

## **FERN's position on the FSC**

**May 2009**

### **History of FERN's involvement**

Since our inception, FERN has been involved in certification because we saw it as an instrument to advance forest governance, strengthen forest peoples' rights and improve forest management. We believed it was particularly useful at times and in settings when it was not possible to put necessary forest law or policy reforms in place. It was also clear from the start, however, that there would be a limit to the extent that certification, as a voluntary market-based instrument, could contribute to these aims. In the current climate and adhering to our mission statement, it is therefore FERN's analysis that certification should not presently be a main focus of our work.

### **The present day**

In the past decade, the certification debate has increased understanding of what constitutes good forest management and opened up political space for non-government and non-forestry industry actors. Certification, and specifically the FSC, has greatly increased understanding that 'sustainable forest management' does not simply mean ensuring a sustained yield of timber. The FSC has clarified that certification should start with the development of a standard, defining what can and should happen in a forest and that this process must be developed in a consensual way with all rights holders and stakeholders around the table.

But while FSC certification has opened 'political space' for all stakeholders at international political level, time has shown that implementing a credible certification scheme is far from simple. The FSC has increasingly certified large-scale monoculture tree plantations and forest operations that do not even meet its own Principles and Criteria.

As an FSC member, FERN has tried to address the problems leading to these controversial certificates, but has, to date, achieved limited success. The problems with the FSC are today so severe that supporting the FSC threatens FERN's credibility and many of our partners question how we can remain involved. As a result of all of these issues, FERN made a public statement to the FSC in October 2008,<sup>1</sup> explaining that our continued support for FSC would depend on decisive action being taken to improve the performance of FSC. FERN is not satisfied with the pace of change so far, but acknowledges and seeks to encourage recent momentum. FERN also believes that FSC is probably the most trustworthy forest certification scheme presently available, and criticism of FSC should not be taken as endorsement of other, less reliable schemes such as PEFC.

### **FERN's position**

Taking all of the above into account, FERN has chosen to continue its membership in the FSC, monitor progress on the changes that have been set in motion, and clearly define the events that would lead to us leaving the organisation.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.fern.org](http://www.fern.org)

We will also put forward a formal complaint about the Veracel certified plantation and publicly criticise FSC certificates if, considering the views of our partners, we believe they are not in line with FSC Principles and Criteria.

FERN makes a public commitment to withdraw its membership in the following circumstances:

- If the Principles and Criteria revision does not integrate the recommendations of the Plantations Review Working Group.
- If the revision of the FSC Principles and Criteria and the inclusion of the recommendations of the Plantations Review do not result in a reversal of FSC's current practise of certifying large-scale monoculture fast-growing plantations.
- If the FSC decides to become actively involved in the certification of carbon forestry practices, including: certification of forest carbon, issuing of FSC certificates concurrently or jointly with carbon credits, or aligning or partnering with voluntary carbon standards.