
FSC Plantations Review under way

The Forest Stewardship Council's Plantations Review is finally under way. The 12 member committee elected to implement the first part of this process (the "policy phase") held its first meeting from 9-11 March in Stockholm, Sweden. Four members –two northern and two southern- from each of the three chambers (social, environmental and economic), will have the task of leading this process and elaborating clear guidelines for future certification of plantations. A possible second "technical phase" is now being discussed by the committee members.

The WRM welcomes this review process, which it had been requesting for a number of years and to which it has contributed –from outside- in many ways. In 1997 the WRM disseminated a detailed critique on the shortcomings of FSC's principle on plantations ("Comments on FSC's principle 10 - Plantations"). In 2001 we called on the FSC "to revisit the whole issue of plantation certification, to take into account the plentiful existing documentation regarding the basic unsustainability of the plantation forestry model and either to exclude plantations from FSC certification altogether or to modify substantially Principle 10." Prior to the 2002 FSC general assembly we urged "FSC members to open up the discussion on the certification of plantations in general and of principle 10 in particular." In 2003 the WRM published "Certifying the uncertifiable", a book based on case studies documenting problems in Thailand and Brazil regarding FSC-certified plantations. Additionally, we produced two full WRM bulletins focused on problems generated by the certification of plantations and a number of critical articles on plantation certification in different countries.

The WRM also participated at the 2004 Bonn meeting, where the FSC Plantations Review was launched, with a presentation expressing our concerns over FSC certification of plantations, while at the same time offering our assistance in providing relevant information on documented impacts of large-scale tree plantations --both certified and non-certified-- and by accompanying members of the FSC Plantations Review Committee to visit local communities affected by plantations.

At the Bonn meeting we also made a number of recommendations for the review, the main one being that the FSC should suspend further certification of large-scale industrial tree plantations until the review was finalized. The rationale for this recommendation was that by initiating a review, the FSC was accepting the existence of problems that needed to be addressed and that it was time to take stock of the experience before moving further forward in plantation certification. Unfortunately, this request for a moratorium was not discussed at the time. However, the issue has now been again raised at the first meeting of the Review Committee and it was decided to request advice on this from the FSC board of directors.

While we have confidence in the Review Committee's willingness and capacity to carry out an open and serious review process, we feel it necessary to express our surprise regarding the election of Luis Fernando Jara as representative of the southern environmental chamber. Mr Jara is the general manager of a company –PROFAFOR S.A.- which has established carbon sink plantations in Ecuador for the Dutch FACE Foundation. These plantations --certified by the FSC-- have resulted in serious social and environmental impacts documented in a recently finalized research (see <http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Ecuador/face.html>). We have nothing personal against Mr Jara, but we

believe that in such circumstances his participation in this committee should be reconsidered, particularly because of his direct involvement in the now challenged FACE-PROFAFOR plantations.

Regardless of the above, we wish to again express our confidence in this process and to reiterate what we said back in February 2001: "The FSC's main strength is its public credibility. Certification of unsustainable forestry operations --such as large-scale tree monocultures-- can erode this credibility. A critical review of its own principles by the FSC can only increase it. We sincerely hope that the FSC will be able to accomplish the latter."