types certification

PEFC has developed a mechanism to enable independent development of national standards tailored to the political, economic, social, environmental and cultural realities of the respective countries while at the same time ensuring compliance with internationally-accepted requirements and global recognition.

Endorsement of a country's national standards requires the country's certification system to undergo a rigorous third-party assessment against PEFC's unique sustainability benchmarks to ensure consistency with international requirements.

PEFC also issues three broad categories of certificates, namely:

- Forest Management

- Chain of Custody

- Controlled Wood

Setting standards in South Africa

In 2016 FSA's Environmental Committee tasked a steering committee to develop a certification system that could be endorsed by the PEFC.

The committee used the National Principles, Criteria, Indicators and Standards (PCI &S) Framework for sustainable forest management, required by the National Forest Act of 1998, as the basis for developing an auditable standard.

The national certification system, registered as the South African Forestry Assurance Scheme (SAFAS), falls under a National Governing body. The SAFAS Technical Committee has developed a standard, along with the chain of custody procedures, group certification procedures, and certification and accreditation procedures.

The SAFAS standard is based on seven principles:

- 1:** Planning, legal compliance and chain of custody.
- 2:** Engagement with stakeholders and protection of cultural heritage.
- 3:** Protection of worker's and human rights.
- 4:** Protection of soil, carbon and water.
- 5:** Conservation of biodiversity and ecological integrity.
- 6:** Forest health and protection.
- 7:** Economic sustainability.

Each principle has a number of criteria which must be met, with indicators to measure the levels of compliance. Verifiers for each indicator guide the auditor to the information sources that provide evidence of compliance.

The SAFAS standard has been through a thorough stakeholder consultation process and comments/suggestions have been taken into consideration in producing the final draft. The standard and system documents were submitted to the PEFC in October 2017 and it is anticipated that the endorsement process will be completed during 2018.



FINAL THOUGHT:

"Forest certification is an important marketing tool as it allows for greater access to International Customers by providing credible independent verification of good management practices. It can also be used as a tool to continuously improve plantation management practices and ensure sustainability".

- Craig Norris, NCT Forestry