



Environment No. 2

- ▶ At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, a number of forest principles were enunciated to address the lack of progress in halting the destruction of the world's forest resources.
- ▶ Forest certification aims to define and monitor standards for environmental and social improvement in natural resources management.
- ▶ Forest certification is an independent assurance that the quality of management practised by an enterprise conforms to agreed specified standards.
- ▶ The certification process, which relies on trade and the international market to work, has gone from strength to strength.
- ▶ The establishment of forest management standards for Ireland, endorsed by certification bodies, is a priority.
- ▶ A certification scheme appropriate to the private sector is required in Ireland.
- ▶ Ongoing awareness and training programmes are required to improve the skills of forest owners/managers to the requirements of certification.

COFORD
 Agriculture Building
 Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland
 Telephone: +353 1 716 7700
 Email: info@coford.ie
 http://www.coford.ie
 © COFORD 2003

Forest Certification – what does it mean for Irish forestry?

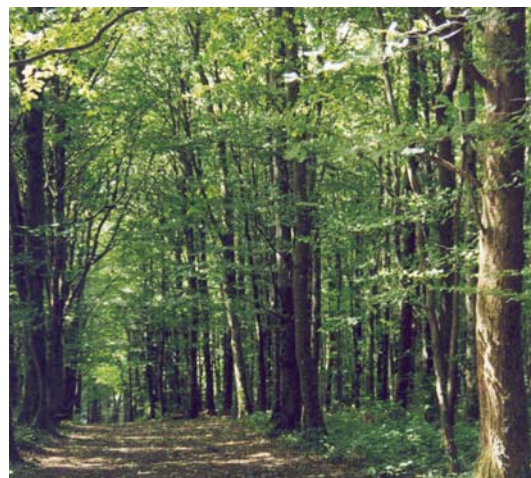
Alistair Pfeifer¹

What is forest certification?

Forest certification is a relatively new concept. It is an independent assurance that the quality of management practised by an enterprise conforms to specified standards. It attempts to link the demand for forest products to environmental and social standards, to producers who can meet such demands. Certification has evolved since 1989 and is part of a trend to define and monitor standards for environmental and social improvements in natural resource management.

Why did it originate?

The degradation and destruction of the world's forest resources has been ongoing for many decades, particularly in tropical regions. Programmes to halt this trend, such as the tropical Forestry Action Plans, the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES) and the Global Environment Facility, have not been fully effective in addressing forest degradation and destruction. This lack of progress was highlighted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 where the environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), along with many government organisations, pushed strongly for international agreements and legislation to tackle the problem of deforestation and forest degradation. Arising from the Earth Summit, a number of non-legally binding Forest Principles and an agenda (Agenda 21) were established which set out action programmes for sustainable development for the next century. The four



Species diversity is an important consideration of sustainable forest management, for balancing economic, social and environmental values.

¹ Alistair Pfeifer, Research and Environment Manager, Coillte, Dublin Road, Newtownmountkennedy, Co Wicklow. Tel: 01-2011111. Email: Alistair.Pfeifer@coillte.ie

TABLE 1: The four programme areas in Agenda 21 concerned with combating deforestation.

AGENDA 21 Chapter 11: Combating Deforestation Programme Areas
A. Sustaining the multiple roles and functions of all types of forests, forest lands and woodlands
B. Enhancing the protection, sustainable management and conservation of all forests, and the greening of degraded areas, through forest rehabilitation afforestation, reforestation and other rehabilitative means
C. Promoting efficient utilization and assessment to recover the full valuation of the goods and services provided by forests, forest lands and woodlands
D. Establishing and/or strengthening capacities for the planning, assessment and systematic observations of forests and related programmes, projects and activities, including commercial trade and processes

programme areas in Agenda 21 concerned with combating deforestation were in effect an action plan for sustainable forest management (SFM) (Table 1).

Prior to the Rio conference, NGOs had devised a number of different approaches and mechanisms to improve forest management. The most novel of these was a system for certifying and labelling forests and forest products. What made this approach so innovative was that it relied on trade and the international market to make it work. Despite early controversies regarding standards and the credibility of the numerous schemes that have been designed to meet local conditions, the certification process has gone from strength to strength.

Certification schemes and standards

It is important to put forest certification in the context of national standards and procedures. The Irish National Forest Standard was published in 2000 and sets out the framework for the sustainable management of forests in Ireland. It is based on six criteria for sustainable forest management, which were adopted at the Third Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe in Lisbon in 1998. A Code of Best Forest Practice and a suite of forest practice guidelines support the standard. While the national standard is not a certification standard it identifies appropriate forestry practices and provides the basis for forest certification.

Performance standards are the basis of any certification scheme. In the case of forests, the management of the forest is compared to a standard of good forestry practice. Certification is essentially a process but the choice of standards has become politically contentious and is

frequently at the heart of arguments concerning certification. Today, there are many forestry standards and certification schemes worldwide. However, in Europe, two schemes dominate: Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Pan European Forest Certification (PEFC) (Table 2). The latter was developed to address the certification needs of small-scale private owners, who considered the FSC scheme inappropriate for the size of their forests.

Forest certification in Ireland

In Ireland, only the FSC scheme is currently operating, with Coillte holding an FSC certificate for its forest estate of 438,000 ha. The PEFC Scheme has yet to be introduced, although preliminary investigations have been made in this regard. In Northern Ireland, the Forest Service manages its forests according to principles of sustainable forest management described in the UK Forestry Standard (1998), which continues to be the official benchmark for good forest management in the UK. The UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) draws heavily on the UK Forestry Standard and provides for independent certification of good management practice. Forest Service Northern Ireland achieved certification in respect of its forests during 2000.

In the Republic, the process of forest certification began in January 1999 with the formation of the Irish Forest Certification Initiative (IFCI). Four chambers were elected, representing the forest industry, social, environmental and woodland owners groupings, and they set about developing an FSC standard for Ireland. This was published as a second draft in December 1999 but progress with the third draft was delayed through internal difficulties within the Technical Working Group of the IFCI. These have now been

TABLE 2: Area of certified forests in European countries.

Country	Total Forest Cover ¹	FSC ²	PEFC ³
	('000s ha)		
Austria	3,900	3	3,600
Belgium	600	4	
Czech Republic	2,630	10	1,870
Denmark	400		
Estonia	2,160	1,064	
Finland	22,200		21,910
France	15,000	16	1,410
Germany	11,300	439	6,425
Hungary	1,810	189	
Ireland	700	438	
Italy	9,500	11	
Latvia	2,880	1,686	17
Lithuania	1,980	66	
Netherlands	300	128	
Poland	8,940	5,659	
Slovak Republic	2,020	44	
Spain	14,000		87
Sweden	27,000	8,886	2,276
Switzerland	1,130 ⁴	103	65
United Kingdom	2,400	1,071	9
TOTAL	130,850	19,817	37,670

Information sources:

¹ O'Carroll, J. 2003. What does an enlarged EU mean for the forest industry? ITGA Forestry Yearbook 2003, p31-37

² www.fscoax.org

³ www.pefc.org

⁴ www.forestworld.com

resolved and it is likely to be ready for wider consultation by the end of 2003. Issues arising from the responses to consultations will be discussed and agreed by the Working Group and amendments made to the Standard before the final draft is submitted to FSC International for endorsement and publication.

In 1999 Coillte applied for forest certification to:

- ▶ independently verify progress with the implementation of its SFM Initiative, and
- ▶ allow its customers access to markets in the UK which were increasingly requiring certified timber.

Due to uncertainties with certification schemes at the time, Coillte chose FSC as it was the most credible scheme that was emerging. In addition, the UK markets were requiring certification to FSC standards.

At the time of the main audit of Coillte, a performance-based forestry standard for Ireland was not available which was endorsed by the FSC. Coillte's auditors, SGS Qualifor, instead used their generic checklist, which took into account the draft Irish FSC Standard and the Forest Service Code of

Best Forest Practice. Where requirements from these sources were judged by the auditors to be inadequate, then the more testing requirements of the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) were adopted.

Since Coillte received its certificate it has continued to work towards compliance with the standard. Some of the changes introduced include:

- ▶ Consultation with stakeholders on forest plans, high impact operations etc.
- ▶ Restructuring of uniform conifer blocks >60 ha
- ▶ Biodiversity – designation of 15% of forest area for nature conservation
- ▶ Deer management plans for all forest management units
- ▶ Game bag returns to determine numbers of birds shot
- ▶ Chemical strategies to effect a reduction in chemical usage
- ▶ Strategic plans for forest management units
- ▶ Monitoring systems for forest management units

- ▶ Species proportions to create forests with greater species diversity
- ▶ Low impact silvicultural systems to introduce alternatives to clearfelling
- ▶ Bio-oils to introduce a more environmentally friendly oil in total loss situations
- ▶ Requirement for legal loads – to reduce the impact of excessive loads on roads
- ▶ Semi-natural woodlands – management planning and restoration

Many of these changes are ongoing and will take several years to complete, e.g. the survey and designation of 15% of the forests for biodiversity.

The changes that have taken place within Coillte to achieve certification are considerable. From a situation where a forest manager was allowed to conduct day-to-day planning and operations without consultation, other than with the statutory bodies, to one where the community at large is consulted, places a major burden on already busy schedules. The requirement to manage a sizeable portion of the forest estate for biodiversity, which in some cases conflicts with the commercial mandate of the company, presents its own difficulties. Record-keeping to provide objective evidence of even the simplest actions undertaken is an extra burden as are increased costs mostly attributable to management time. All of these requirements, and others, are presenting challenges to the established mode of forest management and operations that have been practised in this country to date. Certification does, however, require the forest manager to develop an awareness of the impact his plans and operations are having, not only on the forest, but also on the wider environment and local community. Despite these extra requirements there are benefits to certification, which, on balance, outweigh the negative aspects (see Table 3).

TABLE 3: Some impacts of SFM and certification on forest owners/managers.

POSITIVE
Imposes a discipline of compliance
Clarifies policies and practices
Provides a framework to engage stakeholders
Facilitates continuous improvement
Widens the scope of forestry
Encourages integrated planning
Allows customers access to broader markets
Presents a more responsible image

Future issues

To date, there has been little demand for certification of private forests but this will change in the near future with the rising production of harvestable timber from this sector. Certification will probably take the form of a group scheme where a certified manager will manage the forests of a group of owners to the requirements of a standard. The development of an audit protocol or similar performance instrument, based on the National Forest Standard and endorsed by statutory bodies, eNGOs, certification bodies and other stakeholders is, therefore, a priority. Until this is in place forests will continue to be certified against checklists that may be subject to change at short notice. Such an instrument will allow certification to a number of schemes (FSC, PEFC etc.), depending on the preference of the owner.

Ongoing awareness and training programmes are required to improve the skills of forest owners/managers to meet the requirements of certification. In the short-term, particular emphasis needs to be placed on nature conservation management.

Further information

The web site www.efi.fi/cis/english contains an authoritative and comprehensive Certification Information Service (CIS) funded by the EU and developed by the European Forest Institute. It provides up-to-date information on certification including explanation of the various certification systems, latest news on certification, and country reports, as well as a comprehensive bibliography and links to a range of sites, organisations and reference points selected by CIS as of particular importance, relevance or quality.

NEGATIVE
Generates lots of paperwork
Initially expensive to implement (administrative and management time)
Extra cost on grower not recouped from customers

Note: The use of trade, firm or corporation names in this publication is for the information of the reader. Such use does not constitute an official endorsement, or approval by COFORD of any product or service to the exclusion of others that may be suitable. Every effort is made to provide accurate and useful information. However, COFORD assumes no legal liability for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of any information, apparatus, product, or process disclosed herein or for any loss or damage howsoever arising as a result of use, or reliance, on this information.