
FSC 's plantations certification review: A good start

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was founded in 1993, with the mission of promoting "environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests. FSC forest management standards are based on FSC's 10 Principles and Criteria of responsible forest management."

Unfortunately, the FSC decided to also include tree plantations within its scope and this has resulted in widespread criticism, particularly in the South, where many local communities and NGOs are opposing the spread of large-scale tree plantations.

Acknowledging the problem, the FSC members have agreed on the need to take stock of the organization's experience with plantation certification and have initiated a "Plantations Review" (see <http://www.fsc.org/plantations/index.htm>).

As part of that review, on 9 September the FSC convened a meeting in Bonn and invited the WRM –among others- to make a presentation, where we began by expressing our satisfaction over two issues:

- 1) That a plantations review was under way, because this implied accepting that there are problems that need to be addressed, which is in itself a major step forward in the necessary direction.
- 2) That this meeting –and the review process in general- was open to organizations such as the WRM and others, that hold a critical viewpoint about plantations.

We then went on to clarify that what the WRM and others are campaigning against is not about plantations in general. We do not oppose tree planting at all. We don't even oppose planting species such as eucalyptus or pines. Our opposition is focused on a specific type of plantation defined as large-scale industrial tree monocultures that are not aimed at forest restoration.

We also explained that while campaigning against that type of plantations we have confronted an unexpected problem: that the FSC is certifying the same plantations that local peoples and local NGOs are fighting against because of their negative social and environmental impacts. This weakens those local struggles and also weakens the credibility of the FSC.

After providing examples of some of the problems created by plantations and by their certification, we ended up with a number of recommendations for the process.

The main recommendation was that the FSC should suspend further certification of large-scale industrial tree plantations until this review is finalized. If the FSC recognizes that there are important problems regarding plantation certification, a temporary moratorium on further certification appears to be the most sensible thing to do.

For the review itself, we put forward a number of specific recommendations, organized under three

broad headings:

- 1) To carry out a general assessment of plantation certification
- 2) To carry out in-depth research on the social and environmental impacts of large-scale tree plantations
- 3) To carry out independent studies on certified plantations that are being challenged by local NGOs and local communities.

We believe that the Bonn meeting has been a good starting point for a long needed review of plantation certification. As expressed during the meeting, the WRM is open and willing to collaborate in the implementation of the above recommendations, particularly by accompanying FSC members to visit local communities affected by plantations and by providing them with relevant information on documented impacts of large-scale tree plantations.

We sincerely hope that the review's findings will result in radical changes to current FSC policies and practices and that large-scale tree monocultures shall no longer receive FSC certification.

NB. The full WRM presentation is available at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/FSC/concerns.html>