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**Belgian Forest Certification Scheme**

General Document

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# 1. Objective

Forest certification is a fundamental issue for the forest sector, as it enables all stakeholders involved in the forest management and wood processing to respond to a major requirement of our time: the need to guarantee that forest management is economically viable, environmentally friendly and socially beneficial. Forest certification involves verification by an independent and accredited certification body that forests are being managed on a sustainable basis.

The Belgian Forest Certification Scheme comprises a set of documents drafted with a view to describing and defining the reference framework and the rules to be followed for the issuing of certification of sustainable forest management in Belgium as well as the issuing of an in-company Chain of Custody certificate and use of the PEFC logo.

It has been devised with a view to obtaining recognition by the PEFC COUNCIL in accordance with the PEFC COUNCIL Technical Document.

The Belgian Forest Certification (BFCS) Scheme and in particular the certification standards and implementation arrangements will be periodically reviewed in the light of new scientific knowledge and practical experience. The revisions will be undertaken at least every five years and must be participatory, fair and transparent. PEFC Belgium is the body responsible for undertaking this revision, which is carried out in accordance with Annex 7 of the PEFC Council Technical Document (Endorsement and Mutual Recognition of National Schemes and their Revision).

## 2. Scope and structure of the BFCS

The BFCS sets out the rules to be followed for the issuing of a certificate of sustainable forest management in Belgium and the issuing of an in-company Chain of Custody certificate and use of the PEFC logo.

The BFCS was adopted by the PEFC Belgium commission on 30 October 2001 and approved by the PEFC Council on 22 February 2002.

As required by the PEFC Council Technical Document, the BFCS was revised for the first time and adopted by the Extraordinary General Assembly of 3 April 2007. The first revision was approved by the PEFC Council on 8 March 2008.

The second revision was adopted by the Extraordinary General Assembly of 27 June 2012.

It comprises a series of documents divided into five parts:

### 1. General document:

- PEFC B 0001:2012 General Document  
Presents the framework of the documentation. Describes Belgian forests and forest certification in Belgium

2. Normative requirements:
  - PEFC B 1001:2012 Requirements for the implementation of forest management certification
  - PEFC B 1002: 2012 Sustainable forest management standards for the Walloon Region
  - PEFC B 1003:2012 - Requirements for the implementation of the Chain of Custody
  - PEFC B 1004:2012 - Requirements for use of the logo
3. Procedure documents
  - PEFC B 2001:2012 - Requirements for the standards setting process
  - PEFC B 2002:2012 - Requirements for the qualification of auditors and certification bodies for forest certification
  - PEFC B 2003:2012 - Requirements for the qualification of auditors and certification bodies for the Chain of Custody
  - PEFC B 2004:2012 Dispute Settlement Procedure
4. Best practice document
  - PEFC B 3001:2010 Interpretation guide for SFM in Wallonia (only in French)
5. Administrative documents:
  - PEFC B 4001:2012 - Terms and Definitions
  - PEFC B 4002:2009 - Articles of association of the PEFC Belgium
  - PEFC B 4003:2011 - Notification contract

### **3. Normative References**

The Belgian Forest Certification Scheme is based on the technical documentation of PEFC Council and its corresponding annexes available on the PEFC International Website [www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org)

## 4. Belgian context

### 4.1. *Geopolitical survey - levels of authority*

Situated at the heart of Western Europe, between the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg, and France, Belgium has been an independent state since 1830. It has a population of around 10 million and covers a surface area of 30.528 km<sup>2</sup>.

(Source: [www.fgov.be](http://www.fgov.be), the official website of the Belgian State).

In recent years, the country has evolved rapidly into a federal structure through five sets of institutional reforms (in 1970, 1980, 1988-89, 1993 and 2001). Today, the first article of the Belgian Constitution states that: "Belgium is a Federal State made up of Communities and Regions". Decision-making power in Belgium is no longer exclusively in the hands of the Federal Government and the Federal Parliament. From now on, the management of the country falls to several partners, exercising their areas of competence independently in different fields.

The redistribution followed two broad lines. The first concerns linguistics and, more broadly, everything relating to culture. This gave rise to the Communities, a concept which refers to the people who make them up and to the bonds which unite them, in this case language and culture. Belgium is situated at the meeting point between the Latin and Germanic languages: Dutch, French, and German. Belgium therefore has three Communities, based on language: the Flemish Community, the French-speaking Community and the German-speaking Community. These correspond to population groups.

The Communities have competence in areas such as culture, education and use of languages, but also matters that may be linked to people, such as health policy and assistance for people. In addition, the Communities have competence for scientific research and international relations within areas for which they are responsible.

The second main line of the State reform is historically related to economic concerns - aspirations expressed by the Regions which wanted to have greater autonomy. This gave rise to the founding of three regions: the Flemish Region, the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon Region. To some extent, the Belgian regions are similar to the American States or the German "Länder". The country is further divided into ten provinces and 589 communes.

The Regions have competence for land use, in the broad sense of the term. The Flemish, Brussels-Capital and Walloon Regions have competence for economic affairs, employment, agriculture, water, housing, public works, energy, transport (excluding rail and air transport), the environment, land use and urbanism, rural renovation, nature conservation, credit, external trade, provinces, communes and associations of communes. They also have competence for scientific research and international relations in defined areas.

The Federal State retains important areas of competence including: foreign affairs, defence, justice, finance, social security, major areas of public health, internal affairs, etc. The Regions and Communities are authorised to take care of their own foreign

relations in areas falling within their competence. The Federal State has competence in matters that interact with those of the Communities and the Regions, including nature (maritime conservation, energy, trade, in terms of drafting product standards and undertaking scientific research).

This Forest Certification Scheme may be considered to involve the three levels of competence: the federal level for finance, the regional level for the environment and silviculture (associated with to agriculture) and the community level for education and social aspects.

**As a consequence of these Belgian legislative characteristics, the Scheme is being developed at national level and defines all the requirements needed for forest certification, chain of custody and logo usage processes. However, due to differences in the actual situation as regard regional legislation and in the forests, forest management standards are developed at regional level.**

## **4.2. Belgian forest resources**

### **4.2.1. Forestry background and tradition**

In Belgium, a long-standing common history unites man and the forest. For centuries, man has used the forest and its products for heat, shelter and food, etc.

The first forest revolution took place in the Middle Ages. Confronted with the growing need for wood, man helped the forest to become more productive: he cultivated it more intensively and sought to make it easier to exploit. This is when coppicing began, followed later by coppicing with standard trees. Gradually, through observation, man learned to select the species that met his requirements.

As from the 12th century, the extension of agriculture led to a reduction in the surface area of Belgium's forests. This reduction in woodland continued until 1870.

During the 19th century, the forested area of Belgium fell from 485,000 ha in 1846 to 434,600 ha in 1866. It was not until 1880 that the area of the Belgian forests regained, then exceeded its 1846 level. There were two reasons for this decline in the forested area: On the one hand, agricultural land suitable for cultivation was extended and on the other, the industrial boom brought with it huge wood consumption levels.

A vigorous policy for the re-establishment of woodland was successfully conducted as from 1893, under the impetus of the *Conseil Supérieur des Forêts*, set up on the initiative of the foresters themselves.

Alongside this reduction in the forested area, the soil became poorer owing to the excessive use of the forest and the scant attention paid to leaf litter by the agricultural sector.

In order to enable the forest to win back this poorer soil, the land had to be replanted with less demanding species than deciduous or hardwood trees. For this reason, foresters began to plant Scots pine as early as 1650, followed by spruce.

From the late 19th century onwards, other species were imported, such as the Douglas fir, the Japanese larch, the Corsican pine and the American red oak. The areas planted with these trees extended even more quickly, because this enabled the redevelopment of land that had been abandoned following the agricultural crisis that occurred at this time.

Foresters' know-how and the forestry tradition have for many years been guaranteed by high-quality, highly renowned teaching. Four universities award agronomical engineering diplomas specialising in "water and forests". Two of these are in Flanders and two in the Walloon Region. There are also four forestry technician colleges which train hands-on foresters.

In addition, advanced training courses in logging and hauling are also available.

#### **4.2.2. The forest today**

Forests cover about 22% of the territory of Belgium. They extend over 700,000 ha, compared with 485,000 ha in 1846. The forested area has therefore increased risen by 25% in 130 years.

It is marked by the balance between hardwoods and conifers as well as by the great variety of its forests.

Forests are not evenly spread over the territory of the country: almost 79% of the forested areas are located in the southern part of the country, in the Walloon Region, and nearly 20% in the north, in the Flemish Region. The Brussels Region accounts for just under 1% of the forested areas in Belgium.

The State, regions and provinces own 11% of the forests, while 32% belongs to municipalities, 2% to public establishments and 55% to private individuals. There is no integrated industrial ownership in Belgium.

Public forests, managed by the regional forest departments, cover 45% of the forested area of Belgium. This includes the forests belonging to the State or Regions, municipalities, public establishments and the provinces. Forest engineers and foresters working for the regional forestry departments ensure the operational management and monitoring of these forests.

Privately owned forests in Belgium cover 412,000 ha. They are not made up of large estates, but are characterised by their fragmentary nature. They are divided among some 150,000 owners, i.e. on average 2.7 ha per owner. Almost 80,000 forest holdings cover less than 1 ha and there are only around twenty holdings of 500 ha or more. Most forest holdings, which are already very small, do not form a uniform whole, but are patchy and scattered over several plots.

This division into small plots and the dispersal among numerous owners are typical of Belgian forests, placing them at the very heart of the society, and are themselves a factor of biodiversity.

### **4.2.3. Social functions of the forests**

With the increase in free time and leisure activities, the pressure exerted by the public on nature and more specifically on the forest environment is growing. The average population density in Belgium amounts to 358 inhabitants per square kilometre. Brussels, with 6,902 inhabitants per square kilometre, is the region with the highest density (Source: [www.stabel.fgov.be](http://www.stabel.fgov.be)).

The forest plays an important role in contemporary society in social and cultural terms. It promotes relaxation, thought and well-being. More than three million people regularly visit Belgian forests. On sunny days, the Soignes forest near Brussels alone attracts between 30,000 and 50,000 visitors.

Belgian forests have an extensive network of paths and roads facilitating access. Each region also has specific regulations with regard to forest traffic. Hunting and fishing are also particular aspects of the use of forests and natural areas by tourists, which is also a means of coming into direct contact with the natural environment and its wildlife.

In order to accommodate its many users, Belgian forests have a great number of infrastructures: picnic areas, reception areas, play areas, educational paths, waymarked walks, etc. These facilities help gather the public in particular areas, while at the same time providing a certain amount of comfort and facilities.

The many arboretums and new regulations for the conservation of outstanding trees in municipalities and forests are further indications of the people's attachment to nature and its beauty.

The Belgian forest is also a significant source of employment. The wood sector in Belgium comprises 2700 businesses employing around 32,000 people.

### **4.2.4. Ecological functions of the forests**

The forest is an area in which biological diversity is best represented. The forest is home to many endemic animals and plants. Some of these plant species are used in modern medicines and the population of certain animals has reduced over time.

Many efforts are made to protect this diversity. Nature reserves and forest reserves have been created in Belgium. A total of 12,000 ha of forest are covered by these statuses. Moreover, 30% of the forested areas of Belgium are included in the Natura 2000 network (under two European directives, "Habitats" 92/43 of 1992 and "Birds" 79/409 of 1979) making it possible to protect around ten forest habitats of Community interest, including three priority areas, along with the habitat of several species of Community interest. Regional decrees governing nature conservation on their territory also include provisions on the protection of rare and threatened species in these areas and their habitats. This legislation applies to several dozen forest species. Other nature conservation laws also exist. The 1973 Nature Conservation Act still applies today, along with its numerous more recent decrees.

The forest also protects the soil from erosion. It regulates the flows of watercourses, filters water and regularly supplies the aquifers and springs with pure water.

The forest also plays a major role in the reduction of greenhouse gas phenomena by absorbing CO<sub>2</sub>. The more wood is used for sustainable purposes, the more the forest will play a beneficial role with regard to the storage of CO<sub>2</sub>. The forest therefore represents a significant weapon in the fight against pollution and the problems of global warming which we are currently experiencing.

Efforts made by foresters to plant species which are adapted to local conditions are also evidence of the concerns of the men on the ground to respect the forest environment as much as possible. Other movements such as Pro Silva are also developing in Belgium with a view to promoting forestry which encourages a diversity of species and a wide age range.

**Extremely precise inventories have been drawn up to follow the evolution of Belgian forests, in both dendrological and ecological terms. They constantly examine the state of health of forests and their evolution over time.**

The provisions on forest planning in public forests have recently been supplemented by “management standards to promote biodiversity in woods managed by regional forestry departments”. A similar guide has also been produced for private properties.

The regeneration of forest heritage is an essential factor in sustainable development, which is why the regions have established forestry offices. These undertake harvesting, processing, conservation and sale of seeds. In this area, it is vitally important that quality takes precedence over quantity. It is actually a matter of supplying the best provenances, but also preserving genetic diversity, which guarantees the long-term future of forest species and forest areas.

To run private nature parks and increase public awareness of the environment, Belgium is also able to count on an extensive network of environmental protection associations as well as environmental education centres subsidised by the public authorities.

#### **4.2.5. *Economic functions of the forests***

##### **1. Timber production**

Every year, Belgium transforms 3,600,000 m<sup>3</sup> of logs (extrapolation based on harvest in public forests), subdivided into 2,600,000 m<sup>3</sup> of coniferous and 1,000,000 m<sup>3</sup> of hardwood.

These figures represent an average production of 6.7 m<sup>3</sup> per ha, to which should be added a volume of firewood that is difficult to quantify. It has also been found that 71% of production results from coniferous stands, which only cover 47% of the forested area.

Belgium consumes 11,000,000 m<sup>3</sup> of wood products annually, i.e. over 1 m<sup>3</sup> per inhabitant. The country therefore produces 40% of its requirements, compared with 60% which are imported. So timber production in Belgium falls far short of covering the

country's requirements. Nevertheless, intensive economic life is organised around the forest and its multifunctional management.

## 2. The wood sector

The Belgian wood sector comprises of 2700 businesses employing around 32,000 people and generating added value of EUR 8 billion.

The Belgian wood sector brings together the following professional categories, listed by function, starting with the initial stages of the sector and working downstream:

- Nurserymen;
- Public and private forests managers;
- Forestry experts;
- Forest co-operatives;
- Forestry contractors;
- Wood growers-merchants;
- Sawmillers, peelers, splitters;
- Pulp, paper and card manufacturers;
- Secondary wood processing;
- Carpenters;
- Wood traders and the wood trade.

All the peripheral activities (research, teaching and training) should be added in order to estimate the real size of the sector. And although it is true that most of the added value is generated by businesses downstream in the sector, each stage is actively involved in the economic life of Belgium.

## **5. Forest certification development process in Belgium.**

### **5.1. *National Governing Body***

The National Governing Body is the non-profit organisation PEFC BELGIUM.

The aims of PEFC Belgium, are to:

- establish and set up in Belgium the certification system defined by the PEFC Council, respecting the objectives, rules and procedures defined in his Technical Document.
- represent the members into the PEFC Council and defend their interests
- To promote the sustainable forest management in Belgium, particularly threv the promotion and the management of the PEFC collective brand,
- manage complaints relating to the implementation of the scheme or certification procedures that cannot be dealt with by means of the dispute settlement procedures of the relevant accredited certifications body;
- study and give a ruling on requests for recognition of forestry certification systems submitted to the PEFC COUNCIL by other countries.

Generally speaking, it is responsible for the promotion, organisation, co-ordination and supervision of PEFC certification for Belgium in accordance with the rules laid down by the PEFC COUNCIL.

The members of the PEFC Belgium are any legal entity representing one of the relevant parties involved in sustainable forest management whose application has been approved by the General Assembly.

Under the terms of a contract with the PEFC COUNCIL, the PEFC Belgium is authorised to use the PEFC logo for educational purposes. It is also responsible for issuing licences on behalf of the PEFC COUNCIL, if appropriate, in accordance with PEFC ST 2001:2008 v2 of the PEFC COUNCIL technical document (Requirements for use of the logo).

PEFC Belgium is also responsible for keeping an up-to-date register of all the on- and off-product logo users given licences by PEFC Belgium and of the certificate holders in the country, as well as for transferring the data to the PEFC Council in accordance with the specifications outlined in the PEFC Council Internal Rules on the Registration System.

## **5.2. Certification criteria, indicators and technical operating guidelines**

The criteria for sustainable forest management contain the requirements for ensuring the economic, ecologic and social functions of the forests. The indicators are used to assess conformity with the criteria for sustainable forest management.

The forest management standards applied in Belgium use the requirements of sustainable forest management described in the PEFC ST 1003:2010 of the Technical Documentation of PEFC Council.

## **5.3. Development of regional standards and their revision**

**In Belgium, the environment, town and country planning, rural affairs, agriculture and nature conservation are all chiefly dealt with at regional level. Forest management standards are therefore established at regional level.**

As the forested areas in Belgium are extremely fragmented (forming a mosaic of small holdings averaging 2.7 ha/private forest owner!), the application of certification in Belgium is also regional, the aim being to improve the management of the Region as a whole while imposing stringent requirements on owners and managers wishing to be included in this group certification.

Regional certification is the certification of forests within delimited geographic boundaries, being applied by the regional working group representing all types of forest ownership in the region and other interested parties.

The management standards are drawn up by a Forum open to any organisation with an obvious link to forest management in its multifunctional approach and wishing to take part in the development of the PEFC certification process.

See Appendix 1 Overview of certification system

Upon examining the PEFC International standards, it appears that management standards in Belgium can only be met if they are drawn up concomitantly at two levels - regional and individual.

Regional requirements are reflected the targets set (Progress Plan), defined on the basis of an analysis of the discrepancies between the PEFC International standards and the forest management situation in the region: five-yearly analysis of the forest management situation in the Region (inventory), listing major problems in order of importance on the basis of the PEFC International standards and setting targets for improvement to be attained to resolve these problems.

The individual requirements correspond to a series of management practices that have to be implemented by all private or public forest owners wishing to be part of the PEFC regional certification process (Sustainable forest management charter). They are defined on the basis of all the PEFC International standards relevant to the types of management unit found in the Walloon Region.

The criteria includes management and performance requirements that are applicable at the Forest Management Unit (FMU) level or at the regional level to ensure that all requirements is achieved at the FMU level.

The management standards are reflected in practice by the drafting of an individual charter for sustainable PEFC forest management and regional targets for the improvement of sustainable forest management. The regional entity has to draw up a five-year programme of activities aimed at achieving these targets and is responsible for ensuring compliance with the charter by owners taking part in the group certification process.

The charter and the Progress Plan are two tools for the improvement of forest management used at both owner and regional level. Their complementary nature contributes to their effectiveness. Both levels define clear, objective-based and auditable requirements.

The certification standards and the implementing provisions will be re-examined every five years. These revisions have to be participatory, fair and transparent.

The requirements in terms of the implementation of management standards and their revision are laid down in the document PEFC B 2001:2012.

### ***5.3.1 Development and revision of forest management standards in the Walloon Region***

The process of developing standards in the Walloon Region was initiated in the year 2000 by the “*Société Royale Forestière de Belgique*” (SRFB), which represents private

forest owners, and by the “*Département de la Nature et des Forêts*” (DNF), which represents public forest owners.

The Walloon standards were adopted for the first time by the Forum on 20 February 2001. The Belgian Scheme and the regional standards were adopted by PEFC COUNCIL on 25 February 2002.

The second revision of the forest management standards in the Walloon Region officially began on 15 March 2011.

The method and development of this revision are described in the document PEFC B 2001:2012 and in the Development Report.

The revised standards are set out in document PEFC B 1002:2012. An interpretation guide is available in document PEFC B 3001:2010

### ***5.3.2 Development and revision of forest management standards in the Flemish Region***

Contacts take place for a possible start of the standards.

### ***5.3.3 Development and revision of forest management standards in the Brussels-Capital Region***

No request has so far been made for the development of regional PEFC forest management standards in Brussels.

## ***5.4. Implementation of forest management certification***

The certification unit (= management units to be assessed) is the Region.

Regional certification involves the certification of forests located within defined geographic boundaries. A regional entity (the applicant) applies for regional certification in a specified region. Regional certification gives voluntary access to individual forest owners. Only owners involved in the regional certification process benefit from the cover provided by the certificate and are issued with proof of participation.

The requirement relating to regional certification and in particular the responsibilities of the regional entity (applicant) and the terms and procedures for participation by a forest owner or manager in the regional certification process are laid down in the document PEFC B 1001:2012.

## **6. Appeals, complaints and dispute settlement**

Appeals, complaints and disputes concerning the certification process or its results are dealt with by the certification body in accordance with the requirements covered by the accreditation.

Appeals, complaints and disputes concerning this accreditation process and the fulfilment of requirements covered by the accreditation are dealt with by the relevant accreditation body.

The PEFC Belgium has drawn up written procedures for the establishment of a dispute settlement body that deals with complaints relating to the implementation of the scheme or the certification procedure which cannot be dealt with by means of the dispute settlement procedures of the relevant accredited certification body or the relevant accreditation body (PEFC B 2004:2012).

## **7. Transition period**

The transition period for the implementation of the new version of the Belgian Forest Certification Scheme will be six months from the endorsement of the BFCS by the PEFC COUNCIL.

All forest owners and managers wishing to join the certified region have to comply immediately with the new version of the standards adopted.

# Appendix 1 : Overview of Certification System

