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**"Training for Forest Certification Body"**

ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015 Conformity Assessment – Requirements for

Bodies providing audit and certification of management systems

Part 1: Requirements

**Ensuring Compliance in Timber Certification: The Application of ISO 17065 and ISO 17021**
**for**
**Bodies Certifying to MTLAS and MFCS**

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# Ensuring Compliance in Timber Certification

## The Application of ISO 17065 and 17021

## For bodies providing audit and certification of management systems

## Part 1: Requirement

1. **High Light**

- Differentiate between Accredited Certification Bodies (CBs) and Notified Certification Bodies (CBs).

- Understand the fundamental nature and scope of the Myanmar Timber Legality Assurance System (MTLAS) and the Myanmar Forest Certification Scheme (MFCS).

- Identify the key similarities and differences between MTLAS and MFCS, particularly concerning Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) and Chain of Custody (CoC).

- Understand the strategic implications of government sponsorship in MTLAS and the voluntary internationally recognized nature of MFCS.

2. **Understanding Certification Bodies – Accredited vs. Notified**

**Introduction:**

Certification Bodies (CBs) play a crucial role in verifying compliance with established standards.[1] However, their authority and recognition can differ significantly based on whether they are "Accredited" or "Notified." This section will clarify these distinctions.

(A) **Accredited Certification Bodies (CBs)**

- **Definition:** An Accredited CB is an organization that has been formally recognized by an Accreditation Body (AB) as competent to carry out specific certification activities.[2]

- **What is an Accreditation Body (AB)?** An AB is an independent, authoritative organization that assesses and audits CBs against international standards (e.g., ISO/IEC 17021 for management system certification with ISO/IEC 17065 for product certification).[3] Examples include UKAS (UK), ANAB (USA), DAkkS (Germany), and in a regional context, potentially a National Accreditation Body if Myanmar establishes one or utilizes a regional body.

- **Key Characteristics:**

  o **Independence and Impartiality:** Accreditation ensures the CB operates with independence and impartiality, free from conflicts of interest.[4]

  o **Competence:** The AB rigorously assesses the CB's technical competence, including its personnel, processes, and resources, to perform certifications reliably.[5]

  o **Credibility and Trust:** Certificates issued by Accredited CBs carry higher credibility and are widely accepted internationally due to the robust oversight provided by the AB.[6]

- o **Voluntary Nature (for the CB):** Becoming accredited is generally a voluntary decision for a CB to demonstrate its commitment to quality and competence.

- o **Market-Driven:** Accreditation is often driven by market demand and the need for international recognition and acceptance of certificates.

- **Analogy:** Think of an Accredited CB as a university whose degree programs have been formally recognized and validated by a national or international education accreditation board. This validation assures the quality and rigor of the education provided.

**(B) Notified Certification Bodies (CBs)**

**Definition:** A Notified CB is designated by a governmental authority or an authorized institution (e.g., MFCC) to assess conformity with specific legal or regulatory requirements under national or regional frameworks.[7]

- **Key Characteristics:**

  - o **Government Mandate:** Notification is a legal or regulatory act by a governmental authority or through the affiliated institution (e.g., MFCC), granting the CB the power to certify products or systems for compliance with specific national laws or directives.

  - o **Focus on Regulations:** Notified CBs primarily operate within a regulatory framework, ensuring products or services meet mandatory national requirements (e.g., safety, environmental, health standards).[8]

  - o **Limited Scope (Often):** Their scope of operation is typically defined by the specific regulations they are "notified" to address.

  - o **Compliance-Driven:** The primary purpose of a Notified CB is to facilitate compliance with national legislation, often for market access within that specific country or region.

  - o **Example (EU Context):** In the European Union, Notified Bodies are crucial for CE marking, where they assess products against EU directives before they can be placed on the market.[9]

**Table 1- EU notified CBs under EUTR**

| SGS | TLTV, LegalTrace®, legality verification |
|---|---|
| **Bureau Veritas** | Legal timber audits |
| **SCS Global Services** | LegalHarvest™, SVLK certification |
| **SmartWood.** | VLO & VLC audits |
| **Certisource** | Legality verification services |
| **Control Union** | Timber Legality Verification (TLV), Woodtrack ® DDS, EUDR-ready |

VLO = Verified Legal Origin (Known Source), VLC = Verified Legal Origin

- **Analogy:** Imagine a government agency appointing specific laboratories to test and certify that all imported food products meet national food safety standards before they can be sold. These laboratories are "notified" by the government for this specific regulatory function.

**Table 2: Key Differences Between Accredited and Notified CBs**

| Feature | Accredited CB | Notified CB |
|---|---|---|
| **Authority From** | Independent Accreditation Body (AB) | Government/National Authority |
| **Primary Driver** | Market demand, credibility, international recognition | National regulations, legal compliance |
| **Scope** | Defined by international standards (e.g., ISO) | Defined by specific national regulations/directives |
| **Nature** | Voluntary for the CB to seek accreditation | Mandatory designation by government(or) authorized institution |
| **Focus** | Competence, impartiality, broad acceptance | Regulatory compliance, regional/international market access |
| **International Acceptance** | High, due to adherence to ISO Standards and IAF | Often limited to national / regional scope |

## 3.    MFCC's Dual Systems – MTLAS and MFCS

**Introduction:**

The Myanmar Forest Certification Committee (MFCC) oversees two critical systems designed to promote sustainable forest management and ensure the legality of timber: the Myanmar Timber Legality Assurance System (MTLAS) and the Myanmar Forest Certification Scheme (MFCS). While both share common goals, their approaches and underlying structures differ.

### (A) Myanmar Timber Legality Assurance System (MTLAS)

- **Nature:**  MTLAS is a **combined system** focused on ensuring the legality of timber and timber products from the sustainably-managed forest to the point of sale.

- **Key Aspects Covered:**

    - **Good Forest Governance (elements of Sustainable Forest Management):** This includes adherence to national forestry laws, regulations, and principles of sustainable forest management. It covers aspects like harvesting limits, environmental protection, social considerations, and worker safety.

    - **Supply Chain Guarantee (No Mixing from Unknown Sources):** This is the "legality assurance" component, ensuring that timber originating from illegal or

unknown sources is not mixed with legal timber throughout the supply chain. This involves robust tracking and verification mechanisms.

- **Integration:** Under MTLAS, these two aspects (Good Forest Governance-SFM and Supply Chain Guarantee-CoC) are **set together** as an integrated system. The focus is on demonstrating that the timber originates from both legally harvested and sustainably managed within a single framework.

- **Mandatory Alignment & Government Sponsorship:** MTLAS is designed to be **aligned under the sponsorship by the government**. This means the government plays a central role in its implementation, enforcement, and potentially, in making its application obligatory for timber operators in Myanmar. This government backing provides a strong legal and institutional foundation.

- **Purpose:** The primary purpose of MTLAS is to ensure the legality of Myanmar's timber, meet national legal requirements, and potentially facilitate trade with countries that have timber legality regulations (e.g., EU Timber Regulation, US Lacey Act).

**(B) Myanmar Forest Certification Scheme (MFCS)**

- **Nature:** MFCS is a **forest certification scheme** that primarily focuses on independent, third-party verification of sustainable forest management practices.

- **Key Aspects Covered (Divided):**

  - **Sustainable Forest Management (SFM):** This component rigorously assesses forest management units against a set of predetermined standards for environmental, social, and economic sustainability. It covers aspects like biodiversity conservation, community rights, worker safety, long-term timber production, and silvicultural practices.

  - **Chain of Custody (CoC):** This is a separate, but complementary, certification that tracks forest products from a certified forest through the various stages of processing, manufacturing, and distribution, ensuring that certified material is not mixed with uncertified or unknown material. CoC certification requires accreditation under ISO/IEC 17065 by a recognized AB. CoC is essential for maintaining the integrity of certified claims in downstream processing.

- **Division of Aspects:** Unlike MTLAS, MFCS **divides these aspects** into distinct SFM (Forest Management) certification and CoC certification. While related, they can be pursued independently, though CoC relies on an SFM-certified source (another option as The Controlled Source- which means the sustainably-managed under the own system without certified by an independent certification system)

- **Voluntary Nature & Global Appreciation:** MFCS (as a typical SFM certification scheme) is **voluntary** in nature. Forest owners, managers, and timber companies choose to pursue MFCS certification to demonstrate their commitment to responsible forest stewardship. This voluntary commitment, coupled with adherence to internationally recognized principles, makes it **more widely appreciated in the world**by consumers, businesses, and environmental organizations who value sustainable and ethically sourced products. While accreditation is generally voluntary, participation in some

certification schemes (e.g., PEFC, FSC) requires certification bodies to be accredited by an internationally recognized accreditation body.[10]

- **Purpose:** MFCS aims to provide independent assurance of sustainable forest management, enhance market access for certified timber products, improve the image of Myanmar's forestry sector, and contribute to global efforts in combating deforestation and promoting responsible resource use.

**Table 3: Comparison of MTLAS and MFCS**

| Feature | Myanmar Timber Legality Assurance System (MTLAS) | Myanmar Forest Certification Scheme (MFCS) |
|---|---|---|
| **Primary Focus** | Timber Legality & Good Forest Governance | Sustainable Forest Management |
| **Coverage** | SFM (Good Governance) & Supply Chain Guarantee | SFM (Forest Management) to be attached by CoC |
| **Structure of Aspects** | Combined/Integrated | Divided (SFM and CoC) |
| **Maturity (as of 2025)** | To be aligned under mandatory government sponsorship | Voluntary |
| **Driving Force** | Government mandate, national regulations | Market demand, corporate responsibility, consumer preference |
| **Accreditation Requirement** | Optional or government-mandated (Notified) CBs | Mandatory (Accredited CB under ISO/IEC 17021 and 17065) |
| **Global Recognition** | Focus on legality, potentially for compliance with import regulations | Wider appreciation for sustainable practices, market access benefits |
| **Flexibility for Users** | Less flexible, driven by legal requirements | More flexible, market-driven |

**4. The Synergy and Strategic Importance for MFCC**

**(A) Why have both MTLAS and MFCS?**

The existence of both MTLAS and MFCS demonstrates a comprehensive approach by MFCC to address different but related ways of responsible forest management and timber trade.

**(1) Addressing Different Needs:**

- o **MTLAS:** Primarily caters to the fundamental need for **legality assurance**, which is often a prerequisite for international trade and national compliance. It provides a baseline for all timber operations.

- o **MFCS:** Addresses the demand for **sustainability verification**, appealing to a more discerning market and demonstrating a higher level of environmental and social responsibility.

**(2) Complementary Systems:**

- o MTLAS can serve as a robust foundation for MFCS. A legal timber supply chain (MTLAS) is a prerequisite for a credible sustainable forest management certification (MFCS). It's difficult to claim sustainability if legality is not assured.

- o MFCS can enhance the credibility and international acceptance of Myanmar's timber beyond just legality, opening up premium markets and fostering a positive image.

**(3) Government Mandate vs. Market Voluntary:**

- o The government's sponsorship of MTLAS provides the necessary legal strength and enforcement power to combat illegal logging effectively nationwide.

- o The voluntary nature of MFCS allows forest operators to differentiate themselves in the market, respond to consumer demands, and continuously improve their practices beyond minimum legal requirements.

**(B) Strategic Importance for MFCC:**

- **Enhanced Credibility:** By developing and overseeing both systems, MFCC positions Myanmar as a responsible timber-producing nation. It is difficult to claim sustainability if legality (TLAS) is not assured while MFCS can enhance the credibility and international acceptance of Myanmar's timber beyond just legality.

- **Market Access:** MTLAS helps meet international legality requirements, while MFCS opens doors to sustainability-conscious markets.

- **Sustainable Development:** Both systems contribute to the long-term health of Myanmar's forests and the well-being of forest-dependent communities.

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** MFCC's role in governing these systems fosters collaboration between government, industry, and civil society.

### 5.Conclusion:

Understanding the distinct roles of Accredited and Notified CBs is crucial for appreciating the global landscape of conformity assessment. Similarly, grasping the unique yet complementary natures of MTLAS and MFCS is vital for MFCC's strategic objectives. MTLAS, with its government-backed, combined approach to legality and governance, provides the essential foundation. MFCS, as a voluntary, globally appreciated scheme for SFM and CoC, allows Myanmar to showcase its commitment to the highest standards of sustainable forestry. Together, these systems pave the way for a credible, sustainable, and legally compliant timber sector in Myanmar. Both systems will form the foundation for a phased, dual-track approach aligning Myanmar with legality assurance (baseline compliance) and global sustainability norms (market expansion).

### 6. Additional Clarification

#### (1) Accreditation of a Certification Body (CB):

- o **Notified Status is NOT a requirement for Accreditation:** It is to be noted well that "Notified status" (often used in the context of a scheme owner, like PEFC, "notifying" or recognizing a CB as being able to audit against their standards) is a separate function from accreditation. **Accreditation is about a CB demonstrating its competence and impartiality to an Accreditation Body (AB).**

- o **Accreditation is essential for credibility:** A Certification Body *needs* accreditation to demonstrate its competence, impartiality, and adherence to international standards (like the ISO/IEC 17000 series, specifically ISO/IEC 17021-1 for management systems or ISO/IEC 17065 for products, processes, and services, which apply to forest certification). This gives confidence to the market that the certificates issued by the CB are reliable.

- o **Accreditation Bodies (ABs) and Accreditation Forums (e.g., IAF):** ABs are independent organizations that assess and accredit CBs. The International Accreditation Forum (IAF) is a global association of accreditation bodies and other interested parties. Its primary function is to develop a single worldwide program of conformity assessment (through Mutual Recognition Arrangements or Multilateral Recognition Arrangements - MLAs) that reduces risk for businesses and customers by ensuring that accredited certificates can be relied upon globally ("Certified Once, Accepted Everywhere"). Many national ABs are members of the IAF.

#### (2) Accreditation vs. Notified Status:

- o **Accreditation:** This is a formal recognition by an AB that a CB is competent to carry out specific conformity assessment tasks (e.g., auditing against forest management standards). It's a statement about the CB's operational quality and adherence to internationally recognized guidelines.

- o **Notified/Recognized Status (by a scheme owner):** Forest certification schemes like FSC and PEFC (the "scheme owners") establish their own standards and often have processes to formally "recognize" or "notify" certain accredited CBs as being eligible to conduct audits against their specific scheme requirements. While this often requires the CB to be accredited by an IAF MLA signatory AB, it's an

additional layer of approval by the scheme owner, not a substitute for accreditation itself.

**(3) Multiple Accreditations for CBs:**

  o **A CB can be accredited by multiple international Accreditation Bodies.** This is entirely possible and can even be beneficial for a CB, as it might allow them to operate in different regions or meet specific requirements of diverse markets. As long as each AB is reputable and ideally a signatory to the IAF MLA, it strengthens the CB's global reach and credibility.

Accreditation is the foundational demonstration of a Certification Body's competence and impartiality, assessed by an independent Accreditation Body that often operates under the umbrella of international forums like the IAF. "Notified status" or "recognition" by a specific forest certification scheme (like FSC or PEFC) is an additional layer that confirms the accredited CB is authorized to audit against *that particular scheme's* standards. And yes, a CB can indeed hold accreditations from more than one AB.

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