

**FSC POLICY FOR PRELIMINARY ACCREDITATION OF  
NATIONAL/REGIONAL FOREST STEWARDSHIP  
STANDARDS (2003)**  
FSC-POL-10-002

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Because Forests Matter  
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## **FSC POLICY FOR PRELIMINARY ACCREDITATION OF NATIONAL/REGIONAL FOREST STEWARDSHIP STANDARDS**

FSC-POL-10-002

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The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an independent, not for profit, non-government organisation based in Bonn, Germany.

The mission of the Forest Stewardship Council is to support environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests.

FSC develops, supports and promotes international, national and provincial standards in line with its mission; evaluates, accredits and monitors certification bodies which verify the use of FSC standards; provides training and information; and promotes the use of products that carry the FSC logo.

## **Introduction**

This policy is designed to encourage the development and uptake of national and regional forest stewardship standards. It aims to achieve this objective by creating a formal mechanism through which national and regional FSC forest stewardship standards can be introduced in the field with FSC's full endorsement, whilst allowing the many stakeholders with an interest in the standard additional time to gain real field experience in the implementation of the standard, in order to resolve outstanding issues of concern.

This policy builds on, formalises and replaces the mechanism of 'approval with pre-conditions' that has become FSC practice during the early years of standards review and accreditation.

### *1 Definition*

- 1.1 Preliminary accreditation is a mechanism by which the FSC Board of Directors may formally endorse a national or regional forest stewardship standard for a limited period, subject to the specific conditions described in this policy.
- 1.2 Preliminary accreditation shall be recommended to the FSC Board of Directors by the Executive Director of the FSC International Center only with the written agreement of the FSC National Initiative responsible for submitting the standard to the Board for accreditation.
- 1.3 Preliminary accreditation shall be for a duration of eighteen (18) months. Preliminary accreditation may be extended by one (1) further year, at the recommendation of the Executive Director of the FSC International Center and the discretion of the FSC Board of Directors.
- 1.4 Standards that have received preliminary accreditation shall be referred to as 'FSC preliminary standards'.

### *2 Conditions for preliminary accreditation of standards*

- 2.1 FSC National Initiatives may indicate a preference for preliminary accreditation when they submit a standard to the FSC Accreditation Program for evaluation. However, the decision to recommend a standard for preliminary accreditation shall rest with the Executive Director of the FSC International Center and the decision to grant preliminary accreditation shall rest with the FSC Board of Directors.
- 2.2 Preliminary accreditation shall not be granted unless the standard meets basic requirements for use, including:
  - 2.2.1 The standard shall incorporate all of the FSC Principles & Criteria within its text;
  - 2.2.2 The standard shall provide Indicators which indicate to forest managers and certification bodies the requirements for complying with each FSC Criterion, in the territory in which the standard is applicable;
- 2.3 Preliminary accreditation may be granted when:
  - 2.3.1 The board considers that:
    - a) basic requirements in 2.2 above have been met, although the full requirements for accreditation have not been met; AND

- b) The specific areas in which improvements would be required for full accreditation have been identified; AND
- c) there is a reasonable likelihood that the FSC National Initiative will be able to meet the full requirements within eighteen (18) months; AND
- d) there is a clear benefit to preliminary accreditation detailed in the rationale provided to the FSC Board of Directors;

NOTE: the rationale shall state the areas in which benefits are expected – e.g. in terms of field experience in the application of specific requirements; increased stakeholder involvement, support; etc. If an FSC National Initiative has requested preliminary accreditation of their standard then it shall state in its request what it considers to be the benefits of preliminary accreditation.

- 2.3.2 The FSC National Initiative agrees in writing to implement all its obligations for support of a preliminary standard during the period that it has preliminary accreditation (see section 4, below).

### **3 Certification under preliminary standards**

- 3.1 If an evaluation takes place in an area within the scope of a preliminary standard, then the evaluation shall be carried out against the preliminary standard.
- 3.2 The certification body shall inform any applicant for certification that their evaluation shall be on the basis of a preliminary standard, and shall inform the applicant in writing of all the implications of this.
- 3.3 The certification body shall inform the FSC National Initiative of any request for pre-evaluation ('scoping') or full evaluations to be carried out against the preliminary standard within its geographical scope, and of the dates of any such evaluations.
- 3.4 The FSC National Initiative shall have the right to include up to three (3) technical observers to accompany the certification body during the evaluation. The certification body and the certification applicant shall provide such support, accommodation, transport etc. as is required to facilitate the participation of the FSC National Initiative observers during the evaluation. Any costs associated with these observers shall be covered by the FSC National Initiative.
- 3.5 The certification body shall evaluate certification applicants against all the requirements of the preliminary standard, and shall report the applicant's compliance against all such requirements in full, in the evaluation report.
- 3.6 The certification body shall consider any failure against any requirement of the preliminary standard as either a 'major' or a 'minor' failure against the standard, and shall include such a decision and its justification in the evaluation report.
- 3.7 The certification body shall seek the advice of the FSC National Initiative, prior to the finalisation of the evaluation report, with respect to any issues of interpretation or lack of clarity of the preliminary standard.
- 3.8 The certification body shall submit the evaluation report to the FSC National Initiative of the territory in which the evaluation took place, and shall solicit the comments of the members of the FSC National Initiative at the peer review stage of decision making.

- 3.9 The FSC National Initiative has the right to comment on the evaluation report, and the recommended certification decision, at the peer review stage. The FSC National Initiative shall submit its comments to the certification body as a single document. The FSC National Initiative shall submit its comments to the certification body within four (4) weeks of receiving the report.
- 3.10 The certification body shall not be bound by any recommendations of the FSC National Initiative. However, the certification body shall include the comments of the FSC National Initiative as an annex to the evaluation report, together with the certification body's response to any recommendations.
- 3.11 The certification body shall be permitted to exercise its professional judgement as to whether any failure of the preliminary standard shall be considered 'major' or 'minor', and shall explain the basis for its decision in the publicly available evaluation report.
- 3.12 If the certification body decides to issue a certificate, the certification body shall publish the complete evaluation report (and not only a public summary) on its website prior to issuing the certificate.
- 3.13 Forest management certificates issued against a preliminary standard shall be valid during the period of preliminary accreditation plus twelve months<sup>1</sup>.

#### 4 *Conditions to be agreed by the National Initiative*

- 4.1 Prior to the Accreditation Business Unit recommending preliminary accreditation, the FSC National Initiative shall submit a workplan specifying the steps it will take to develop the preliminary standard and to achieve full accreditation within eighteen (18) months, and shall agree in writing to the following:
  - 4.1.1 The FSC National Initiative shall support certification bodies and their clients in their efforts to implement the preliminary standard in the field, and in accordance with the requirements of this policy.
  - 4.1.2 The FSC National Initiative shall set up a dedicated system (e.g. committee) and procedures to provide certification bodies carrying out evaluations with timely advice with respect to any requests for clarification or help with interpretation of the preliminary standard.
  - 4.1.3 The FSC National Initiative shall review and comment on all forest certification reports relating to evaluations carried out within the scope of the preliminary standard, submitted to it by FSC-accredited certification bodies, within 4 weeks of receiving such reports.
  - 4.1.4 The FSC National Initiative shall be committed to publicly endorsing any FSC certificates that are issued on the basis of preliminary standards, unless and until such time as a formal complaint has been submitted, evaluated and decided upon through the normal FSC dispute resolution and complaints procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> In other words the certificate shall be valid up until twelve months after the preliminary accreditation expires. If the preliminary accreditation is extended by a year (see 1.3), then the validity of the certificate would be automatically extended. The twelve month additional period is to provide enough time for the operation to be evaluated against either a replacement standard, or the certification body's own generic standard, after the preliminary standard has been withdrawn.

- 4.1.5 The FSC National Initiative shall agree to complete a formal review, report and revision of the preliminary standard within eighteen (18) months of its preliminary accreditation. During the review of the standard the FSC National Initiative shall focus specifically on the areas previously identified for improvement (see 2.3.1b) and shall incorporate experience gathered during certification assessments under preliminary accreditation.

**5 Issue of certificates**

- 5.1 Certificates issued on the basis of preliminary standards shall have the same status as other FSC certificates, except in respect of their duration.
- 5.2 Holders of certificates issued against preliminary standards shall have the same rights and responsibilities with respect to use of the FSC logo and trademarks as other certificate holders.

**6 Expiry of a preliminary standard**

- 6.1 The preliminary standard shall expire after eighteen months unless an extension has been granted by the FSC Board of Directors.
- 6.2 When a preliminary standard expires it shall be replaced with EITHER:
- 6.2.1 A fully accredited FSC national or regional standard; OR
- 6.2.2 Certification bodies' locally adapted generic standards, following normal FSC requirements.
- 6.3 All certificates issued on the basis of preliminary standards shall be withdrawn within twelve months of the expiry of the preliminary accreditation of the standard. Companies that have not been issued with a new certificate on the basis of the replacement standard shall at that time cease to be FSC-certified.