

# Certification schemes respond to Confor survey



**Andrew Heald** has asked PEFC and FSC to comment on the Confor Certification survey results.

In the last issue of FTN, Confor shared the results of our certification survey of UK sawmill and processors. The results of the survey confirmed a number of concerns that we have been highlighting in recent years, particularly around the availability of certified material and the question of a certified 'price premium'.

We asked the two schemes for their response and these are published in full in the panel on the right.

Following our meeting with PEFC International CEO Ben Gunneberg in April, we have also met with FSC International in July. Andrew Heald and Stuart Goodall of Confor sat down with FSC International Director General Kim Carstensen, the European Director Anand Punja and Rosie Teasdale, Executive Director of FSC UK, to highlight concerns and frustrations from the UK forest and timber industry.

We received reassurance that there is full support for a review of certification for smaller forests, and a revision of the FSC Group Scheme standard has been prioritised. However, there remains a tension within the FSC membership about the scope of FSC and whether it should be a platinum standard for the few or a 'good-

enough' standard for the many. FSC International reiterated their target of 20% of forest products to be certified by 2020, and that this was one of their main priorities.

Risk-adjusted auditing was also discussed, and this is seen as a key method to better target improvements in certification. Risk-adjusted auditing will be raised at the forthcoming FSC General Assembly but there doesn't appear to be a clear implementation plan as to how this will move forward and be delivered on the ground. Confor stressed that the UK would be the perfect low-risk country in which to trial any proposal.

Confor has lodged a motion at the General Assembly calling on better analysis of audit reports, to understand where non-conformances are occurring during audits. This ground work will be essential for any risk based approach. We were pleased to learn that this analysis is already occurring in some countries and that the UK intends to work on this in the near future.

Certification will always be a thorny topic and there remains a lack of clarity about what problem certification is actually trying to fix in the UK. The priority should be to simply promote and deliver better forest management, but somehow this seems to be perpetually lost in an ever-growing list of requirements, criteria and indicators. Confor's members want to see some simple improvements which save time, reduce cost and maintain integrity; at the moment there doesn't seem to be many improvements on the horizon.



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## Continuing to grow

by **Tallulah Chapman**, FSC UK Communications Manager

FSC certification can improve market access, enhance public image and incentivise good forest management. In the past five years global FSC certified forest area has increased by 32% to more than 196 million hectares and Chain of Custody (CoC) certificates have increased by 42% to over 32,000.

The FSC certified area in the UK has decreased from its peak of 1.69 million hectares in 2007; at the time of writing, it stands at around 1.62 M ha. However, over the last three or four years there has actually been a slight upward trend.

### Specification

50% of respondents to the Confor survey for timber processors and sawmills stated that their customers specify FSC certified material. However, the FSC UK office regularly handles enquiries from businesses who, possibly due to incorrect specification, have received uncertified material or potentially certified material with a broken chain of custody. FSC UK are therefore working to improve the links between specifiers and suppliers of FSC certified products.

Those inviting tenders that include a requirement for FSC certified materials should ensure that suppliers are aware of the requirement that both the product and the supplier themselves (not just



their supplier) must be FSC certified. Those tendering for projects requiring the use of FSC certified materials should ensure that they hold FSC certification. This will enable them to provide the appropriate evidence of FSC certification to their contracting organisation.

### Small businesses

Group forest management and chain of custody certification has been developed to help smaller woodland owners and small businesses achieve FSC certification by reducing the costs of certification. Groups of small or low intensity managed forests (SLIMFs) benefit from streamlined auditing procedures designed to reduce the costs of certification. The total number of group scheme members in the UK has risen from 916 in July 2015 to 959 in June 2017, despite the closure of some smaller group schemes in the same period.

### Vancouver and the future

“At the 2014 FSC General Assembly, our members made it clear that they wanted a bolder, stronger, more effective FSC. The Global Strategic Plan 2015-2020 confirms our commitments to increase focus on outcomes, empower people, advance our mission through alliances and improve user orientation.” says Kim Carstensen, FSC Director General.

A key objective of the plan is the streamlining of FSC’s policies and standards to ensure they are outcome-oriented and risk-based, incorporate market implications, and are analysed for cost implications. FSC welcomes feedback from certificate holders and other stakeholders, particularly in response to public consultations on these and other normative documents.

## Time for a more pragmatic approach?

Commenting on the findings of the Confor Certification Survey, **Alun Watkins**, who heads up PEFC in the UK agrees that the survey provides some very useful feedback on what many find a confusing prospect. “Both forest owners and Chain of Custody certificate holders appear frustrated by what they see as unnecessary bureaucracy involved in the certification process and the cost of audits,” says Alun.

“As FSC forest certification was once the only option available to the UK forestry sector, PEFC is still very much in catch up mode. However, we welcome the chance to work more closely with UK forest industry to give them some clarity on what PEFC offers.” PEFC is now the world’s largest forest certification scheme and prides itself on its bottom-up approach. Its national members work closely with both forest owners and the supply chain to ensure that certified material is delivered to market as efficiently as possible.

### Reducing costs

Indeed, with a view to reducing certification costs, PEFC UK is already working to establish group certification schemes for small and medium-sized forest owners, along with an online forest certification tool to make the process easier. PEFC is also revising its Chain of Custody standard and guidance documentation to make them more user-

friendly. Additionally, all certification body auditors now have to participate in PEFC-recognised training to make auditing, just as robust, but more applicable and consistent.

In terms of market access, PEFC UK is investing resources into growing demand for PEFC certified timber. In 2015 the Central Point of Expertise on Timber (CPET) the review of public sector timber procurement policy (Category A Evidence), saw PEFC certification once again judged to provide assurances of legal and sustainable timber sourcing. In addition, various international construction sustainability schemes such as BREEAM accept PEFC certified timber as providing assurances of responsibly-sourced timber. Most of the UK’s leading construction companies are committed to procuring certified timber and the majority of UK timber merchants are dual PEFC/ FSC certified.

However, one issue that PEFC UK hears regularly, is that merchants specify that homegrown timber must be FSC, purely because this is what is embedded into their computer procurement system. “This is not an insurmountable problem,” says Alun. “Maybe the UK should follow the rest of Europe and adopt a more pragmatic approach to certification, there is a viable alternative, perhaps it’s time for a change!”