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WHY THE PEFC, SFI AND CSA ARE NOT CREDIBLE FOREST CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

Forest certification can be an important tool to improve forest management. It is neither a panacea to solve the world's forest crisis, nor can it replace regulations and legislation. However, it can and should complement these tools.

The role forest certification can play depends on the strength of the chosen certification system. Certification systems currently in operation are significantly different from each other in terms of procedural and performance requirements. The four largest are: the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Pan European Forest Certification Scheme (PEFC). The FSC is a global program, the CSA is only applicable in Canada, the SFI is mainly applicable in the US and Canada, and the PEFC provides a framework for national certification schemes in up to 14 European countries.

The CSA, PEFC and SFI are certification systems initiated and, in most cases, governed primarily by the forestry industry and forest owners. Although attempts by the forestry industry and forest owners to improve forest management are to be encouraged, we believe that the CSA, the SFI and the PEFC do not fulfil the basic requirements for credible forest certification systems and should not be preferred or promoted by consumers or corporate purchasers.

The basic requirements for a credible forest certification system

Certification is a process by which an independent third party gives written assurances that a product, process or service conforms to specified requirements. To be effective, forest certification must:

- be based on objective, comprehensive, independent and measurable performance-based standards –both environmental and social;
- be based on equal and balanced participation of a broad range of stakeholders;
- be based on a labelling system that includes a credible chain of custody;
- be based on reliable and independent third party assessments and includes annual field audits;
- be fully transparent to the parties involved and the public;
- take place at the forest management unit level (and not at country or regional level);
- be cost effective and voluntary;
- positively demonstrate commitment from the forest owner/manager towards improving forest management;
- be applicable globally and to all sorts of tenure systems, to avoid discrimination and distortion in the market place.

Applying these basic requirements to the four different certification systems shows clearly why the FSC is currently the only certification system that meets these requirements:

	FSC	PEFC ¹	CSA	SFI
Certification of performance standards ² with clear minimum environmental and social thresholds.	Yes	No	No	No
Allows for equitable and balanced participation and decision making.	Yes	No	No ³	No
Includes a credible chain of custody as a basis for product labelling.	Yes	No	No	No
Requires independent third party assessment and annual field audits.	Yes	No	Yes	No
Is transparent to the public and the parties involved.	Yes	No	No	No
Requires forest management unit level certification.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes ⁴
Is cost effective and voluntary. ⁵	Yes	No ⁶	Yes	Yes ⁷
Requires a clear commitment from managers towards improving forest management.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Is a global system, applicable in all regions and all sort of tenure systems.	Yes	No	No	No

While the PEFC, CSA and SFI incorporate some of the above features, only FSC delivers on every important component of a credible forest management certification system. Consequently, we consider the FSC to be the only available framework that meets the basic requirements outlined above. The FSC is therefore the only credible forest certification system that we can recommend to consumers or promote among forest managers, policy makers and the public.

¹ Although the PEFC has different standards and procedures in different European countries, the table is based on the general PEFC requirements. Some national PEFC systems (i.e. Sweden) are performance based.

² Performance standards should specifically address a comprehensive range of key issues, including, at a minimum: old-growth or high conservation value forests; protection of biological diversity; use of chemicals and GMOs; recognition of indigenous peoples' rights; soil and water quality; and consistency with laws and international agreements (e.g., ILO standards on labour rights, Convention on Biological Diversity).

³ Public input is required via public **advisory** groups, but the final decision about performance objectives is made by the applicant.

⁴ SFI is largely systems based. The forestry organisation determines the scope of the assessment and it is unclear to what extent individual forest management unit audits are required.

⁵ All schemes are seen as cost-effective, but not all are voluntary.

⁶ As regions are certified without requiring the consent of all the forest owners in the region, it is doubtful whether the system is truly voluntary. Forest owners are given the option not to join, but this involves opting out and communicating this decision.

⁷ Compliance with SFI standard is mandatory for the members of the American Forest and Paper Association, the national trade association for the US forest products and paper industry. Members may choose between first-party, second-party or third-party verification. Only third-party verification equals SFI certification.

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