
FSC suspends SGS Forestry's certification activities

The Forest Stewardship Council has suspended the forest certification activities of SGS Forestry, an FSC-accredited pioneer of independent forestry assessments. The suspension may indicate a rift at FSC Board level. The decision was taken despite an earlier finding by the Council's executive director Dr Tim Synnott that SGS had "identified and addressed" weaknesses in the West African Leroy-Gabon forestry operation.

The suspension will remain in place until the completion of "corrective actions" to ensure that SGS procedures comply fully with the FSC's principles and criteria. The FSC will appoint an agent to monitor the situation. The move follows complaints from environmental activists about the Leroy-Gabon certification. FSC had suspended the company's certificate for six months in June, after discovering that the entire management team had been replaced. The certificate was then due to be revoked in December.

At the time, FSC's board expressed concern over SGS's stakeholder consultation procedure and implementation of regional-specific field standards in full compliance with FSC principles and criteria. It has also asked all FSC-accredited certifiers for a six months moratorium on certification of timber harvesting operations in primary forests.

SGS disagreed with the decision but will not appeal against the suspension. Simon Counsel, director of the Rainforest Foundation, stressed the "need for much more rigorous assessments by the FSC and a more strict application of its principles and criteria by the certifier." He added that the problems should have been identified much earlier, when SGS was itself being accredited.

Source: Rettet den Regenwald e.V. 30/10/97 from Timber Trade Journal, 24 October 1997 by Oliver Tickell