

Forest Stewardship Council Certification Standard for

Plantations Forests and SLIMF

Republic of South Africa

FSC-STD-ZAF-01-2013 South Africa Plantations and SLIMF

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INTRODUCTION

1. PREFACE

1.1. The Forest Stewardship Council

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an independent, non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation established to promote the responsible management of forests worldwide. It was established as a legal entity in Mexico in February 1994 with its origins in a group of timber users, traders and representatives of environmental and human rights organisation concerned about accelerating deforestation, environmental degradation and social exclusion. At a meeting in California in 1990, this diverse group highlighted the need for a credible system that could identify well-managed forests as the sources of responsibly produced wood products.

But it was only two years later during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 that provided the timely opportunity for many non-governmental organisations to gather support for the idea of a non-governmental, independent and international forest certification scheme.

Since its formal establishment in 1994, the growth of the FSC has seen over 1150 forest management certificates and almost 25000 chain-of-custody certificates issued, with 169 million hectares of land certified.

2. THE FSC'S VISION AND MISSION

2.1. **Vision:** The world's forests meet the social, ecological and economic rights and needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations.

2.2. **Mission:** The Forest Stewardship Council A.C. (FSC) shall promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests.

The FSC defines environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable as follows:

- **Environmentally Appropriate:** Environmentally appropriate forest management ensures that the harvest of timber and non-timber products maintain the forest's biodiversity, productivity and ecological processes.
- **Socially Beneficial:** 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 resource and adhere to long-term management plans.
- **Economically viable:** Economically viable forest management means that 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. The tension between the need to generate adequate financial returns and the principles of responsible forest operations can be reduced through efforts to market the full range of forest products and services for their best value.

For further information, visit: www.fsc.org .

3. WHAT IS FSC CERTIFICATION?

The FSC Principles and Criteria (P&C) describe the essential elements or rules of environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically sound forest management.

These are in turn supported by indicators and verifiers that are normally developed by stakeholders through consensus for a particular geographic region or country. The following definitions have been modified from the CIFOR certification initiative (CIFOR, 1999. Guidelines for Developing, Testing and Selecting Criteria, and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management. Prabhu, R.; Colfer, C. and Dudley, R.I. The Criteria and Indicators Toolbox Series. Centre for International Forestry Research, Jakarta, Indonesia).

- Principle:** A fundamental truth or law as the basis for reasoning or action.
- Criterion:** A principle or standard that a thing is judged by (criteria are “second order” principles that add meaning to a principle without itself being a direct measure of performance).
- Indicator:** Any variable or component of the forest enterprise used to infer the status of a particular criterion (indicators should convey a single, meaningful message).
- Verifier:** Data or information that enhances the specificity or ease of assessment of an indicator (verifiers provide specific details that would indicate or reflect a desired condition of an indicator).

Useful questions that can be asked of a verifier are (after Scrase H. and Lindhe, A. 2001. Developing Forest Stewardship Standards – A Survival Guide. Targa Rescue Network, Sweden. 56pp.):

- Will complying with the verifier achieve good forest management?
- Does the verifier make sense?
- Is it fair to all timber farms (small through large)?
- Does the verifier work consistently well in all parts of the country?
- Can an auditor use it to reach a clear decision, and will all auditors reach the same decision?
- Do forest owners agree that it is operational?

4. THE FSC PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA – International guidelines developed through consensus.

The FSC P&C were first published in 1994, with the last amendment in 2002. All ten principles must be applied in any forest management unit before that unit is awarded FSC certification. The P&C apply to all forest types and to all areas within the management unit included in the scope of the certificate. In South Africa, this would include all planted forests, and unplanted land consisting of natural vegetation, roads, workshops, loading areas, etc.

The South African Standard has been developed through a process of stakeholder consensus to provide locally appropriate indicators for each criterion to show compliance can be demonstrated in the South African situation.

Major failures in any individual Principle will normally disqualify a candidate from certification or, in the case of an existing certificate holder, may lead to decertification. However, flexibility is allowed to cope with local circumstances. The P&Cs allow for differences and difficulties of interpretation to be addressed in national and local forest stewardship standards. The FSC intends to complement, not supplant, other initiatives that support responsible forest management and the P&Cs should be used in conjunction with national and international laws and regulations.

For further information visit www.fsc.org and specifically FSC-STD-01-001 (version 4-0) EN.

5. THE FSC NATIONAL INITIATIVE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In March 2004, following a meeting of the FSC International Board in the town of Sabie, Mpumalanga, South Africa, those stakeholders present met to informally discuss a proposal to develop a set of indicators that could be used for plantation forest certification in South Africa. Various informal meetings and discussions took place from April 2004 to January 2005. On 19 January 2005, a process of establishing a formally constituted National Working Group (as it was known at that time) was put in place. A Background Document: The Development of a National Initiative for South African Plantation and Natural Forest Certification was prepared as the formal initiation of the process.

The interim group identified various criteria for qualification for membership of the NI Working Group, viz.

- A minimum of two people in each of the following chambers:
 - environmental
 - social
 - economic
 - government
- Applicants should demonstrate experience and understanding of the social, environmental, and economic or governance issues expressed in the principles of the National Forest Act 84 of 1998.
- Accept and support their role to facilitate the development of forest management standards, and have exposure to, or working experience in, criteria and indicators.
- Must be
 - willing to become FSC members if required
 - financially independent (travel and subsistence will be paid for)

- literate
- willing to ensure the process is transparent and follow National Initiative procedures as outlined in the FSC 1998 Manual
- The working group should, as far as is practicable, be representative of gender and race, provided the other criteria can also be met.

Following responses from stakeholders, the NI Working Group was constituted and made up of three members in each of the four chambers. The first formal meeting endorsed the process followed so far, and agreed that the NI Working Group Chairperson (the FSC Contact Person) would continue to drive the process. With no funds available, progress was understandably slow, but nevertheless it was agreed that service providers would need to be appointed to develop the standards, and terms of reference were developed as follows.

The standard must be applicable to all plantation forests within the geographical boundaries of South Africa and must:

- be in full compliance with the FSC Principles and criteria
- be aligned with the draft Principles, Criteria, Indicators and Standards for Sustainable Forest Management of Natural Forests and Plantations in South Africa, prepared for the Committee for Sustainable Forest Management (a sub-committee of the National Forests Advisory Council in the Ministry of Forestry)
- comply with existing applicable legislation
- take into account existing best practice documents
- take into consideration any certification body forest management standard check list for South Africa
- include indicators and criteria that are cost-effective and efficient
- be compatible with the ecological, social and economic circumstances prevailing in South Africa

The major delay in any significant progress was lack of adequate funds. Various approaches were made to organisations, both locally and internationally, but there was limited response. Finally, in June 2007, the Department of Forestry agreed to provide the necessary funds for the development of the Standard. The National Forests Act 84 of 1998 specifically states that the Minister may create or promote certification programmes and other incentives to encourage sustainable forest management (section 4(2)(b)) and, following this development, the Terms of Reference for an Expression of Interest were distributed to service providers. The Working Group was represented by a member from each Chamber during the review of the respondents' submissions. Resulting from this was the appointment of the Institute of Natural Resources at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, to develop a voluntary certification standard that is aligned with the principles for sustainable forest management as defined in the National Forests Act, No. 30 of 1998 and the Forest Stewardship Council's Principles and Criteria (FSC-STD-01-001(version 4-0)EN).

In order for the South African National Standard to be approved by the FSC Policy and Standards Unit as the locally appropriate FSC certification standard, it needs to comply with the standard setting requirements determined by the FSC. At the time of the development of the South Africa FSC Standard, the only guidance document available was the FSC National Initiatives Manual (FSC, 1998), and this document therefore provided the basis of the process followed in South Africa. It is perhaps important to note that this Manual was a draft prepared by I.J. Evison and was not an approved FSC document, but was the only one available at that time.

Furthermore, the FSC requires that the development of the standard be undertaken under the guidance of a FSC approved Country Co-ordinator and a National Initiative Working Group comprising representatives in the social, economic and environmental chambers. In the South African case, a fourth chamber (governance) was added to the Working Group. This was because of the Department of Forestry funding of the project, and because the National Forest Act allows for the creation or promotion and certification programmes to encourage sustainable forest management.

The development of the South African FSC standard was undertaken by a core technical team led by the Institute of Natural Resources which reported to the Country Co-ordinator and the National Initiative Working Group.

The development of the standard used an iterative approach, with the preparation of three draft discussion documents and stakeholder comments being obtained on all three of these. The INR core technical team had technical expertise across all four chambers (environmental, social, economic and governance) and was responsible for providing any additional expert input, as well as reviewing all stakeholder comments and input. It should be noted that the stakeholder inputs have been central to the preparation of the three draft standards, with comment invited through a process of both meetings and email communications. A stakeholder list was developed from a range of sources, with a total of approximately 260 people on that list on the completion of the stakeholder consultation process.

A separate standard for SLIMF plantations forests emerged as a stakeholder requirement. This was largely because many of the small growers are illiterate and a simple version of the Plantation Forest Standards was deemed as an appropriate solution to this problem. All plantation forests up to 1000ha was agreed by stakeholders would need to comply with the SLIMF Standard.

A set of trial audits was undertaken on the second drafts as a testing process, using professional auditors, to assess whether the indicators referred to only a single aspect of performance –

- the indicator was measurable
- the indicator was relevant to achievement of the particular criterion
- the verification of the indicator was relevant to that indicator

The INR third draft standards were submitted simultaneously to the Working Group and listed stakeholders in June 2009. Further stakeholder comments were received up until the end of August 2009.

The FSC Principles and Criteria is the core document for FSC forest management certification, and can only be changed by a vote from the FSC membership. Since their adoption in 1994, some changes have been made, though the current version (FSC-STD-01-001(version 4-0) EN) has few differences from the original version. More recently, the FSC initiated a process to conduct a limited review of the P&C, which was subsequently broadened to a full review with a Working Group balanced FSC sub-chamber. In early September 2008, the FSC informed stakeholders of the Review of the FSC Principles and Criteria with the scope and objective “analyse all issues identified in the past regarding the FSC Principles and Criteria, and to propose, where necessary, revisions to the Principles and Criteria needed to solve the identified issues”. The review and revision covers the entire Principles and Criteria including the introduction and glossary of terms.

In September 2008, the FSC invited FSC members to serve on the Working Group on the Review and Revision which was to consist of six members and be chamber balanced. In January 2009, following an internal voting process, the Working Group members were appointed, together with an Advisory Group and a Consultative Forum.

In July and August 2009, the FSC distributed a number of documents to stakeholders for review and comment. The final document for comment was expected in the first quarter of 2010, which would be followed by a 60 day comment period, final publication and then a 30 day voting period.

The process of revision and adoption of the revised FSC International Principles and Criteria was mired in controversy in terms of the implementation date, with some suggestions being that compliance with the new Principles and Criteria could be as early as a year from date of implementation. However, the FSC soon acknowledged that the revision of all country standards within one year of acceptance of the new standard by its members was impractical and potentially very costly to existing country standards and countries in the various stages of establishing their own standards under the existing Principles and Criteria. Various proposals were put to members, with the compliance to the new Principles and Criteria (at that time, still under preparation), as late as 2015.

Because of the confusion over the final date of the implementation of the revised Principles and Criteria, the SA National Initiative Working Group put on hold further consideration of the final draft standard on the understanding that time and finances would be better spent transferring the existing final draft standard to the new Principles and Criteria. However, as the new Principles and Criteria process unfolded, coupled with the development of international generic indicators, the Working Group agreed that irrespective of the consequences, there was a need to submit the South African standard using the existing Principles and Criteria, viz. FSC-STD-01-001(version 4-0) EN.

However, it emerged during the Working Group's approval of the INR final draft standard, that while it met the terms of reference in its entirety, the team had included not only indicators and verifiers, but an additional 'layer' termed a 'standard'. This was developed in an attempt to provide greater clarity on the interpretation of the indicator in that they were designed to provide a largely quantifiable or measurable benchmark to assist with a more consistent interpretation of what can be accepted as compliance with an indicator and thus the criterion.

However, the National Initiative's opinion was that the additional 'layer' made the Certification Standard more complex and detailed. Further. The INR even proposed the removal of the indicators for auditing purposes. The National Initiative Working Group agreed that the inclusion of a fifth 'layer' – the standard – as well as the suggestion to remove the Indicators for field auditing purposes, went beyond their mandate and that the final draft Standard needed to be amended.

This process was initiated in January 2011 by the appointment of an expert auditor, Dr Michal Brink from Forestry Solutions. The reformatting of the INR final draft standard was completed in May 2011, which included a series of meetings with members of the National Initiative Working Group. Following the submission of the reformatted final draft standard, the National Initiative Working Group met between August 2011 and January 2012 to approve the standard. It must be mentioned that during the period July to January 2012, use was made of FSC-GUI-60-004(VI) Forest Stewardship Standards: structure, content and suggested indicators. This is a guidance document that provides a set of 'suggested indicators' that would be useful for FSC national and regional standards in development and would make the process of approval much smoother than has been experienced in the past by other standard setting processes.

Final agreement within the SDG on all the reformatted indicators and verifiers was completed at the end of January 2012.

There was final agreement that the standards would be applied as follows:

Plantation Forest Standard: *For all plantation forests greater than 1000ha.*

- i. Indicators would apply to all plantation owners or managers where the individual different forest management units are larger than 1000ha and are generally spread over a large area (in the region of approximately 25000ha and up to 350000ha) and in some cases over more than one province. Such plantation forests may be certified under one certificate, or up to five different certificates.

- ii. Plantation forest management units totalling in excess of 1000ha but managed or owned by a private landowner are sometimes excluded from indicators and these are identified under each indicator. This would be under circumstances where typically the landowner or manager would be a farmer that relies on timber as the prime source of income with a total forest management area in excess of 1000ha but not exceeding 25000ha or relies on timber and other crops combined as the prime source of income with forest management units on the landholding in excess of 1000ha.

SLIMF Forest Standard: *For all plantation forests less than 1000ha*

Typically this would be small timber growers with management units of anything between 0.2ha up to 1000ha. Growers would not normally rely on the forest products as their main source of income but would comprise mixed farming units with income from timber on an infrequent, but not annual, basis. This standard requires the same levels of infield performance as the Plantation Forest Standard, but does not require detailed record keeping such as would be found on a large forest enterprise covering many forest management units.

Definitions: All definitions are as contained in the FSC-STD-01-001(version 4-0 EN).