



FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

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For immediate distribution

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Public Statement

Response to the Rainforest Foundation Report “Trading in Credibility”

This public statement is a response from FSC Executive Director, Mr. Heiko Liedeker to a report entitled “Trading in Credibility”, published by Rainforest Foundation UK and Rainforest Foundation Norway in November 2002. The report is subtitled “The myth and reality of the Forest Stewardship Council”. It contains serious criticisms of the work of FSC, of accredited certification bodies and of certified forest enterprises, including accusation of breaches of FSC rules and agreements, and also suggestions and recommendations for change.

The Rainforest Foundation report has three sections written by staff of Rainforest Foundation UK, and nine case studies by different individual authors. FSC staff and board members received a draft of the report in September 2002, and discussed the recommendations with Rainforest Foundation representatives at FSC headquarters in Mexico. Discussions among FSC directors, staff and members have continued.

FSC welcomes the report in the spirit in which it was offered, “to lead to the implementation of improvements and the assurance of FSC’s credibility worldwide”.

Rainforest Foundation (RF) complains that FSC accredited certification bodies have certified forests, knowing them to be in serious breach of the FSC rules and Principles & Criteria, and the certification bodies’ own systems. The case histories describe alleged weaknesses in Brazil, Thailand, Indonesia and Ireland. The report suggests collusion and manipulation between forest managers and certification bodies, to ensure easy and favorable results.

FSC welcomes the presentation of any evidence of breaches or non-compliance with any elements or rules of the FSC program. The FSC will

examine the evidence and accusations carefully, decide on the actions needed, and take any necessary steps. FSC and accredited certification bodies have detailed systems for dealing with complaints, and are constantly working to improve all elements of certification and monitoring. FSC and the certification bodies are aware of many weaknesses in certified forests, and do not pretend that they are perfect, but we maintain that the systems are working and FSC endorsement is justified.

FSC also welcomes the recommendations and suggestions from Rainforest Foundation for changes to the structure and organization of FSC. These include the suggestion that FSC should stop working as an accreditation body, phase out all accreditation contracts, and then employ assessors to carry out “direct certification” of forests, acting as a certification body, with certification fees paid directly to FSC. Other recommendations from Rainforest Foundation cover tightening the monitoring and quality enforcement of existing certification bodies, basing all certification exclusively on agreed national or regional standards, and streamlining the handling of complaints and disputes, and improving access to information.

All these recommendations are under consideration, along with other proposals from FSC members, designed to improve the systems and workings of FSC.

The report recognizes the complexity of FSC as a structure, and the complexity of standard setting, certification, accreditation and forest management. FSC is still young and has evolved rapidly, so it is not surprising that weaknesses and mistakes have occurred. FSC’s transparency has made such weaknesses clearly visible to FSC staff, members and stakeholders, and allowed FSC to comprehensively address any deficiencies. We regularly review our guidelines, and develop new policy interpretations and safeguards, learning from our experiences. New challenges are constantly emerging, much remains to be done, and it is seldom easy to reach agreement on what changes are needed or how best to carry them out with limited resources.

In recent months, FSC has produced guidelines for compliance with ILO conventions (which protect the rights of workers and indigenous peoples), and for the controlled use of chemical pesticides, two of many guidelines that raise the quality of forest management and improve the consistency of certificates. We have new proposals for accelerating the development of national forest stewardship standards. The 3rd FSC General Assembly in November has considered major changes in FSC’s governance structure. All these match the hopes of Rainforest Foundation to continue implementing improvements and increasing the credibility of FSC and certification. However, not all the

Rainforest Foundation recommendations are supported by the FSC membership.

The Rainforest Foundation report includes several inaccuracies and evident misunderstandings, which we accept as inevitable in a report, drafted without consulting with the responsible representatives of FSC, and with minimal consultation with the certification bodies concerned. They do not reduce in any way the attention that is being paid to the report, its conclusions, or to the RF recommendations.

The first step in this process will be an internal analysis of the report to identify possible steps to be taken in relation to each reported breach of FSC systems, and each recommendation proposed by Rainforest Foundation. This analysis will be available on request.

Heiko Liedeker
FSC Executive Director
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