

## The PEFC Council is expanding beyond Europe to include schemes developed against other sustainable forest management processes

by Ben Gunneberg

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THE Pan European Forest Certification (PEFC) Council is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation promoting the independent third-party certification of environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable forest management. It does this by encouraging national or regional, multi-stakeholder-developed, independent third-party forest certification schemes based on political processes for the promotion of sustainable forest management such as the ITTO Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management, the Montreal, Tarapoto, Near East, Lepaterique, Dry Zone Africa, Dry Zone Asia and Ministerial Conference on Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE, also known as Helsinki) processes and the African Timber Organization/ITTO initiative. PEFC provides a framework and umbrella for the mutual recognition of independent, national forest certification schemes so developed.

PEFC is the largest certification system in the world, with more than 43 million hectares certified by twelve endorsed schemes; the area is increasing rapidly (*see table* and also the interactive database at [www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org)). PEFC provides a logo for timber products from such schemes.

### PEFC is not only for Europe

Since it was established three years ago the PEFC Council has seen an increase in membership from nine to 19 schemes, including three schemes from North America—the Canadian Standards Association Sustainable Forest Management Standard, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, and the American Tree Farm System—which will all be seeking endorsement in the near future. This year, three more non-European schemes—from Australia, Chile and Malaysia—have applied for membership and more applications are expected.

The PEFC Council was established on the basis of some fundamental principles that were in danger of being eroded

by other efforts to promote sustainable forest management. These principles included, among others:

- respect for and use of regional political processes for promoting sustainable forest management as a basis for developing certification standards;
- support for the subsidiarity principle for each country and encouraging a bottom-up approach to the multi-stakeholder development of certification standards based on the regional political processes to ensure the long-term buy-in of the users of the schemes and of society in general;
- respect for the democratic principles appropriate to each country for developing, with broad stakeholder participation, national certification schemes which can be delivered by certification bodies accredited by national accreditation bodies that are independent of the standards-setting bodies and scheme owners; and
- the genuine separation of the bodies responsible for setting the standards from those assessing and delivering the final certificate to ensure the total independence and impartiality of certification decision-making.

### PEFC and independence

Increasing numbers of stakeholders in countries around the world want the certification schemes they develop to be truly independent and appropriate to the political, cultural, economic and ecological realities of their particular country. A simple question can be used to check the independence of any mutual-recognition or endorsement process: can the national scheme remain fully operational should the scheme owners decide to withdraw from a mutual recognition or endorsement process? In the case of the PEFC umbrella the answer is emphatically 'yes'. If a national scheme were to decide to withdraw from the PEFC Council, the use of independent certifiers accredited by national accreditation organisations would ensure it remained fully operational. This would not be the case if, for example, the PEFC Council was to be an accreditation body. This independence requires a responsible and mature approach by all the schemes (and stakeholders) involved in a mutual recognition umbrella.

Most of the schemes that currently form the PEFC Council have been developed against the MCPFE process and have been assessed against the Pan European Operational Level Guidelines (PEOLG). Unfortunately, many of the other regional processes have not yet produced equivalents to the PEOLG; nevertheless, it is appropriate and proper that national schemes should be assessed against the regional processes used to develop them.

The PEFC Council is now reviewing its procedures to facilitate the endorsement process; a set of proposals will

### Endorsed and certified

Area of forest certified under schemes endorsed by the PEFC Council, July 2002

Scheme	Area certified (hectares)
Austrian Forest Certification Scheme	3 924 000
Belgian Forest Certification Scheme	–
Czech Forest Certification Scheme	–
Finnish Forest Certification Scheme	21 910 000
French Forest Certification Scheme	239 989
German Forest Certification Scheme	5 584 592
Latvian Forest Certification Scheme	8000
Norwegian Living Forest Standards and Certification Scheme	9 352 000
Spanish Certification Scheme for SFM	86 690
Swedish Forest Certification Scheme	2 052 115
Swiss Q Label Certification Scheme	64 574
UK Certification Scheme for SFM	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>43 221 960</b>

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# The challenge of growing certification

**A phased approach could be the best way of making more rapid progress**

**by Dradjad Wibowo**

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**F**OR many developing countries in the tropics, forest certification is a tall order. Many social, political, ecological and economic factors undermine efforts made by these countries in making progress towards sustainable forest management (SFM). In most cases these factors are very complex, intertwined, and extremely difficult to resolve. As a consequence, forest stakeholders in these countries need to work much harder to achieve SFM compared to their counterparts in the temperate, developed world.

Such difficulties are not well recognised in the consuming (developed) countries. This is unfortunate given the dominance of developed countries in determining the norms and values of SFM and also given that the credibility and international acceptance of certification schemes are in most cases determined by NGOs in those countries.

Developing countries are lagging way behind in SFM certification (see page 3). There is a wide gap between the existing level of forest management and what is required by SFM certification standards. This is not all the fault of poor logging practice: some components of the gap are external factors beyond the control of a forest concession-holder. For example, the issue of disputed land tenure has become one of the key stumbling blocks to SFM. Land tenure conflicts between concessionaires or forest owners and local communities, which are not uncommon, often result from flawed government policies on land tenure and natural resource management. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that developing countries often lack the necessary institutional infrastructure to mediate and resolve these conflicts. In Indonesia, for example, virtually all forest areas are under some kinds of tenurial conflict. The Soeharto administration often suppressed local communities and violated their rights over forest lands. Nowadays, the reverse is taking place. Community claims over forests can be found everywhere, from Sumatra to the Papua islands. Some of these are legitimate and reasonable, but others are difficult to comprehend and often include financial

claims way beyond what could be deemed reasonable. If the conflict is relatively mild it can often be settled directly by concession-holders in negotiation with community claimants—at a given cost. But in most cases the conflict is much more serious and expensive and cannot be settled easily. Unfortunately, if a multi-stakeholder conflict resolution mechanism is not yet established and if social institutions are unable to mediate the conflict to ensure a win-win solution, forest management units (FMUs) involved in such a conflict will not be certifiable.

Even in the developed world, settling tenurial conflicts is not easy. Australia, for example, took decades before it came up with the Mabo decision in the early 1990s, which went some way towards addressing Aboriginal land-tenure claims in the country. The task is even more difficult when there is political instability and major transitions in power, as is sometimes the case in tropical countries.

Rampant illegal logging poses another hurdle for certification. Illegal logging is in fact not the cause of the problem but a symptom of deeper causes. In Indonesia these causes include: weak legal infrastructure and law enforcement; a political transition that sidelines military and police forces (which in turn leads personnel from these forces to look, on an individual basis, to activities such as illegal logging); legal mayhem as a result of the flawed design of decentralisation; and a lack of willingness on the part of some forest concession-holders to implement legal and sustainable forest management. A high level of illegal logging adds to the complications of certification in developing countries and makes it even less credible in the minds of consuming countries.

For Asian-crisis countries, and other poor countries in the tropics, the costs required to bridge the gap between current practice and the standards of certification can be enormous, and way beyond the financial capacity of forest stakeholders. For national certification initiatives such as the Indonesian Ecolabelling Institute (LEI) and the Malaysian Timber Certification Council, all these challenges significantly

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be presented to members at the Council's General Assembly in November. This includes a proposal for pursuing the endorsement of non-European schemes, although debate on the appropriate structures and procedures to better integrate the other regional processes into the PEFC scheme is ongoing.

The current proposal is that when standards developed by a regional process are submitted to the PEFC Council for endorsement, the documentation shall include a common reference base for each process that is compatible with the PEOLG with respect to scope and the level of requirements. It is therefore proposed that the PEFC Council will approve such a reference base prior to commencement of the scheme assessment (this will of course require studies to be undertaken to inform decision-making); the standards

will be assessed against such a reference base. Where such a reference base is not provided, the default procedure will be to use the PEOLG as the basis for the endorsement (as is currently the case). All other scheme requirements will be assessed against the existing PEFC Council requirements as amended from time to time by the General Assembly.

Although initially developed to address the European situation, the PEFC Council's approach now has worldwide appeal. We look forward to closer cooperation with national forest certification schemes around the world to further develop our global mutual recognition umbrella.