

# PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT AROUND THE WORLD

PEFC, FSC and RESPONSIBLE WOOD



# Responsible Forestry

Responsible Wood is often asked about the similarities and differences between the two global forest management certification schemes – the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). In Australia, Responsible Wood manages the Australian Standard for Sustainable Forest Management which is internationally endorsed and mutually recognised by PEFC, the world's largest forest management certification scheme.

This publication aims to help answer these questions and we therefore hope that it will provide a useful resource to both Chain of Custody certified companies, and those specifying certified products in their corporate procurement requirements, such as retailers and brand owners.



Worldwide, there are two internationally recognised systems for the certification of sustainable forest management and its supply chain – the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). For Australian forests and forest products, the PEFC certification is known as Responsible Wood, previously Australian Forestry Standard and is the official Australian Standard for Forest Certification and Chain of Custody. Both PEFC and FSC claims are made on a wide range of products that use wood as a raw material: timber for the construction industry, energy and DIY sectors as well as paper and packaging products.

## **But what are the differences and similarities between these two global forest certification programmes?**

Firstly, there are far more similarities than differences, with both systems working towards the implementation of sustainable forest management practices around the world. While PEFC and FSC share the same goals, they choose different routes to get there.

Both systems focus on conserving the natural habitats of plants and animals and respecting the rights of forestry workers and local communities. Growing and harvesting timber sustainably provides valuable income and work opportunities whilst conserving forests for future generations. This means that there is an on-going incentive to manage forests responsibly, with equal emphasis on the social, environmental and economic aspects. More and more forest owners are **opting for certification to demonstrate responsible forestry and they can choose either PEFC or FSC.**

# Origins of PEFC and FSC

PEFC and FSC are committed to achieving the same objectives. Both organisations use third party certification bodies to certify forests to credible forest management standards. For historical reasons, the two schemes approach this shared objective using different processes.

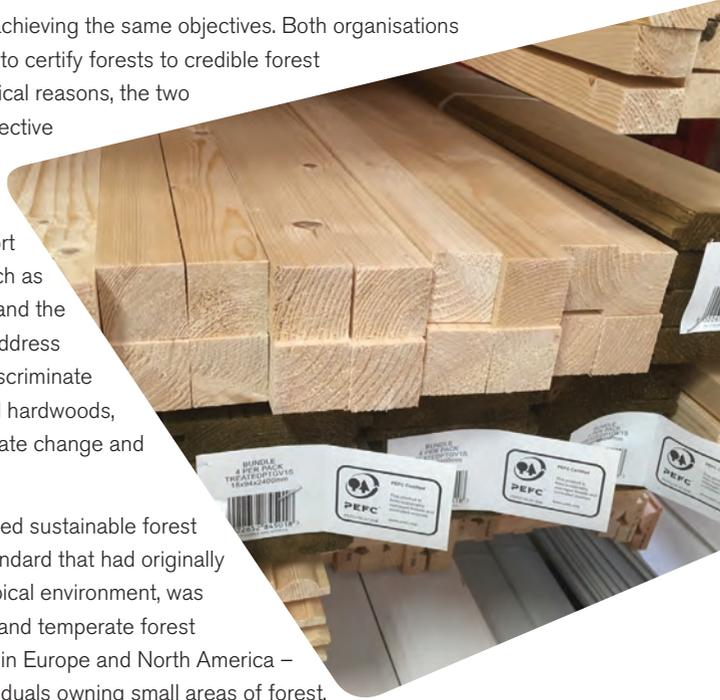
FSC was established in the early 1990s – principally with the support of environmental organisations such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) – to address consumer concerns about the indiscriminate and often illegal logging of tropical hardwoods, and the associated effects on climate change and biodiversity.

However, as the demand for certified sustainable forest management became global, a standard that had originally been developed primarily for a tropical environment, was considered unsuited to the boreal and temperate forest practices and ownership structure in Europe and North America – specifically, large numbers of individuals owning small areas of forest.

FSC certification was initially unsuited for this, as it could not accommodate 'group certification' so every individual forest management unit would have to be separately certified (this would mean 350,000 separate certifications in Finland alone). This meant that for many private forest owners, certification costs were prohibitive.

However, they wanted to be able to demonstrate that they were managing their forests sustainably and sell their products under an internationally recognised label. So, PEFC was formed in 1999 and quickly developed a group certification model that made the certification of small forest areas possible and more cost-effective.

The existence of two competing international certification schemes has resulted in continuous improvement, with both PEFC and FSC significantly revising their schemes over the past twenty 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 landowners. Both are fully compliant with the National Procurement Guideline (with PEFC, Responsible Wood and FSC recognized as equivalent 'ecolabels' by the Australian Government for Commonwealth entities) and assist in meeting the requirements for the Illegal Logging Prohibition Act and Regulations (2012).



# Standards and definitions

## FSC

FSC developed its set of Principles and Criteria at international level. They apply to all forests, temperate, tropical and boreal, natural forests and plantations. There is a common misconception that because FSC has defined a standard, all national FSC standards are the same. However, to take local conditions into account, FSC encourages the development of national forest management standards, which interpret the international Principles and Criteria, in each country or region.

Therefore, physical geography, climate, land ownership structures, tree species and national legal and commercial infrastructures all impact on how any standard is applied. In the same way, each national standard has to reflect the differences in forest types, for example plantations vs. semi-natural forest.

FSC was also originally established as an accreditation body, i.e. it accredited the independent certification bodies that conduct forestry and Chain of Custody audits against the FSC standards. This is no longer the case: **Assurance Services International (ASI), a subsidiary of FSC, now oversees the accreditation function. ASI is a member of ISEAL (International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance).**

## PEFC

PEFC is an alliance of national forestry standards – e.g. in Australia, Responsible Wood manages the Australian Standard for Sustainable Forest Management (AS 4708) and its Chain of Custody (AS 4707). PEFC was set up as an endorsement process, to assess independent national forestry management standards against internationally recognised criteria for sustainable forest management. PEFC bases its Sustainability Benchmarks on globally recognised principles, guidelines and criteria developed by international and inter-governmental bodies with broad consensus from interested stakeholders.

National certification systems seeking to obtain PEFC endorsement, must submit to a comprehensive and rigorous assessment process, including independent evaluation and public consultation.

A full and final report of this process is then made publicly available. National systems are required to review their schemes after a five year period. **PEFC uses internationally recognised requirements for certification and accreditation defined by the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO) and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF).**

Based on the recommendation of an independent consultant, the assessment, is submitted to the PEFC Board of Directors and the General Assembly for final endorsement.



# Standards development

## Certification Bodies

Certification bodies that undertake forest certification and/or chain of custody assessments are often accredited to provide the service for both the PEFC and FSC schemes. Only these independent, third party auditors can determine whether forest owners and the supply chain meet strict criteria and guidelines. Therefore, certification bodies must be 'accredited', in other words authorised and judged competent to conduct such audits.

PEFC requires certification bodies to comply with the standards of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and to be accredited by the appropriate national accreditation body (e.g. JAS-ANZ in Australia and New Zealand). This helps avoid any potential conflicts of interest when setting or verifying the criteria and requirements of the standards. Certification Bodies maintain complete independence from PEFC.

## Governance & Decision Making

### **FSC has a defined three-chamber system.**

These three chambers represent the social, environmental and economic issues related to sustainable forestry management. FSC strives for consensus, meaning that a majority in all three chambers have to agree proposals as a minimum requirement.

PEFC decision-making is by consensus and seeks to achieve balanced representation. In order to identify all relevant issues, PEFC uses the nine stakeholder groups as defined in Agenda 21 by the United Nations<sup>†</sup>. This involves all stakeholders concerned with sustainable forest management including forest owners and managers, representation from indigenous peoples, trade unions, trade associations and

organisations and NGOs. No individual stakeholder group can block a decision or drive one through, either internationally or at a national level. PEFC's General Assembly is attended by national member systems (National Governing Bodies) as well as representatives of the Agenda 21 stakeholder groups. These are also represented on PEFC International's Board of Directors.

## Stakeholder Engagement

Both PEFC and FSC take account of social, economic and environmental aspects in their standards, but PEFC takes a bottom-up approach. PEFC endorses national standards and each national standard has to comply with the internationally recognised PEFC Sustainability Benchmarks, which are based on intergovernmental agreements on sustainable forestry management.

A broad range of stakeholder groups (e.g. forestry, conservation organisations, trade unions, indigenous people) are involved in the national standard setting processes. As a starting point for setting a national standard, PEFC complies with existing local laws and regulations for sustainable forestry management. Each stakeholder group in this forum has an equal voice. In this way, the standards that are created, remain rooted for the long term in their country of origin and appropriate to the culture and ideals of that country.

FSC sets its own requirements and standards and operates on more of a top-down basis. Therefore, forest owners are expected to meet the FSC Principles and Criteria, as interpreted by the national standard, when applying for forest certification.

<sup>†</sup>Agenda 21 – at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the United Nations agreed that the best starting point for the achievement of sustainable development is at the local level. Each local authority has had to draw up its own Local Agenda 21 (LA21).

# Chain of Custody and Labels



Both FSC and PEFC operate a Chain of Custody process that traces material through the supply chain from the forest to the end-user in a robust and transparent way. This makes a key contribution to sustainably managed forests worldwide. PEFC and FSC both apply rules for the use of their labels on products.

PEFC recognises two labels to be used on certified products: the **Certified** and **Recycled** labels. In order to use the PEFC label, at least 70% of the material has to be certified. A different label - 100% PEFC origin - is available for materials which all originate from a PEFC certified forest. This applies to all wood-based materials including paper and composite boards. The Responsible Wood logo is available for wood grown and certified in Australia against the Australian Standard for Sustainable Forest Management (AS 4708). The certification body carries out checks on logo use retrospectively, at the point of annual audit.

FSC recognises three labels: **100%**, **Mix** and **Recycled**. FSC Mix can be used on a certified product if at least 70% of the material in timber products comes from FSC-certified forests and/or reclaimed (post-consumer) material. Anybody wishing to use the logo or labels can apply to their certification body. If the label or just the logo is used, any new reproduction must be approved by the certification body issuing the Chain of Custody certificate.

Recycling makes a valuable contribution to sustainable forestry management. It allows wood fibres to remain in use for longer and means that less wood harvesting is required. Recycled paper and wood are deemed sustainable by both PEFC and FSC. Post-consumer is the material delivered for recycling by businesses after use. Pre-consumer material comes from offcuts, waste processing and remnants from carpentry shops and envelope manufacturers etc.

**For products to carry the PEFC recycled label, PEFC requires 100% of the product content to be recycled.**

# What can you do?



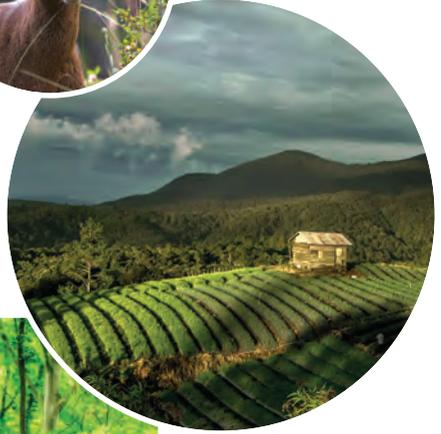
The more certified wood, packaging and paper bought, the greater the incentive for forest owners to opt for sustainable forest management. By developing an inclusive procurement policy that gives preference to certified forest products, you are supporting forest owners' investment in certification.

PEFC firmly believes that competition between the two global schemes encourages continuous improvement, ensures cost effectiveness, delivers efficiency and helps prevent a monopoly forming. The principle of free competition by having two competing global schemes, ensures that the interests of all stakeholders are best protected.

For further information and guidance on the global PEFC and FSC Sustainable Forest Management programs visit: [www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org) and [www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)

PEFC's distinctive 'two trees' logo transcends language barriers making it a truly global brand.

For further information about the PEFC program in Australia visit:  
[www.responsiblewood.org.au](http://www.responsiblewood.org.au)



## RESPONSIBLE WOOD

Level 1, 30 Boothby Street  
Kedron, QLD, Australia 4031  
PO Box 786, New Farm, QLD,  
Australia 4005  
P. +61 7 3359 1758  
E. [info@responsiblewood.org.au](mailto:info@responsiblewood.org.au)

