

Revision of the complaints and appeals procedures

Normative documents under revision

FSC-PRO-01-008 V2-0 (Processing Complaints in the FSC Certification Scheme)

Anybody can submit **complaints** about:

- FSC's normative framework
- FSC International's performance
- FSC's network partners, regional teams and national country representatives
- Performance of Assurance Services International (ASI)

NOTE: Policy for Association complaints are managed through procedure FSC-PRO-01-009.

FSC-PRO-01-005 V3-0 (Processing Appeals)

Only **those** who were **affected** by an adverse decision can **appeal** about:

- Decisions taken on complaints
- Any other decision made by FSC (e.g. approval of National Standards)

NOTE: Decisions taken on Policy for Association complaints, accreditation decisions and ASI's decisions and measures to address a complaint **cannot be appealed**.

Key objectives of the revision process

Simplify the complaints and appeals processes; make it easy to access

Ensure a balanced approach between the lowest level principle and independence

Ensure alignment with FSC's evolving normative framework

Incorporate elements of global best practices in complaints mechanisms

Timeline of the revision process: past, present and future

The last time the complaints and appeals procedures were revised.

Start of incremental revision of FSC's dispute system policies and procedures.

02 Oct. – 30 Nov. Conceptual phase's public consultation.

Analysis of consultation results

Presentation of consultation results to the Board in **March 2024**.

2014

2020

2023

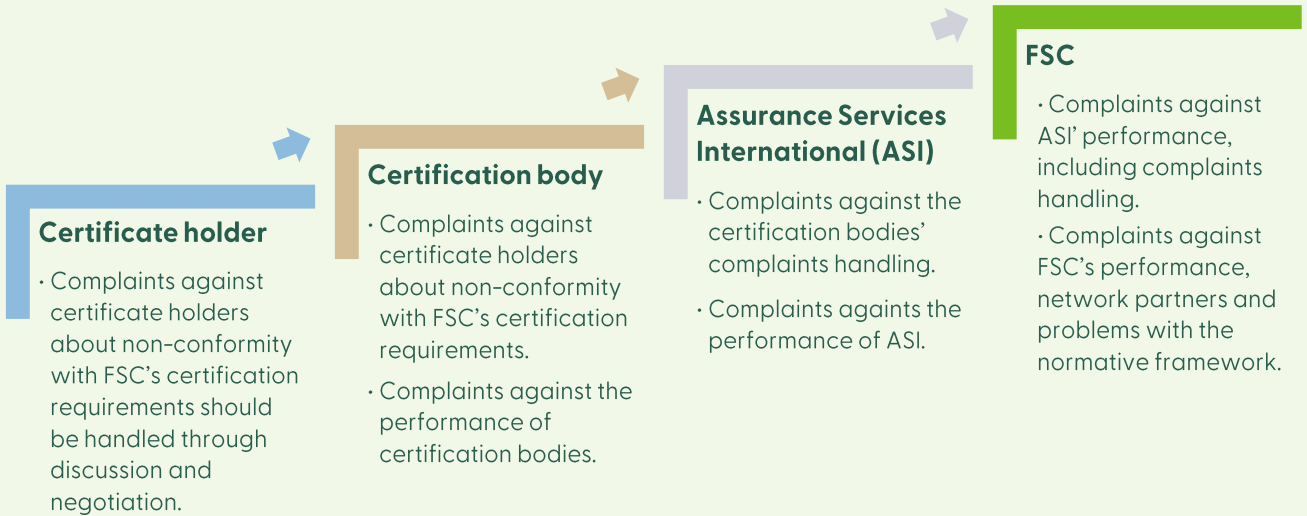
2024

FSC evolved rapidly, broadening the scope of its activities beyond the certification of forest management and forest product supply chains.

**Revision of complaints and appeals procedures
June 2023 – December 2025**

Key features: FSC’s current complaints & appeals procedures

Lowest level principle: Escalation pathway for complaints



The rights of the parties provided in the currently effective procedures



- **FSC supports** the complainant in submitting the complaint to the correct complaint handling body
- **FSC protects** the identity of the complainant
- Either party may **request** that the dispute be resolved through discussion and negotiation or mediation
- Either party may **ask** questions and contradict the evidence of the opposing party
- The complainant may **withdraw** the complaint
- Both parties shall **receive** a response with the conclusion on the complaint and the rationale for the decision
- Both parties may **appeal/challenge** a decision.

Revision of the complaints and appeals procedures

Public consultation for conceptual phase: Proposed changes

Current practice

Proposed changes

Clarifying what may be complained about and appealed

- Complaints about forest management and chain of custody certification can be filed.
- Focus of complaints process is on the actors against whom complaints can be lodged.
- Only entity subject of an adverse decision can lodge an appeal, on the other hand it is possible to appeal against any FSC decision.

- Complaints can be filed about current and potential areas of activities covered by FSC.
- Focus on activities against which the complaints can be lodged.
- Scope appeals to be limited to decisions arising from the complaint processes within the wider range of activities covered by FSC.

Assessing the governance of the dispute resolution system

- No minimum standards or guidance to ensure uniformity in the way complaints are handled.
- Role of FSC's regional and local network not clearly stated.
- Third parties assisting complainants or deciding on the complaints are not considered.
- Exceptions to the lowest level principle not acknowledged.

- Establish criteria/principles of effectiveness and common minimum standards.
- Identify how FSC regional and local network could play a role.
- Assess the need to work with or establish an ombuds-service.
- Review the need and clarify criteria for exceptions to the lowest level principle.

Establishing the rights of the parties

- The rights of the parties are provided, but in an unstructured manner.
- Equal access to the complaints and appeals mechanism is not guaranteed.
- The risk of abuse of the complaints and appeals system is not considered.

- Clarify the rights of the parties at each stage of the process.
- Establish special rights for marginalized and vulnerable people.
- Develop guidance for dealing with cases of abuse of the complaints and appeals mechanism.

Systematic improvement

- There is no specific institutional learning tool in the system to identify and address systemic issues and take preventive action.

- Develop a centralized database for registering, monitoring and reporting complaints across the entire system, making it possible to track the effectiveness of case management.

Participate in shaping the new complaints and appeals procedure



Consultation Platform

To register and participate in the public consultation between:
02 October – 30 November 2023
 Click [here](#).



Process updates

- To receive updates about the revision process, click [here](#).
- Visit the process page for more information, [here](#).