
Brazil: The impossible certification of Veracel

Veracel Celulose – a joint venture between the Swedish-Finnish company Stora Enso and the Norwegian-Brazilian company Aracruz Celulose - has launched a process to obtain FSC certification for its eucalyptus plantations in the extreme south of the State of Bahia. For this purpose, it has hired the consulting firm SGS.

This has led to a strong reaction on the part of over 300 Brazilian and international organizations that on 14 August sent a letter to FSC and SGS (available at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/Letter_Veracel.html) denouncing Veracel, contesting the process and demanding that certification should not be granted.

The fact is that Veracel has a long record of noxious actions in the area. Its eucalyptus plantations have occupied part of the lands that historically belonged to the indigenous population of the Extreme South of Bahia, thus violating its indigenous territorial rights. Logging and indiscriminate use of poisons in river areas and near springs are practiced by the company, thus making it very hard to consider it as being “environmentally responsible.”

Among other damages denounced the letter refers to the problem with water which is being affected by Veracel’s monoculture tree plantations both in quantity and quality, and the company’s contribution to the migration of the rural population.

The organizations signing the letter sent on 14 August also contest the process for assessment and recognition carried out by the certifier company SGS. Contrary to what could be understood as a true consultation, the certifier did not duly contact the social organizations in the area that are actively involved in the problems caused by Veracel. On the morning of 23 July it made a phone call to the well-known organization CEPEDES to tell them that they would only be available that day or the following day to hold a meeting with the Extreme South Socio-Environmental Forum. The lack of time prevented the meeting from taking place because the organizations already had prior engagements. And, as is denounced in the letter, various organizations were not even aware of the process.

The scant organizations - members of the Socio-Environmental Forum of the Extreme South – that did receive a form to be answered, sent a letter to SGS requesting a meeting and inviting it to a field visit together with organized civil society organizations that have been operating in the area for many years, as the auditors sent by the certifier were not from the region and did not know the Extreme South of Bahia. But SGS did not address this request.

It is also denounced that the auditors only dedicated five days for the field assessment in the ten localities comprised in the area where the company carries out its activities, which comprises a total area of 1,421,773 km². Something which is humanly impossible!

As stated by the organizations making the complaint, “we consider that a company such as Veracel Celulose, one of the symbols of the “development” model imposed in an arbitrary, illegal and violent way, giving rise to serious negative consequences and causing violence, poverty and hunger to the

people of the Extreme South of Bahia, cannot be considered as “environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable.”

This joint action bore its fruit. On 22 August, the Executive Director of FSC, Heiko Liedeker, answered the letter sent by the social organizations, expressing his gratefulness for the contribution made to the certification process, which he qualified as “valuable.”

He also reported that this information had been sent to the certifying body accredited by FSC – that assesses whether Veracel complies with FSC standards – and to Accreditation Services International (ASI) that is responsible for accrediting and supervising certifying bodies – in this case SGS.

Finally, Liedeker invited the organizations to continue sending information and expressing their concerns to FSC authorities.

The process continues. Those who should be listened to have raised their voices and made themselves heard by getting organized and by mobilizing. The inhabitants of the Extreme South of Bahia continue to be alert, in the expectation that FSC will say what needs to be said vis-à-vis Veracel’s “fast wood” plantations: that their certification is impossible.

Article based on the letter sent to FSC and SGS: “Arguments to show that Veracel should not receive certification”, http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/Letter_Veracel.html)