

GUIDANCE ON MARKET USE AND COMMUNICATION OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES IMPACTS: **A SUMMARY**

Refer to the full document for more information:
[FSC-GUI-30-006b | FSC Connect](#)



**FORESTS
FOR ALL
FOREVER**

Are you involved in a project that supports ecosystem services (ES), either as a sponsor or as a forest manager?

This resource is for you: **Welcome to your ES journey with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®)!**

FSC's definition of ES covers the following seven categories:



Biodiversity



Carbon



Water



Soil



Recreation



Culture



Air quality

We will cover the following topics:

Key definitions

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- Alignment with international sustainability frameworks
- Development of ES claims

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- Finding sponsors (as a forest manager)
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- Mitigation hierarchy
- Procurement policy

KEY DEFINITIONS

Before we dive in, here are some key definitions that will contextualize everything that follows.

Sponsor

A company, individual, foundation, or donor organization that provides funding for an ES project or activity – they should have signed a written agreement with the forest manager and disclosed the nature of their sponsorship to FSC.

Forest manager

A person or entity holding or applying for FSC certification and demonstrating compliance with the ES Procedure ([FSC-PRO-30-006 V2](#)).

ES impact

The maintenance or enhancement of ecosystem services, or other benefits derived from these ecosystem services resulting from responsible forest management activities.

- **Validated ES impact:** a feasible plan to achieve a positive ES impact in the future, which has been validated by a certification body and registered in the FSC system.
- **Verified ES impact:** a demonstrated positive impact on ecosystem services, which has been verified by a certification body and is registered in the FSC system.

ES claim

Any communication made by a forest manager or sponsor, based on a verified or validated ES impact generated by using the ES Procedure, and using FSC trademarks.



PART I: **MARKET USE AND** **COMMUNICATION**

Uses of ES impacts (1/2)

When you support ES impacts, it's not just good for the planet – it can also benefit you in a variety of ways. Here's a selection of ES impact uses, broken down by user.

For sponsors

- **Payments for ecosystem services (PES):** Sponsors in industries that rely on ecosystem service(s) may choose to support forest managers who maintain healthy ecosystem service(s), often at additional cost. PES schemes enable a fair payment mechanism for supporting these service(s).
- **Evidence of within-value-chain mitigation:** Sponsors who generate negative impacts through their sourcing and production activities can internalize these negative impacts by engaging in within-value-chain mitigation. This demonstrates their awareness of and commitment to sustainability to stakeholders.
- **Evidence of beyond-value-chain contributions:** Sponsors who do not have a forest-dependent value chain can use these data to enhance business operations beyond their value chain, contributing to ES projects across the globe. This highlights their overarching commitment to sustainability, which may attract consumers who favour environmentally conscious brands.

Uses of ES impacts (2/2)

For forest managers

- **Data-driven storytelling:** Effective communication is key for fostering demand for any service or product, including in the forestry sector. FSC's ES Procedure provides a mechanism to measure ES impacts and translate them into impact data. These data may be used to generate various benefits, including increased brand value and improved relationships with stakeholders.
- **Evidence of positive impacts for fund applications:** Nature-related funds often require evidence of positive impacts on nature and clear metrics to show funding has been well spent. Quantified ES impacts help forest managers meet this requirement.
- **Promotion of future plans:** Achieving targets takes time, but FSC's validated ES impact category gives forest managers a framework for communicating about ongoing initiatives that are yet to reach their objectives. This is particularly helpful when looking for sponsorship opportunities.

For both sponsors and forest managers

- **Sustainability reporting:** International laws and sustainability disclosure frameworks increasingly demand transparency around environmental footprint and natural capital accounting. With ES projects, both sponsors and forest managers gain independently audited evidence that they can include in sustainability reports.

Aligning with international sustainability frameworks

During the development of the ES Procedure, FSC analysed leading international frameworks to seek alignment and maximize market fit and user-friendliness. We provide a list of the aligned sustainability frameworks below.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)

United Nations Global Biodiversity Framework (UN GBF)

CDP (previously Carbon Disclosure Project)

Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)

International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB)

European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS)

Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol

Science Based Targets Network (SBTN)

How to make an ES claim (1/5)



Who can make an ES claim?

Forest managers who have:

- a valid Ecosystem Services Report (ESR).

Sponsors who have:

- a sponsorship agreement with the FSC certificate holder of the ES project they sponsor
- an Ecosystem Services Promotional Licence Agreement (ES PLA)
- registered their transaction in the FSC ES Registry.

Where can you make an ES claim?

ES claims can be made in **digital or print media**, including via an organization's website, social media, in-store banners, promotional posters, magazines, product pamphlets, info sheets, ESG reports, sustainability disclosures and frameworks, and other promotional materials. You can find ready-made templates at FSC's [Brand Hub](#).

ES claims **cannot** currently be placed on products using FSC trademarks – FSC is hoping to provide solutions for this purpose in its revised [Chain of Custody Certification](#).

How to make an ES claim (2/5)

How do you structure an ES claim?

There are four elements that you must include in your ES claim.

1. An **impact statement**, containing:
 - a description of the ES impact or the plan to achieve it
 - the geographical location of the project (at least the country name)
 - the year of validation/verification by the certification body OR the years covered by the verification process
2. **FSC trademark(s)**
3. **FSC licence code**
4. **FSC website address.**



2. FSC trademark

Sustainable Choices Start Here

Thanks to our Nature
Forever sponsorship, the
FSC-certified Biosphere
Reserve ABC
(Cambodia) has seen an
increased count of the
Asian elephants
between 2018 and 2023.

1. Impact
statement

FSC® N000000

www.fsc.org

4. FSC web
address

3. FSC licence code

How to make an ES claim (3/5)

Dos

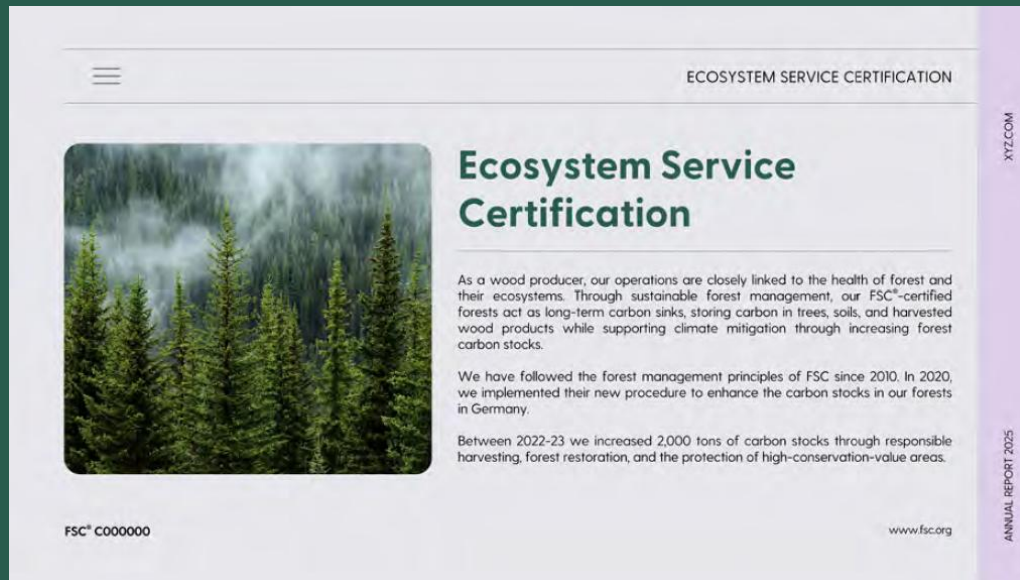
- ✓ Include the four mandatory elements of the ES claim.
- ✓ Ensure that the content of the impact statement matches the ESR.
- ✓ Check that the FSC trademarks are being used correctly.
- ✓ Use clear and transparent language.
- ✓ Describe a sponsor's efforts using words such as 'sponsored', 'contributed', 'invested', 'partnered', 'supported', or 'helped'.
- ✓ Describe a forest manager's efforts using words such as 'developed', 'produced', 'increased', 'maintained', 'enhanced', 'restored', or 'managed'.
- ✓ Make sure you comply with the applicable regulations or local laws.

Don'ts

- ✗ Don't present the sponsor as 'owning' the impacts; ES impacts are owned by the forest manager.
- ✗ Don't exaggerate, misrepresent, or use outdated information about the ES impacts.
- ✗ Don't write about 'future' or 'potential' duration or impact in cases of validated ES impacts. If a validated ES impact has not yet achieved its intended target, its future cannot be determined – the ESR only sets out and audits a plan to achieve it.
- ✗ Don't combine information about the ES claim with statements relating to other organizations. Instead, use a different paragraph or ensure there is space between the ES impact statement and the rest of the text. There should be no confusion about what falls within the scope of the ES project and is verified by FSC, and what isn't.

How to make an ES claim (4/5)

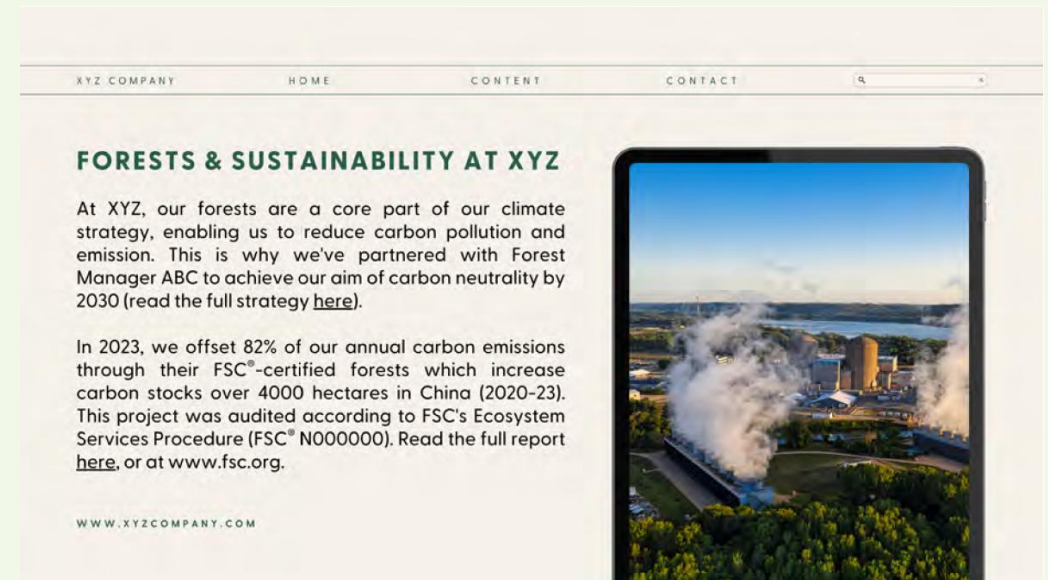
Example of a correct ES claim



Why is it good?

- This claim covers all four mandatory elements and references relevant details from the ESR.
- It makes clear, specific, and substantiated claims.
- The claim is clearly presented and separated from other claims and information.

Example of an incorrect ES claim



Why is this bad?

It claims carbon offsetting as part of an ES project.

How to avoid it?

Care must be taken with the phrasing and implications of your message, in this case, avoid words like 'offset', 'credits', 'compensated', and 'counterbalanced'.

How to make an ES claim (5/5)

How do you get an ES claim approved?





PART II: **CONNECTING SPONSORS AND FOREST MANAGERS**

How to find an ES project as a sponsor



Analyse scope

What are you looking for in an ES project?

We recommend considering:

- country/region
- type of ecosystem service(s)
- project stage
- project features
- foreseen use
- budget and duration.



Find ES project

How do you find the right ES project for you?

You may wish to consult the following resources to narrow down your options:

- FSC database:
 - [FSC Search](#)
 - [FSC Registry](#)
- [FSC national or regional offices](#)
- market intermediary.



Connect with forest manager

How do you start building a relationship with the forest manager running the ES project?

Suggested steps include:

- request contact details from FSC
- ask forest manager for a project summary/ introductory meeting.



Sign agreement

Ready for the next stage?

If you're both enthusiastic about entering a partnership, it's time to prepare a sponsorship agreement, detailing:

- agreed responsibilities
- protection of interests
- exclusivity conditions
- duration
- any other elements.

How to find a sponsor as a forest manager



Analyse scope

What are you looking for in a sponsorship?

We recommend considering:

- project stage
- type of sponsor
- what you can offer
- how much you can invest in sales.



Find sponsor

How do you find the right sponsor for you?

You may wish to make a list of potential sponsors.

Consider:

- Do they have a connection to your forest or activities?
- Do they benefit from the ecosystem service(s) you support?
- Do they have stated ecosystem service(s) or sustainability targets?



Connect with a sponsor

How do you start building a relationship with your potential sponsor?

You may wish to produce marketing materials, such as a project summary and a slide deck. Top tips:

- use simple messages
- speak the sponsor's language (avoid technical terms)
- use attractive photos.



Sign agreement

Ready for the next stage?

Ensure you have the necessary buy-in from all stakeholders and then prepare a sponsorship agreement, covering:

- responsibilities
- scope of activity
- protection of interests
- duration of sponsorship, etc.

Refer to [ES PRO](#): Clause 11.1.

How to price an ES impact

What is the value of nature? What is the value of a forest and all the biodiversity it is home to, as well as the ecosystem services it provides? Arguably invaluable.

Still, if you need to put a price on your ES impact, there are questions you can ask and methods you can use. Find a selection below, broken down by user.

For sponsors

- What is the value of the forest to you? Do you depend on ecosystem service(s) provision for your core operations? Are you sourcing directly from the forest?
- Do you have a target related to ecosystem service(s)? Are you looking for trusted data for your sustainability reporting?
- Are you looking to boost brand value, improve stakeholder relationships, or gain a social licence to operate?
- Will you have exclusivity? In other words, will you be the only one communicating about the ES project you are helping to realize?

For forest managers

- How much does it cost to generate the ecosystem service(s)? This may include management activities, revenue sharing, and any fees collected by government agencies.
- Will you receive other benefits from the ES project, such as access to subsidies, favourable loan terms, promotional benefits, and additional revenue streams?
- Have you considered any economic valuation methods for your ecosystem service(s)? Examples include replacement cost, avoided cost, opportunity cost, production function.

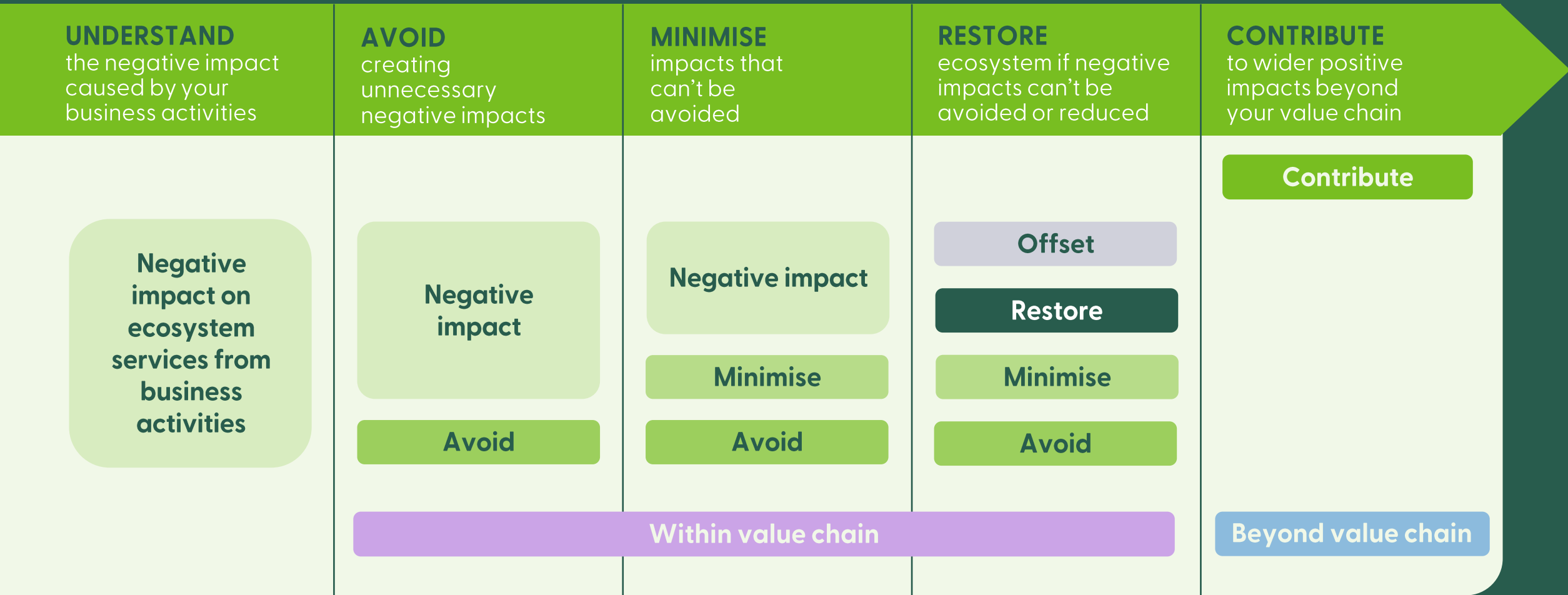


PART III: **BEST PRACTICES** **FOR SPONSORS**

The mitigation hierarchy (1/2)



The mitigation hierarchy is an approach to **taking responsibility for and mitigating negative impacts on ecosystem service(s) resulting** from your business activities.



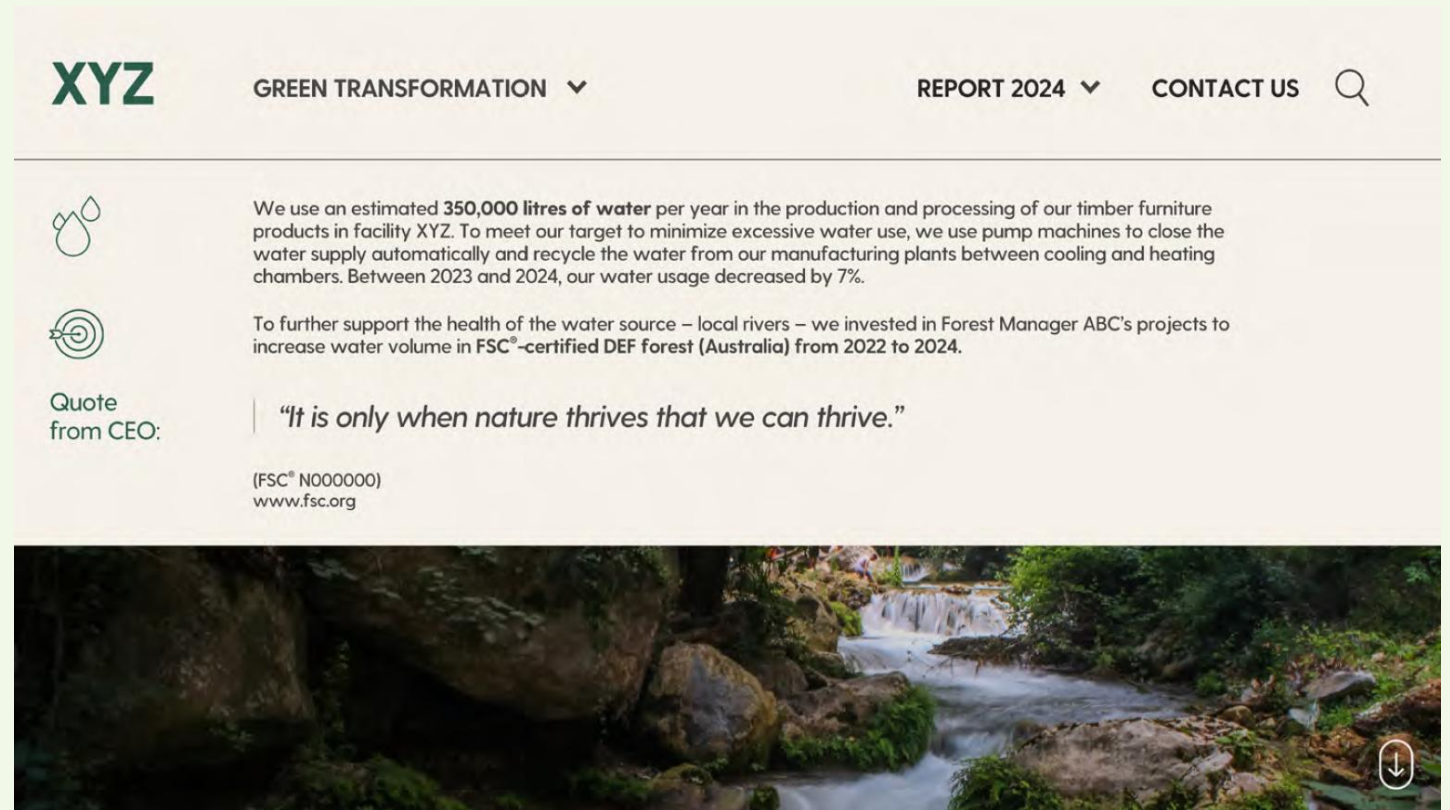
The mitigation hierarchy (2/2)

To ensure integrity, sponsors wishing to make ES claims are required to demonstrate that they follow the mitigation hierarchy.

How to demonstrate you follow the mitigation hierarchy

When preparing an ES PLA, trademark service providers (of FSC) will ask sponsors to answer and provide evidence for the following two questions:

- Does your organization have climate or nature mitigation targets? Are they externally validated?
- Does your organization systematically report its environmental impacts and actions?



A company communicating about their mitigation targets and plans.

Developing a procurement policy

Sponsors with a material dependence on forests are encouraged to review their sourcing of forest-based products. We recommend two ways of doing this:

1. if your company is eligible for an FSC Chain of Custody Certification, then you should get certified within 12 months;
2. if your company is not eligible for an FSC Chain of Custody Certification, then you should adopt a publicly available procurement policy expressing preference for FSC-certified products.

Refer to ES PRO: Clause 11.10.

What is a procurement policy?

A procurement policy is a statement which specifies information about the products used by the company.

In addition, it may contain:

- a forward-looking commitment or target that includes a year in the future, e.g. “By 2027, we aim to source all of our rubber material from FSC-certified forests”;
- a backward-looking claim substantiated with evidence of past sourcing, e.g. “In 2023, 67% of our packaging was FSC-certified”.

Annex: Alignment of ES impacts with UN SDGs and GBF

ES impacts align fully or partially with the following UN SDGs and UN GBF targets.
Refer to [Annex A](#) for detailed analysis.

UN Sustainable Development Goals



UN Global Biodiversity Framework



THANK YOU

In case of any questions, please contact:
ecosystems@fsc.org

Access the full guidance document here:
[FSC-GUI-30-006b | FSC Connect](#)



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