



**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
FSC CHECK**

November 2023



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<b>Title:</b>	Frequently Asked Questions FSC Check
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# INTRODUCTION

FSC Check is a tool that is being developed to implement the new Disclosure Requirements for Association with FSC, FSC-PRO-10-004 V2.

Through this set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), find out more about the FSC Check process, who it applies to, and the role of various stakeholders.

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## WHAT IS FSC CHECK?

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### 1. What is FSC Check exactly?

FSC Check is a tool for FSC to review individuals and organizations applying for association with FSC for possible reputational risks in line with the Policy for Association. It aims to reduce risk of establishing association with organizations and individuals who have engaged in unacceptable activities or are blocked from the FSC system.

FSC Check is a highly automated process, where applicants provide information about themselves through responding to an online questionnaire. The questions vary dynamically depending on the responses provided. The data is automatically checked against risk factors and if high risks are identified, FSC will get back to applicants for further clarifications. When no risks are identified – which is expected to be a high majority of applicants – this conclusion is provided automatically to both the applicant and to the certification bodies, and the applicant is directed to the next step of their application process. For applicants of certification, FSC Check is embedded in the Trademark License Agreement (TLA) signing process and for membership, in the general application processing.

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### 2. What are the requirements governing FSC Check?

The process is based on [FSC-POL-01-004 V3 Policy for Association](#) and [FSC-PRO-10-004 V2 Disclosure Requirements for Association with FSC](#).

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### 3. When was FSC Check launched?

The FSC Check was launched on 31 July 2023.

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## WHO IS IT FOR?

**4. Who does the FSC Check process apply to?**

Organizations or individuals that are new to the FSC system and are looking to become certificate holders or FSC members are expected to go through the FSC Check process before signing the FSC Trademark License Agreement (TLA) for certification or before being approved as a member. FSC Check also applies to organizations and individuals who wish to re-join the FSC system, i.e., applying for certification after their TLA has expired or been terminated.

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**5. Does it apply to already certified organizations and existing members of FSC?**

No, it does not apply to existing certificate holders and existing FSC members. The introduction section of the procedure ([FSC-PRO-10-004](#)) mentions that it may also become a requirement for already associated organizations in the future once FSC has gained experience with the process, but it does not provide a prediction regarding the timeline for such a change in scope.

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**6. Will the new FSC Check apply also to new group and multi-site and project certificate holders?**

The procedure applies to all new organizations applying for certification. New organizations in this context should be understood as new trademark license holders during this first phase. So, for example, any new group would be required to go through the FSC Check. Groups that are certified at the effective date of the procedure will not be required to participate in the FSC Check, for now. The same applies for multi-site certificate holders.

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**7. Will the FSC Check apply to promotional license holders (PLH)?**

No, promotional license holders do not sign the Policy for Association, so this is outside of scope of FSC Check.

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## **ABOUT THE FSC CHECK PROCESS**

**8. How do the applicants access FSC Check?**

For applicants seeking certification, this will be part of the Trademark License Agreement (TLA) signing process, where, as the first step, there will be a questionnaire before the signing of the agreement is enabled. The applicant is automatically invited to login into FSC's website (FSC Connect). The invitation is triggered when the certification body (CB) makes a request through the FSC database. For applicants for membership, the FSC Membership team triggers the invite through respective database.

For detailed step-by-step instructions on how to complete FSC Check, click [here](#).

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**9. What about group, multi-site and project certificate applicants?**

For group and multi-site applicants, the process is the same as that for single certificate applicants. Group and multi-site applicants will also be directed by the system to FSC's eTLA signing portal after they have successfully completed the FSC Check process. NOTE: For project certificate applicants, once the FSC Check process is completed, the system informs the CB and the TLA can be signed separately. As soon as the project TLAs are within the eTLA system, the process will be transitioned there fully.

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**10. How does the applicant, CB and membership enroller know what the result of the FSC Check was?**

The system will send automated messages to applicants and their CBs or membership team about the FSC Check result, when an applicant passes the check. The result is also available in the database for CBs and membership team. The applicant can also see the status with their access to FSC Check. In case there is need for further information, the applicant and respective parties will be contacted by FSC directly.

**11. What happens if an applicant does not pass FSC Check?**

If high risks are identified, the process will be put on hold until further clarification have been made. If the risk has not been cleared - for example an affiliation with a disassociated corporate group is confirmed – the applicant and the CB or Membership team will be provided a justification for not passing FSC Check and not being able to proceed to next step in the process.

**12. Will there be delays in the certification or membership processes?**

It is not expected that there will be significant delays. The majority of applicants are expected to pass the FSC Check automatically within few days. In case there are severe risks identified, for example possible affiliation with a disassociated corporate group, it may take more time to check this first internally and/or with the applicant directly.

**13. How long will it take to see the result of the FSC Check?**

In most cases, the result should be available in a couple of business days. If risks are identified, FSC will reach out to the applicant to gather more information, which could take more time.

**14. Can there be a situation when the result is incorrect (similar name etc)?**

There is a phase in the process for manual checking of the information categorized as high risk. This is planned to mitigate such situations.

**15. Who will have access to the information provided by applicants?**

Only dedicated individuals in assigned teams in FSC International will have access to the information provided by the applicants.

## **THE ROLE OF CERTIFICATION BODIES**



**16. What is the obligation of certification bodies (CBs) in the FSC Check process?**

The FSC Check will be part of the TLA signing process: When the new client is ready for TLA signing, the CB will trigger associated process, and the FSC Check will be embedded as the first step. This means taking following step:

- 1) Create a new applicant to database.
- 2) Click 'Ready for eTLA' (NOTE: also for project certificate applicants who do not have an electronic TLA yet).
- 3) Correct information if requested: The applicant is shown basic information (name, country etc.) as a first step of FSC Check. If this information is incorrect, an applicant can send a direct message to CB to correct it, before starting FSC Check questionnaire.
- 4) Respond to follow up questions by FSC concerning the application during the process, if requested.
- 5) FSC Check passed: Upon receiving a message that FSC Check is passed for applicants without available eTLA, continue to TLA signing. For others, wait for confirmation for signed eTLA.
- 6) FSC Check not passed: Upon receiving a message that FSC Check is not passed, discontinue the certification process.

### **17. What is new for CBs?**

UPDATE for CBs: From 27 November 2023, all single, group and multi-site certificate applicants will be required to sign FSC's electronic TLA through the FSC Certification Portal. Only project certificate applicants will be directed to sign the paper version of the TLA. Hence, in principle, the process remains the same for applicants requiring a single, group or multi-site TLA. For applicants requiring project TLAs there is a new step to click 'Ready for eTLA' and holding the process until the applicant has passed FSC Check. Then the CB will have to resume the earlier process for signing the paper version of the TLA. For more information about the eTLA signing process, click [here](#).

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### **18. Will applicant information have to be filled multiple times by the CB and applicant?**

At the start of the application process, the CB will feed in the basic information about the applicant as before. FSC Check will use this information inserted by the CB or membership applicant when the applicant is invited to answer the questionnaire. So, the applicant does not need to feed it in again. However, the applicants are asked to review the information before moving to the FSC Check questionnaire and request correction to any inaccuracies. The corrections will be carried out by CBs (for certification) or FSC Membership team (for membership).

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## **THE ROLE OF FSC NETWORK PARTNERS**

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### **19. What is the role of the FSC Network in the process?**

The membership application process is carried out in the similar way than now. The new step of triggering an invitation to FSC Check will be performed by FSC Membership Team after reviewing the application and confirming it is ready for FSC Check.

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## **WHAT IS FSC CHECKING FOR?**

**20. What will FSC Check be looking for exactly?**

FSC Check will scan the information provided by the applicant to determine if there are indications for risks of having engaged in any unacceptable activities defined in the PfA, affiliation to disassociated corporate groups, or are blocked from the FSC system. Also other risk factors affecting the integrity of the FSC system could be reviewed at later stage of development of FSC Check.

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**21. Will there be an exact list of data that needs to be provided during FSC Check?**

The disclosure procedure (FSC-PRO-10-004) provides categories of information required for the FSC Check process. The level of detail needed is expected to vary based on responses provided, so it will not be the same for all organizations. It is anticipated that all companies will have to provide a basic set of information. For example, organizations will be required to provide information about their corporate structure (size, entities, owners etc), areas of operation (countries of operations etc), legal findings in areas of unacceptable activities and status and history of association with FSC. The FSC Check will provide information of the data required step by step but will also allow for seeing the relevant questions in one go. Refer to the disclosure procedure for more information, [here](#).

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## **ABOUT THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

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**22. How long will it take to complete the questionnaire?**

The time will vary greatly, depending on, for example the size of operations, where larger corporates would simply have more information fields to fill out. For small organizations, if all the information is readily available, it should not take more than 15 minutes. If the information has to be gathered, then it could take longer.

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**23. Do the applicants need to complete the whole questionnaire in one go?**

No, it is not required to fill it in in one go. It is possible to save the responses and continue later, until the entire questionnaire is filled and ready for submission. After submission, it is not possible to change the responses any longer.

**24. Is there a deadline to complete the questionnaire?**

A draft version that is not submitted will be discarded after 180 days. Please note though that if it is not completed, the processes cannot be completed and certification or membership processes will not proceed further.

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**25. Will it all be in English language?**

FSC Check is available in Spanish and French. The preferred language can be selected from a dropdown menu available at the top right corner of the page. In addition, FSC Check is also embedded with Google Translate, which provides automatic translation for the questionnaire in other languages.

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**26. What if the applicant does not want to disclose some of the information requested?**

If an applicant does not want to answer the questions in the questionnaire, the FSC Check process cannot be completed. Therefore, neither can the certification (signing of TLA) process take place, nor can membership be granted.

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## **PUBLIC INFORMATION**

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**27. How does the publication of new applicants on FSC website work exactly?**

FSC has incorporated the list of applicants into the [FSC public search dashboard](#). This is available as an independent report of the currently available dashboard and will contain the applicant's name, date of application, applicant type and country.

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**28. Will FSC publish all applicant information?**

FSC will only publish a basic set of information consisting of applicant name, location, and application type, which will be available for 30 days at a designated location.

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**29. Does the publication include the result of the FSC Check?**

No, it does not. The only information available is that the organization or individual has applied for association with FSC, to increase transparency about who has applied to become part of the FSC system.

**30. Can the process be continued (TLA signed, certification granted) while this 30 day period of publication is running?**

Yes, it can. The publication of applicants is a separate parallel output to ensure transparency about who is applying to become part of the FSC system. It is not intended to create a new step (or a waiting period) in order to become a certificate holder.



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