
Chile: Has the CERTFOR label any value?

In the year 2000 Chilean forestry companies announced the launching of their own forestry certification scheme, CERTFOR. This label was created under the auspices of the Fundación Chile, the Forestry Institute (Instituto Forestal - Infor) with the financial support of the Corporation for the Promotion of Production - CORFO (Corporación de Fomento de la Producción). After having attempted to join FSC – seeking international legitimacy – and following a negative answer, CERTFOR approached another international certification system: PEFC. It was thus that in October 2004, the Chilean CERTFOR certification system was internationally endorsed by PEFC.

The certifying companies accredited to carry out the audits are QMI Toronto and SGS. It is surprising that the latter is also accredited in the FSC system and that has been repeatedly questioned over its certification of plantations under this system. Perhaps it has mixed up the manuals of procedure?

So far CERTFOR has certified seven forestry operations in Chile, covering no less than a total of 1,600,000 certified hectares. Among these are the vast plantations of two of the most powerful groups in Chile: the Arauco Group and the Mininco Group.

This system is based on 9 principles accompanied by a number of criteria and indicators. Beyond these principles and indicators it is important to point out that CERTFOR is able to certify in one go all the plantations of a given company. This is the case with Bosques Arauco, a company that has been granted with a single certificate a label for 280,000 hectares distributed in 950 different plantation units. The same has happened in the case of Forestal Celco and Forestal Cholguán (also belonging to the Arauco Group) which have been granted certification for 446,100 hectares distributed in 2150 different plantation units. Needless to say the certifiers only visited a fraction of these units, going to show the system's lack of reliability.

Among its principles, the CERTFOR label does not make any mention of the use of transgenic trees, so it would not be surprising if in the future it were also to certify transgenic plantations. This gap has a very simple explanation: Fundación Chile – one of the creators of this scheme – is one of the organizations that has been most actively involved in the genetic engineering of trees.

Beyond the theory, practice itself shows sufficient elements to point out that none of these plantations should ever have been certified...by anybody!

In the first place, the Chilean forestry model was promoted during the Pinochet dictatorship and expanded on territories that historically belonged to Chilean indigenous people: the Mapuche People.

The impacts caused by the powerful expansion of forestry companies in the south of Chile are well documented: the destruction of native forests, the depletion and pollution of water resources due to the use of agrochemicals, uncontrolled erosion, destruction of biodiversity, the decline and even disappearance of wildlife and vegetation, health problems in the local population due to the use of agrochemicals, just to mention a few.

But fundamentally in Chile “forestry development” has led to serious negative impacts on the Mapuche People. It is not by chance that the increase in poverty of the Mapuche population coincides with the concentration of tree plantations. In spite of the millions of dollars of profits received by the companies, the forestry locations with a high Mapuche population in the Eighth and Ninth Regions are the areas where the highest levels of poverty and extreme poverty are to be found.

The advances of the Chilean forestry model are causing an ethnocide of the Mapuche People, a sufficiently important argument to prevent any certification of a Chilean forestry company operating in these territories. However, the CERTFOR certifiers do not even seem to be aware of the problem.

The Mapuche communities’ principle focus of conflict over territorial claims is with the forestry companies, mainly with Forestal Mininco and with the companies grouped in Bosques Arauco. This has given rise to hundreds of people being arrested, sentenced and condemned, dozens of people wounded, and hundreds of mobilizations as a balance and result of the many demonstrations aimed not only at recovering lands but also at curbing expansion of plantations and of the serious consequences being denounced against the forestry companies.

Moreover, the Mapuche people have had to lament the death of two young men who were brutally murdered by the guards of Forestal Mininco during mobilizations to recover their land. So how could CERTFOR give Forestal Mininco a certificate for its 540,766 hectares?

Summing up, the CERTFOR label deceives consumers and is an affront to the Mapuche communities that are suffering the serious impacts of these plantations. We therefore permit ourselves to make a suggestion: perhaps they could change the pine on their logo for a skull and crossbones. It would not look so nice, but it would better reflect the true situation.

Article based on information from: CERTFOR, <http://www.CERTFOR.org>; Defensores del Bosque Chileno, <http://www.elbosquechileno.cl/41fsc.html>; “Modelo forestal chileno y Movimiento autónomo Mapuche: Las posiciones irreconciliables de un conflicto territorial” (The Chilean Forestry Model and the Autonomous Mapuche Movement: the irreconcilable positions of a territorial conflict) by Alfredo Seguel, http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Chile/modelo_forestal_chileno.html; Previous WRM bulletins, available at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Chile.html>