



# ENABLING **SUSTAINABILITY** IN FOREST MANAGEMENT

PEFC's unique approach  
to forest certification



## ABOUT PEFC

PEFC, the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, is a leading global alliance of national forest certification systems. We were founded by small- and family forest owners to demonstrate excellence in sustainable forest management.

“Forest certification is at the core of our work, as we promote and enable sustainable forest management around the world.

We recognize that while the concept of sustainable forest management is global in nature, its implementation is local. We therefore work with local organizations and people to advance responsible forestry.

This brochure will provide you with an overview of how we approach the core of our work, forest certification.”



**Ben Gunneberg,**  
PEFC International CEO  
and Secretary General

# CONTENTS

<b>WHY SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT MATTERS</b>	<b>1</b>
Forest Certification: An enabler of sustainability	1
<b>SEEING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH A LOCAL LENS</b>	<b>2</b>
National Forest Certification Systems: Why we work through local organizations	2
Standard Setting: How national standards are developed	4
<b>IMPLEMENTING CERTIFICATION ON THE GROUND</b>	<b>6</b>
Sustainable Forest Management: Size is no barrier	6
Chain of Custody: How we ensure that certified products originate from certified forests	7
<b>THE PEFC SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT STANDARD</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>ENSURING COMPLIANCE AND CONSISTENCY – GLOBALLY AND LOCALLY</b>	<b>10</b>
Certification & Auditing: How compliance with certification requirements is verified	10
Endorsement of National Systems: How compliance with PEFC's Sustainability Benchmarks is verified	11
Complaints: What if something is going wrong?	12
<b>GETTING INVOLVED</b>	<b>13</b>



## WHY SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT MATTERS

Forests play a critical role for the global environment, population and economy. Besides alleviating the effects of climate change and natural disasters, they represent some of the richest biological areas on Earth.

They also provide food, heat, energy, medicine and renewable raw materials for many of our products.

More than one in five people depend on forests, and the services they provide, for their livelihoods. Yet forests are among the world's most vulnerable ecosystems.

If forests are to continue to deliver the full range of benefits that people and nature depend on, they need to be conserved and managed sustainably.

### Forest Certification: An enabler of sustainability

While forest management is a long-term process, forest certification allows forest managers to demonstrate that the practices they apply in the forest today are sustainable and that their forests meet both our needs and those of future generations.

Forest certification also acts as an enabler of sustainability. It provides a framework for forest owners, based on best practices, as to how forests need to be managed to be sustainable.

Certification empowers consumers and companies to choose sustainably-sourced, PEFC-labeled products, rewarding responsible forest owners and creating an incentive for uncertified forest owners to obtain certification.

This means all of us interested in safeguarding forests – responsible businesses, public authorities, organizations and consumers alike – can use our purchasing power to support the sustainable management of the world's forests.





# SEEING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH A LOCAL LENS

While the concept of sustainable forest management is global in nature, its implementation is local. This is why PEFC works with local organizations to advance responsible forestry and endorses national forest certification systems that have demonstrated compliance with our globally recognized Sustainability Benchmarks. National forest management standards must be tailored to country-specific priorities and conditions, and developed through multi-stakeholder, consensus-driven processes.

## National Forest Certification Systems: Why we work through local organizations

Forests are highly diverse, from evergreen eucalyptus forests in Tasmania to tropical rainforests in South America and the Congo Basin and boreal forests in Canada. Similarly, their management differs greatly, along with local traditions, cultural and spiritual expectations, average property sizes and support structures such as forest owner associations.

As conditions vary from country to country, we must address this diversity when defining sustainable forest management requirements in forest certification standards. We must ensure that these requirements are tailored to the needs of the specific forest ecosystems, the legal and administrative framework, the socio-cultural context and other locally relevant factors.

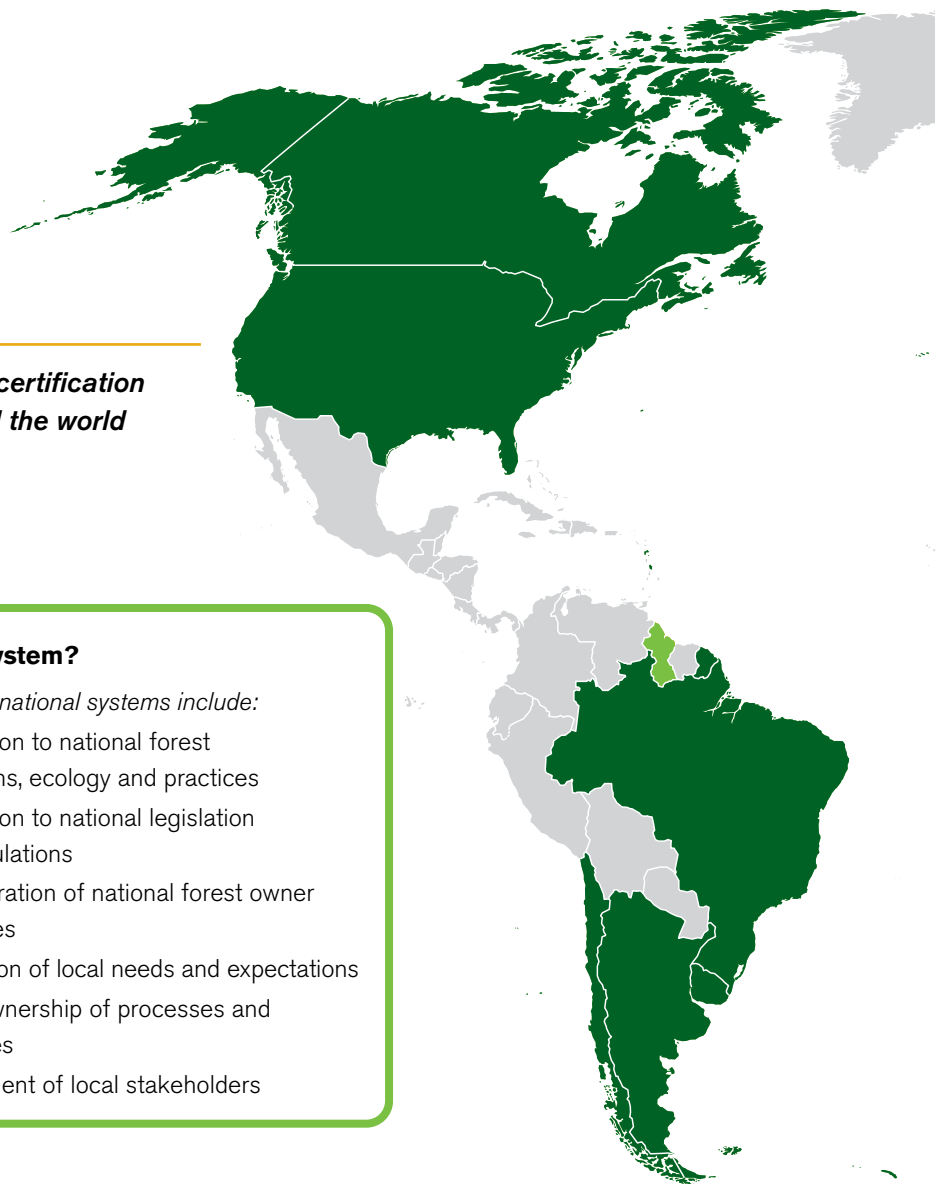
### ***National forest certification systems around the world***

#### **What is a National Forest Certification System?**

A national forest certification system outlines the rules, procedures and management criteria for carrying out forest certification at national level, in line with the PEFC Sustainability Benchmarks. It also incorporates all operational aspects involved in managing a forest certification system.

#### *Benefits of national systems include:*

- Adaptation to national forest conditions, ecology and practices
- Adaptation to national legislation and regulations
- Consideration of national forest owner structures
- Integration of local needs and expectations
- Local ownership of processes and outcomes
- Involvement of local stakeholders





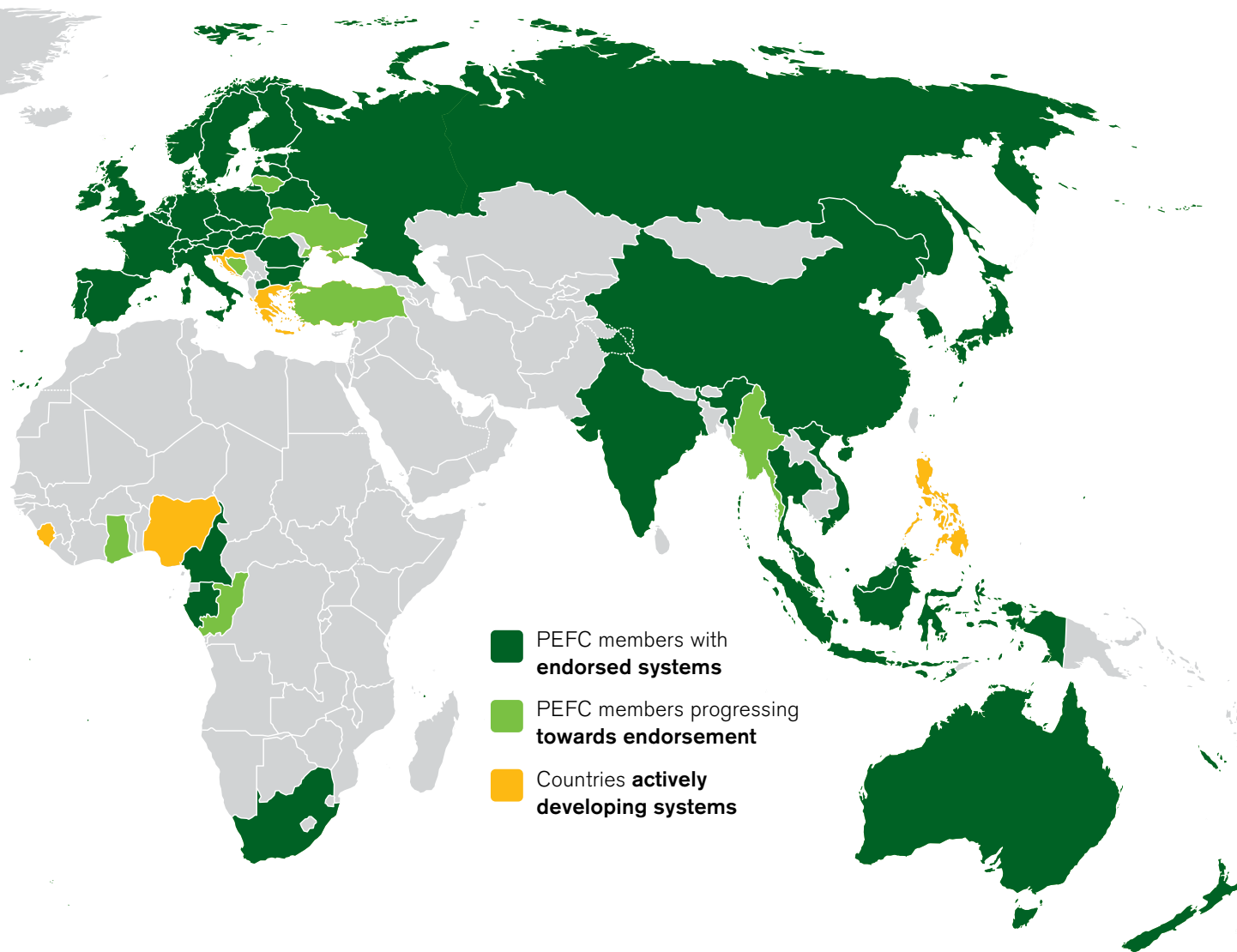
Added to this, a wide range of stakeholders need to be involved in determining best practices for managing forests in their country sustainably, and how this can best be implemented locally.

PEFC's bottom-up approach to forest certification is well placed to respond to these challenges. Based on our fundamental belief that forest certification needs to be local, we work through national forest certification systems and national sustainable forest management standards.

All our standards are developed independently at local level, and local stakeholders from within the country own the process and are responsible for moving it forward. It is this ownership that is the key to the success of PEFC, as it empowers those managing forests – small- and private forest owners, communities, governments and companies – to do so in compliance with the standards that they themselves helped develop, in alignment with their unique local circumstances.

Through our process we can ensure that these national standards meet globally accepted sustainable forest management requirements and are recognized internationally.

PEFC is the only global forest certification system that requires all standards to be developed publicly, with the open participation of all interested parties at national level in a consensus-driven decision-making process.



## Standard Setting: How national standards are developed

PEFC sets out global forest management and performance requirements that national standards need to address. We also put in place conditions on how national standards must be set, as for us, the process of standards development is as important as the final content.

Forest management concerns all of us. It is therefore essential that standards are developed in a transparent, open and consensus-driven process. In particular, we ensure the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in a balanced manner throughout the standards development process – from public and private forest owners, local communities and Indigenous Peoples, to forest industry, labour unions and environmental and social NGOs.

### Notification

There must be a public invitation to participate in the standard setting process. Disadvantaged and key stakeholders are identified, their proactive participation sought, and constraints to their participation considered.

### Participation

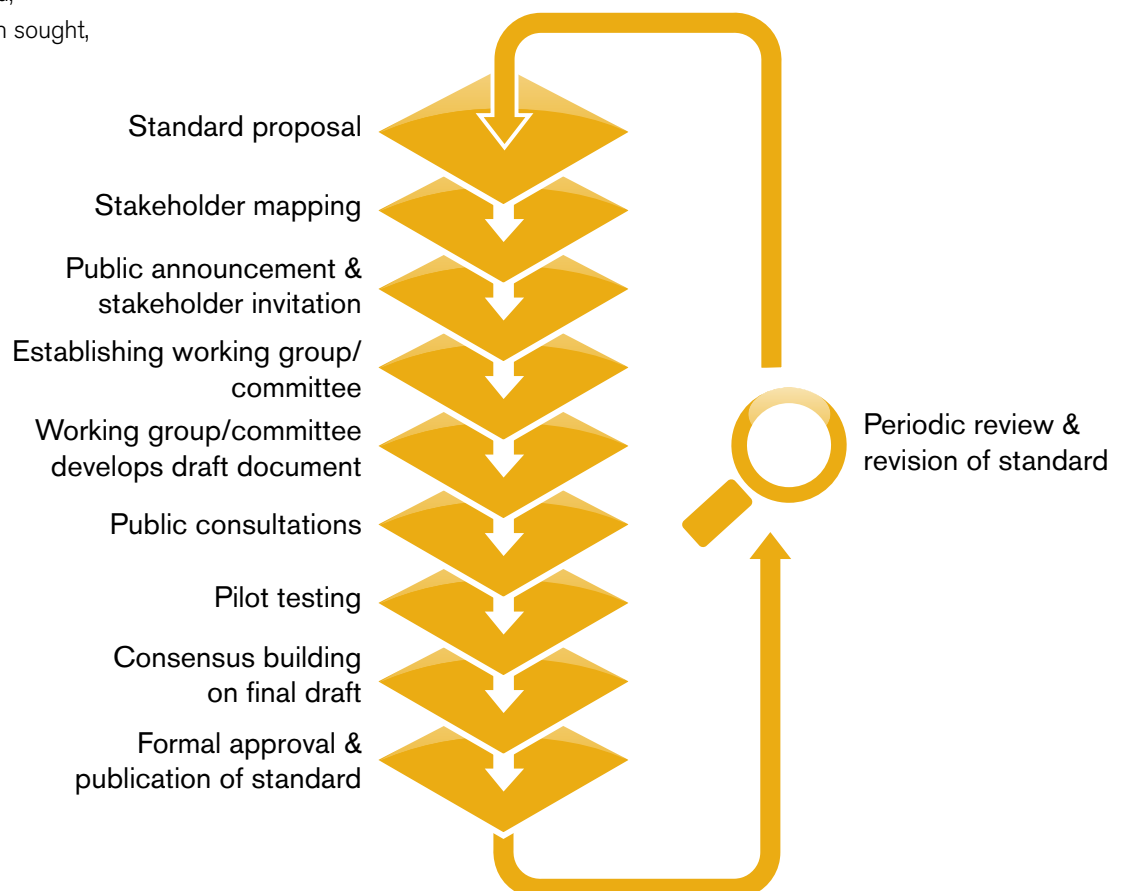
Stakeholders form a working group to develop the standards. It is important that they are balanced in terms of the interests that they are representing. Ideally, we strive for a balance as defined in the United Nation's Agenda 21 and include business and industry, children and youth, forest owners, Indigenous People, local authorities, NGOs, scientific and technological communities, women, and workers and trade unions. The standard setting process is consensus driven, so no single interest can dominate.

### Consultation

All draft standards are subject to public consultations. These public consultations are important to obtain additional feedback, input and comments from stakeholders who were not directly involved in the working group.

PEFC only recognizes national forest certification systems with standards developed in compliance with our requirements for this highly inclusive process, and we require these standards are reviewed every five years.

### *PEFC standard setting process*





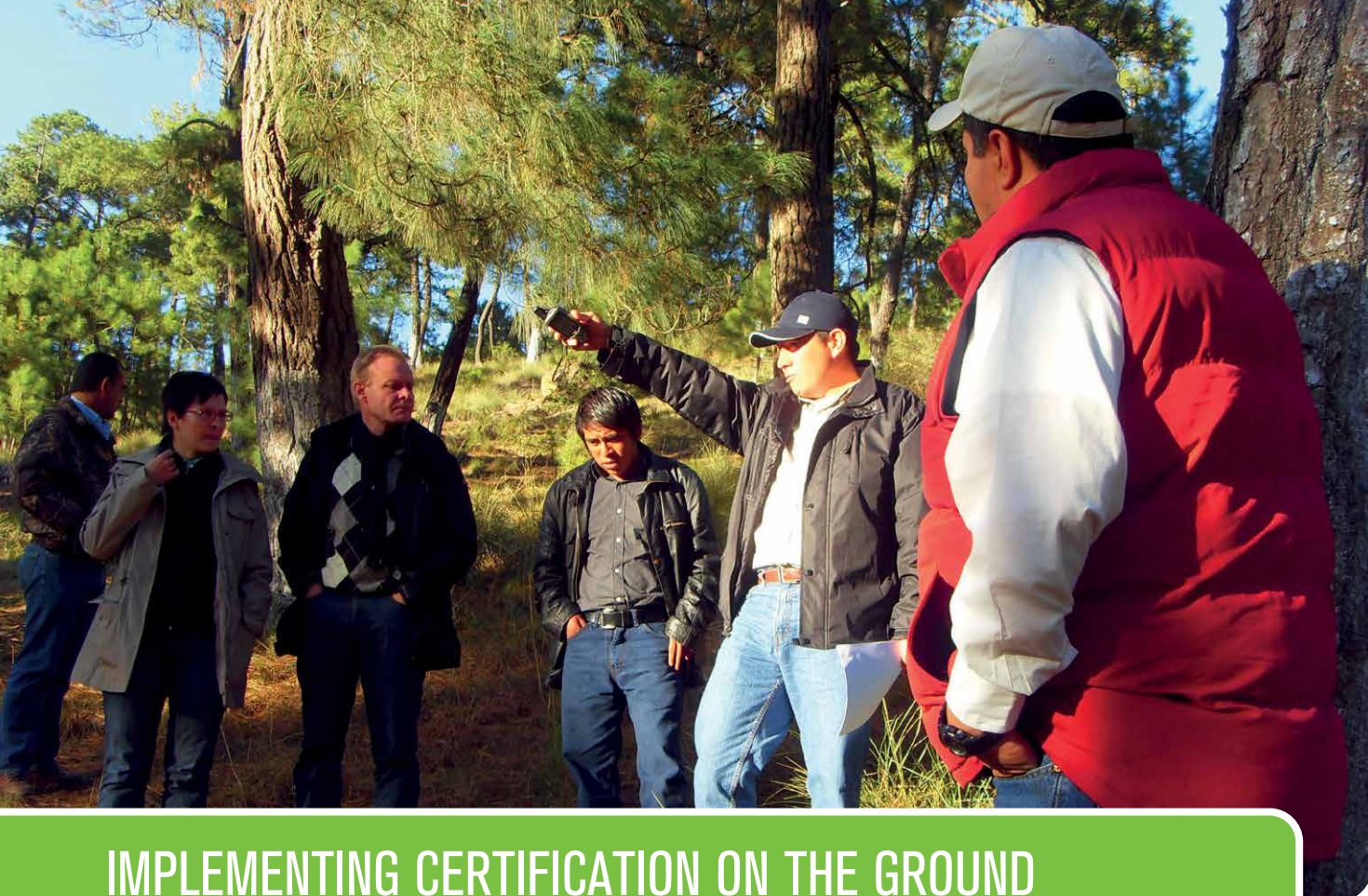
### **National Standards: Exceeding Global PEFC Sustainability Benchmarks**

We require local stakeholders to develop their own national standards. As a result, issues considered to be relevant and significant at national level, but that are not captured in our globally applicable requirements, are naturally incorporated into these standards.

The PEFC endorsement process ensures that all national forest certification systems are in compliance with the global PEFC Sustainability Benchmarks.

The national standard development process means that national standards include requirements relevant to specific national contexts, above and beyond what can be captured in our globally applicable benchmarks.





## IMPLEMENTING CERTIFICATION ON THE GROUND

Forest certification is a voluntary instrument to promote sustainable forest management and is implemented through two separate but linked processes: sustainable forest management certification and chain of custody certification.

### Sustainable Forest Management: Size is no barrier

PEFC sustainable forest management certification provides assurances that forests are managed in line with challenging environmental, social and economic requirements – balancing people, planet and profit.

For large and medium companies, such as those owning or managing larger areas of forestland, individual certification is the perfect mechanism to demonstrate compliance with PEFC requirements. However, for the millions of small-, family- and community forest owners, the cost of individual certification, both in terms of time and resources, can pose a significant obstacle.

With this in mind, we developed the group certification approach. Group certification enables small-forest landowners to group together and organize themselves, pool their resources and work as a team to achieve certification. This makes PEFC certification affordable and practical for small-forest owners.

Internationally, around one million small-forest owners have achieved PEFC certification through group certification. This number is testimony to the fact that forest certification is possible for small landholders, and that it is a powerful and cost-effective mechanism for promoting forest conservation and sustainable management.



## Chain of Custody: How we ensure that certified products originate from certified forests

Forest certification, while crucial in maintaining the valuable services forests provide, does not establish the link from the forest to the market. This link is established through PEFC chain of custody certification, which tracks forest-based materials from sustainable sources to the final product. It monitors each step of the supply chain through independent auditing. This ensures that certified, sustainable material reaches the consumer while unsustainable sources are excluded.

As long as every company in the value chain is chain of custody certified, and the product is delivered with a PEFC chain of custody claim, it can be considered PEFC certified and can use the PEFC label.

As a globally trusted mark, the PEFC label assists consumers, businesses, governments, forest owners and managers, and other stakeholders in identifying, buying and promoting products and goods from forests that are managed sustainably. Governments and companies around the world increasingly require PEFC certification within their procurement policies.

As with forest management certification, we recognize that one size does not always fit all for chain of custody certification. In addition to individual certification, we have made specific provisions for three particular situations: for small businesses, for companies operating several facilities to simplify administration, and for specific, one-off or short term projects such as construction projects.

### **The PEFC Label: Assisting consumers in identifying responsibly sourced products**

Chain of custody certification comes with an additional benefit: it allows companies to use the PEFC label on certified products. This is positive for both the company and the consumer. By communicating responsible sourcing practices, companies strengthen the positive perception of their brand while enabling consumers to make informed ethical shopping choices.

In fact, an overwhelming majority of consumers globally – more than 80% – want companies to use labels on products, and consider the PEFC label the most trusted global certification label, according to the first PEFC/GfK Global Consumer Survey.



Promoting  
Sustainable Forest  
Management

[www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org)



More information:  
[treee.es/supplychain](http://treee.es/supplychain)



# THE PEFC SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT STANDARD

Our PEFC Sustainable Forest Management standard is at the heart of our work. This is the standard that the national forest certification systems use when developing their own national sustainable forest management standards. The requirements that are set out in this document govern how hundreds of thousands of forest owners manage their forests globally.

But it covers so much more than just how to manage a forest. Through its requirements, it supports biodiversity and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, promotes the economic development of rural communities, ensures the health and safety of forest workers, and mitigates against climate change and deforestation.

## Enhancing biodiversity

Biodiversity refers to the diversity of life on earth, and forests are among the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet, home to about 80% of the world's land-based animals and plants. In a PEFC-certified forest, the biodiversity must be maintained, conserved and enhanced.

Ecologically important forest areas must be identified, protected, conserved or set aside, while protected, threatened and endangered plant and animal species cannot be exploited for commercial purposes. Enough dead wood and rare tree species need to be left in order to safeguard biological diversity, and infrastructure planned and constructed in a way that minimizes damage to ecosystems.

## Reducing deforestation and forest degradation

Deforestation and forest degradation are among the biggest global challenges we face. While just 2% of deforestation is linked to logging, forest certification still has an important role to play. Through PEFC certification we help add value to forests, reducing the incentive for their conversion to alternate land uses such as agriculture – one of the leading causes of deforestation.

Managing forests sustainably is key to ensuring they don't become degraded. From requiring that forest management aims to maintain or increase forests and their ecosystem services, to ensuring that forest ecosystem health and vitality is maintained or enhanced, our standard covers a wide range of requirements that keep our forests healthy and productive.

## Supporting Indigenous Peoples

60 million Indigenous People are fully dependent on forests and forest resources. Forest certification has the potential to enhance the progress already made in securing acknowledgement of their human, cultural and property rights.

We require that areas fundamental to meeting the needs of Indigenous Peoples and local communities need to be protected, and that the long-term health and well-being of communities within or adjacent to the forest is promoted. Special consideration is also given to new opportunities for training and employment of local people, including Indigenous Peoples.





## Mitigating climate change

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges currently facing humankind. While forests can help to combat climate change, they are also highly vulnerable to changing climatic conditions. The requirements in our standard aim to strengthen the resilience of forests, enabling them to adapt to climate change impacts and other adverse environmental factors.

Forest owners must maintain or enhance the protective functions of forests, including their role in climate regulation. Going further, we also encourage climate positive practices in forest management operations, such as green-house gas emission reductions and efficient use of resources.

## Promoting economic development of rural communities

Forests contribute significantly to national and regional economies. In developing countries, forest-based enterprises provide 13–35% of all rural non-farm employment, that's equivalent to 17 million formal sector and 30 million informal sector jobs.

The role of forestry in local – often rural – economies is specifically emphasized in our requirements, and PEFC certification ensures that property rights, tree and land tenure arrangements are clarified and established. We require that wages meet at least legal, industry minimum standards or exceed them, leading the way for a step-wise approach to living wages. Forest owners also need to pursue sound economic performance, with consideration for the role of forestry in local economies.

## Ensuring the safety of forestry workers

Forestry remains one of the world's most dangerous jobs. Through our requirements on health and safety, we are working towards making this vital profession safer, stronger and more inclusive.

PEFC certification promotes living wages, safe working conditions as well as equal opportunities, gender equality, non-discrimination and freedom from workplace harassment, in addition to compliance with fundamental ILO conventions. It also requires that all forest practices and operations respect human rights, as defined by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.



# ENSURING COMPLIANCE AND CONSISTENCY – GLOBALLY AND LOCALLY

Ensuring compliance and consistent application of our requirements is a vital aspect of our work, from implementing third-party certification in line with the ISO framework to obtaining independent verification that national standards meet our globally recognized Sustainability Benchmarks.

## Certification & Auditing: How compliance with certification requirements is verified

Certification is the actual process of validating that individuals or organizations wishing to obtain PEFC forest management or chain of custody certification are in compliance with our requirements. To ensure

that certification is objective and impartial, it is not carried out by PEFC, but by independent accredited certification bodies.

After a forest owner or company is satisfied that they meet our requirements, they contact a certification body and request an audit to confirm their practices. During an audit, the auditor assesses whether practices on the ground or in a factory meet our requirements through, for example, visits in the field and consultations with stakeholders.

If compliance is demonstrated, the certification body issues a certificate valid for three to five years. Additional checks are done through annual surveillance audits to proactively verify on-going compliance with our requirements and after five years operators must become re-certified. Only if operations continuously meet our standards do they earn the right to make “PEFC certified” claims and use the PEFC label.

To ensure the credibility and competence of their work, certification bodies must be accredited by national accreditation bodies.

Through the accreditation process, we have assurance that certification bodies are independent and impartial, that they follow our certification procedures and that they employ competent auditors.

Accreditation bodies, in turn, need to be members of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), the world association of national accreditation bodies. This means they have to follow IAF's rules and regulations. Like this, we even have a mechanism for overseeing accreditation bodies.

PEFC is the only global forest certification system that strictly separates standard setting, certification and accreditation.

### The Three Pillars of Credible Certification

Credible certification requires certification decisions to be impartial, independent and competent. This means that standard setting, certification and accreditation must be completely separate in order to eliminate the risk of conflicts of interest and ensure the highest level of competency.

#### Standard setting:

the process of defining certification requirements in collaboration with stakeholders.

#### Certification:

the process of checking whether a forest owner or company fulfills the certification requirements, carried out by a certification body.

#### Accreditation:

the process of assessing the competence of the certification body, carried out by a national accreditation body recognized by its respective government.



## Endorsement of National Systems: How compliance with PEFC's Sustainability Benchmarks is verified

We want to be confident that all national systems we endorse meet our globally recognized Sustainability Benchmarks.

To ensure that our requirements are consistently applied at national level, all national forest certification systems applying for PEFC endorsement go through a comprehensive and thorough independent assessment process.

This process takes on average nine months to complete, and includes the following elements:

### Assessment

An independent registered assessor is responsible for assessing whether a national system meets our

requirements. Their assessment forms an important professional and objective basis for the decision to approve and endorse a system.

The assessor evaluates the compliance of the national system with our Sustainability Benchmarks. They base the assessment on desk research, field trips, comments from the 60-day public consultation and other available information.

### Endorsement

After a national system has successfully passed the assessment and been approved by the PEFC Board, the PEFC General Assembly votes on its endorsement.

PEFC endorsement confirms that all fellow PEFC members are satisfied – and mutually recognize – that a national system meets PEFC's Sustainability Benchmarks. This means that forest-based products certified to a national forest certification system are considered “PEFC certified” anywhere

in the world, are eligible to carry our label, and benefit from PEFC's global market recognition.

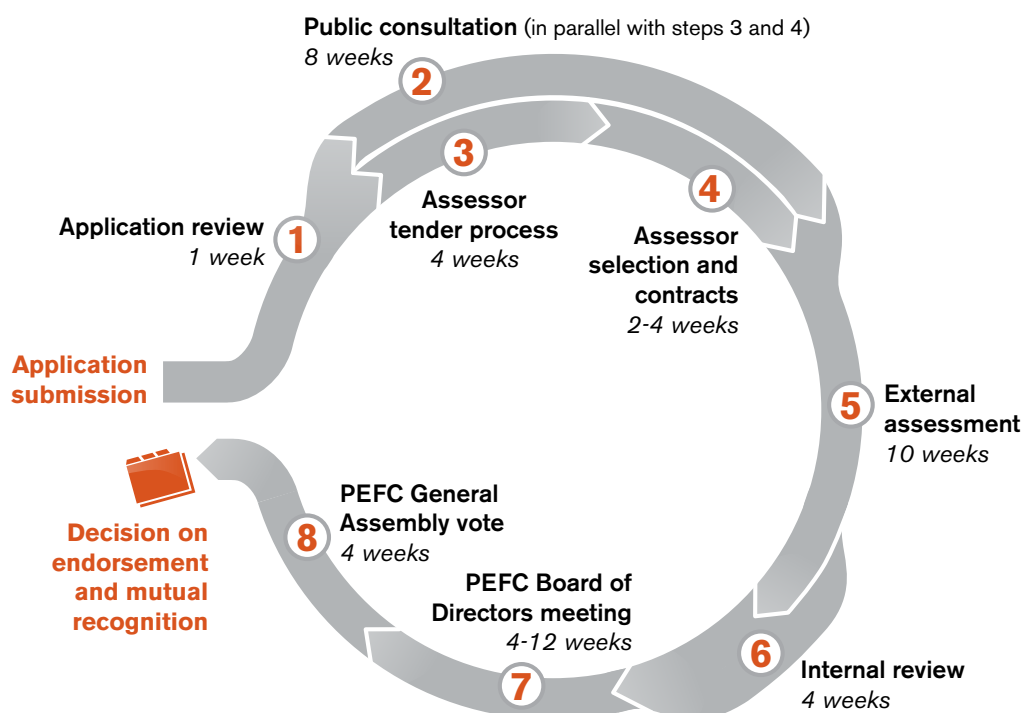
Documentation concerning all endorsed systems, including the full assessment report, is publicly available on our website.

### Revision

For a national system to maintain its endorsement, it must meet a series of endorsement milestones. With these milestones, we are constantly monitoring the endorsed national systems, ensuring they respect their national periodic review processes and continue to meet our Sustainability Benchmarks.

PEFC is the global forest certification system that provides an independent, transparent and participatory process to demonstrate compliance of national forest certification systems with international requirements.

### PEFC endorsement process



Note: indicative timeline based on average process

More information:  
[treee.es/endorsement](https://treee.es/endorsement)

# ENSURING COMPLIANCE AND CONSISTENCY – GLOBALLY AND LOCALLY – Continued

## What are the PEFC Sustainability Benchmarks?

The PEFC Sustainability Benchmarks are a set of standards and guides outlining rigorous requirements and criteria that national forest certification systems must meet. This includes documents referring to:

- Standard setting
- Forest management
- Group forest management certification
- Chain of custody
- Certification and accreditation
- Complaints and appeals
- Trademarks usage
- Administrative procedures

## Complaints: What if something is going wrong?

We are aware that, as with any programme or activity, there may be issues of non-conformity or noncompliance from time to time. For this reason, PEFC has put in place a series of complaints and appeals mechanisms to enable stakeholders to raise awareness if something goes wrong.

We encourage everybody to forward information on any suspected activities to the respective complaints and appeals mechanism. In addition to correcting issues on the ground, complaints and appeals also provide an opportunity to implement corrective and preventive measures and help us to improve our services.

Certification also offers additional benefits, even if claims are unsubstantiated or outside the scope, as it can be used as a platform to facilitate both new and ongoing dialogue amongst stakeholders. This can be vital, particularly when other outlets or means of dialogue are difficult to access or unavailable.

### Certified entities

Complaints against certified entities are dealt with by the respective complaints and appeals procedures put in place by the certification body that issued the certificate. Issues that remain unresolved at this level should be raised with the respective complaints and appeals mechanisms of the national accreditation body and thereafter – as a third level of



appeal – with the IAF. If the certification or accreditation body is judged to not have dealt with the complaint appropriately, it risks losing its licence to operate.

### PEFC International or PEFC national members

Any stakeholder can lodge a complaint or appeal against a PEFC national member or PEFC International regarding its compliance with the PEFC requirements and PEFC Sustainability Benchmarks, respectively.

Complaints or appeals against a PEFC national member should first be submitted to the member. All members have complaints and appeals procedures to deal with any issues. If they cannot be solved at national level, stakeholders can use PEFC International's complaints and appeals mechanism. Complaints against national members, if upheld, can have serious consequences, including the suspension or termination of PEFC endorsement.

### Standard setting working groups

Standard setting working groups have mechanisms in place to deal with complaints and appeals concerning the standards development process.

*More information:*  
[treee.es/complaints](https://treee.es/complaints)





## GETTING INVOLVED

For forest certification to deliver maximum benefits for the world's forests, it requires engagement and active participation from a wide range of stakeholders. This is especially true for PEFC as an alliance of national forest certification systems. For us, partnership and collaboration are key to our success.

There are many opportunities to engage with PEFC, in either a personal or professional capacity. These range from giving preference to products bearing the distinctive PEFC label when shopping, to contributing your professional expertise during a forest management standard setting process.

### BECOME A PEFC MEMBER

- **National members**  
National forest certification systems and organizations striving to establish national standards. *More information:* [treee.es/pefcnationalmembers](https://treee.es/pefcnationalmembers)
- **International stakeholder members**  
Organizations, companies and associations with operations in two or more countries. *More information:* [treee.es/becomeism](https://treee.es/becomeism)
- **Member of national organizations**  
Institutional stakeholders and/or individuals can become members of national PEFC member organizations. *Contact national organizations:* [treee.es/pefcnationalmembers](https://treee.es/pefcnationalmembers)

### GET INVOLVED IN PEFC PROJECTS

- **Partnership**  
Engage with PEFC through joint activities, projects and other collaborative actions. *Contact:* [development@pefc.org](mailto:development@pefc.org)
- **Financial Support**  
Support PEFC and our activities financially, or by providing expertise and knowledge, secondments and other means of support. *Contact:* [development@pefc.org](mailto:development@pefc.org)

### PARTICIPATE IN STANDARD & SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

- **Sustainability Benchmarks**  
Become involved in standard setting working groups and task forces. *Contact:* [technical@pefc.org](mailto:technical@pefc.org)
- **National standard setting**  
Contribute to processes at local level and to national standard setting and revision work. *Contact national organizations:* [treee.es/pefcnationalmembers](https://treee.es/pefcnationalmembers)
- **System development**  
In countries without a national forest certification system, take the lead in establishing a national organization to facilitate the development of a PEFC-compliant national system. *Contact:* [development@pefc.org](mailto:development@pefc.org)
- **Assess national systems**  
Give your feedback on national systems during the 60-day public consultation. [treee.es/consultations](https://treee.es/consultations)

### PRODUCE, SELL AND BUY PEFC-CERTIFIED PRODUCTS

- **Certify your forest**  
*More information:* [treee.es/certify-forest](https://treee.es/certify-forest)
- **Certify your company**  
*More information:* [treee.es/getcertified](https://treee.es/getcertified)
- **Label your products**  
*More information:* [treee.es/pefclabel](https://treee.es/pefclabel)
- **Procure and buy responsibly**  
*More information:* [treee.es/procure-certified](https://treee.es/procure-certified)



# PEFC International

ICC Building C1  
Route de Pré-Bois 20  
1215 Geneva 15  
Switzerland

**t** +41 22 799 45 40

**e** [info@pefc.org](mailto:info@pefc.org)

[www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org)

2021 © PEFC

Front cover: Marcel Poncu/Shutterstock, Tuan Aufa Bin Tuan Othman ('Experience Forests, Experience PEFC'), Rasmus Hjortshøj – COAST Studio/Shutterstock. Inside front cover: Siloto, Jorge Romero JRPD. 1: Forestis, Urciser/Dreamstime/PEFC. 3: Jaggat Rashidi. 5: PEFC, Sevenke, Nga Ha. 6: MTK. 7: Huhtamaki Ltd (product & photography), PEFC UK. 8-9: Pieter Vandenheede ('Experience Forests, Experience PEFC'). 9: Mohd Samsi Sumairi ('Experience Forests, Experience PEFC'). 11: PEFC. 12-13: PEFC Germany. Back cover: Shutterstock from Vladimir Melnikov, All-stock-photos and Hien Phung Thu.

Updated in January 2021