

REVISION OF THE COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURES

09 and 22 July 2025

Public Webinar

Consultation phase of Draft 1-0



AGENDA



Topic		Who	Time
1	Introduction & background	Julian	10 min.
2	Changes introduced in DRAFT 1-0 a. Structure and scope of the draft b. New concepts introduced	Julian and Siu	15 min.
3	Complaints management tool	Julian	5 min.
4	Questions and answers		30 min.

A close-up photograph of several green leaves, likely from a rose bush, with numerous small, clear water droplets resting on their surfaces. The leaves are vibrant green and show detailed vein patterns. A semi-transparent dark green horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, serving as a background for the text.

1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

FSC's Certification System

FSC has established a certification system that requires the support of several third-party actors to operate on the ground, maintain independence and integrity, and ultimately ensure sustainable management of the world's forests.

WHO ARE THE MAIN ACTORS?



Background of the Revision Process: Goals

FSC-PRO-01-008 V2-0

**Processing Complaints in
the FSC Certification
Scheme**

+

FSC-PRO-01-005 V3-0

Processing Appeals

*Last full revision: 2014

Develop a **simplified, accessible** and **effective** procedure

Ensure **balance** between the lowest level principle and the need for alignment with other implementing bodies (subsidiarity).

Align with FSC's normative requirements

Update according to international **best practices**

UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)

The Team

1

Archana Kotecha
CEO and Founder of
The Remedy Project

2

Te Ngaehe Wanikau
PIPC member; Strategic
Advisor and Director at
*Te Kotahitanga o Ngati
Tuwharetoa Post
Settlement Trust*

3

Gabriel Bolton
Senior Technical
Advisor at *Preferred by
Nature*

4

Isak Lodin
Forest Expert at
WWF Sweden

The FSC team



Siu Lang Carrillo Yap



Anna Maurer



Julian Nierentz



Arushi Sen



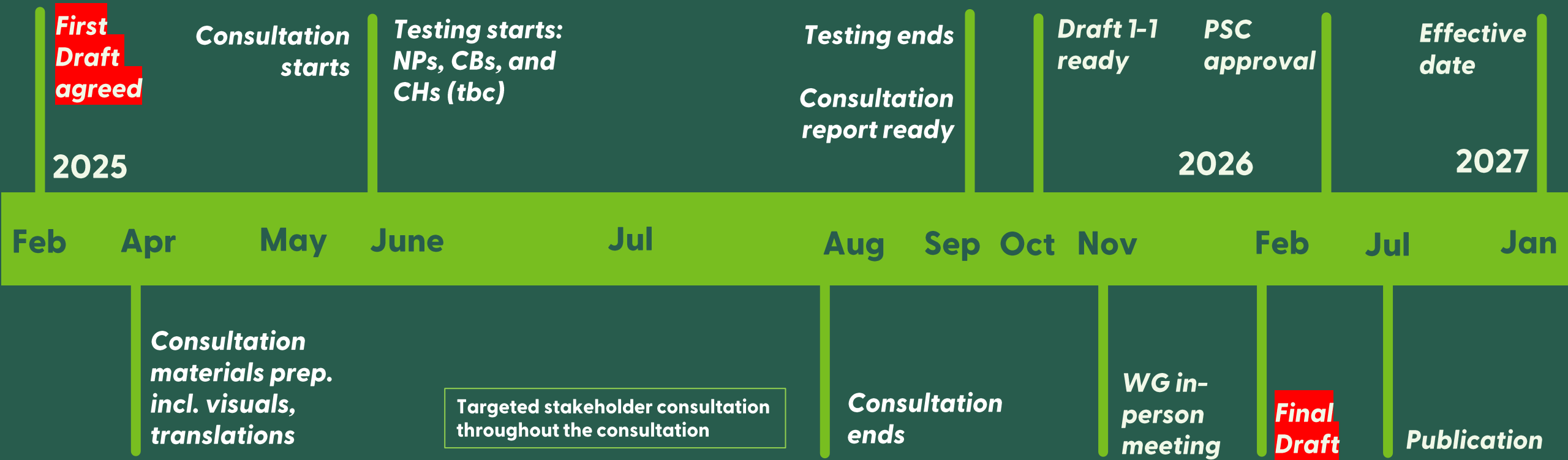
Izzah Sheikh

Revision Timeline



6 months from
publication
Jan 1st or July 1st

Testing phase



2nd Public consultation phase

Stakeholder Engagement Plan



Drivers of the Revision

Outdated requirements

- **Accessibility improvements**
- **Lack of consistency between implementing bodies**
- **System-wide oversight missing**
- **Lack of systemic learning from complaints**
- **Rigid subsidiarity requirements**

Need to align with international best practices

UNGP:

- **Global standard of practice that is now expected of businesses**
- **UNGP have gained extensive support from businesses, and states, being reflected in the standards of international organisations.**
- **They propose effective operational-level grievance mechanisms for individuals and communities, enabling early resolution and direct remediation of grievances.**

Credibility and compliance risks

- **Complaints mechanism as an indicator of the credibility of the FSC system – its core business proposition**
- **FSC to ensure compliance with international standards**
- **Need for a more effective, more accessible system**
- **Ensure systemic learning**

A close-up photograph of several green, oval-shaped leaves with prominent veins. Small, clear water droplets are scattered across the surfaces of the leaves. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green. A semi-transparent dark green rectangular box is positioned on the left side of the image, containing white text.

2. CHANGES INTRODUCED IN DRAFT 1-0

Structure of the Draft

A new Procedure with requirements for all implementing bodies, with two addenda.

FSC-PRO-01-008 V3-0

Procedure for Complaints and Appeals Mechanisms **in the FSC System**

FSC-PRO-01-008a

Complaints and Appeals **before FSC International**

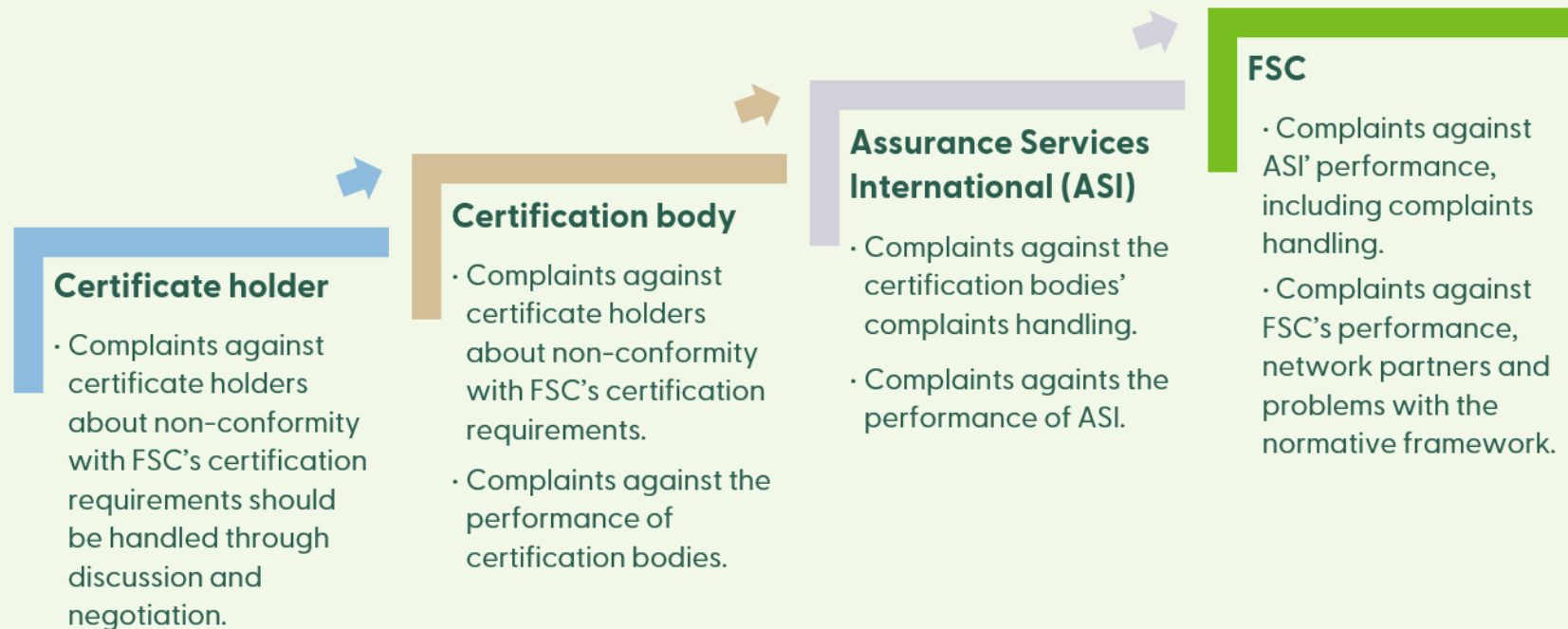
FSC-PRO-01-008b

Reduced requirements **for SLIMF & CF**

Lowest level principle:

Current and future model to determine responsibilities in handling complaints.

Lowest level principle: Escalation pathway for complaints



New: Subsidiarity exceptions in Draft 1-0

Criteria for exceptions to following the escalation pathway:

An exception to subsidiarity may be granted to the complainant if at least one of the following assessment criteria is met:



Immediate action is necessary to stop and/or prevent severe social or environmental harm, including irremediable effects on human rights or natural ecosystems and specifically high conservation values.



Actual or presumed harms have been caused to vulnerable persons and groups, including Indigenous Peoples, traditional peoples and local communities.



Presumed significant harms have been caused to high conservation values or objects entitled to enhanced environmental legal protection.



Aggregation over time of unaddressed concerns that may lead to major disputes or significant human rights abuses or significant environmental harm.



The complainant is unable to submit the complaint in a safe environment due to fears of reprisal or retaliation.

Scope of Draft 1-0: Alignment with the FSC statutes

What can stakeholders complain about and what they **cannot**?

What's included: Complaints about...



Violations of FSC's
normative requirements

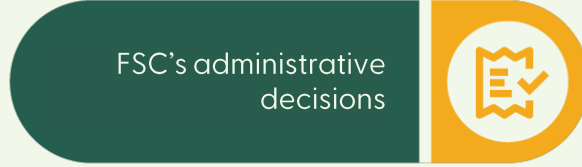


Accreditation decisions
related to certification
findings

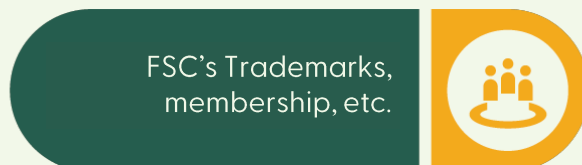


Requirements of the FSC
Remedy Framework not
being fulfilled

What's processed via other mechanisms: Findings about...



FSC's administrative
decisions



FSC's Trademarks,
membership, etc.



Violations of FSC's Policy
for Association

The **FSC statutes*** make this differentiation between complaints about:

- FSC certification and related accreditation decisions, which shall have an accessible complaints mechanism; and
- Those related to administrative decisions, which are not part of the complaints handling mechanism.

Complaints about administrative decisions are addressed separately as they are issued to implement FSC's governance structure, strategic direction, or operational processes.

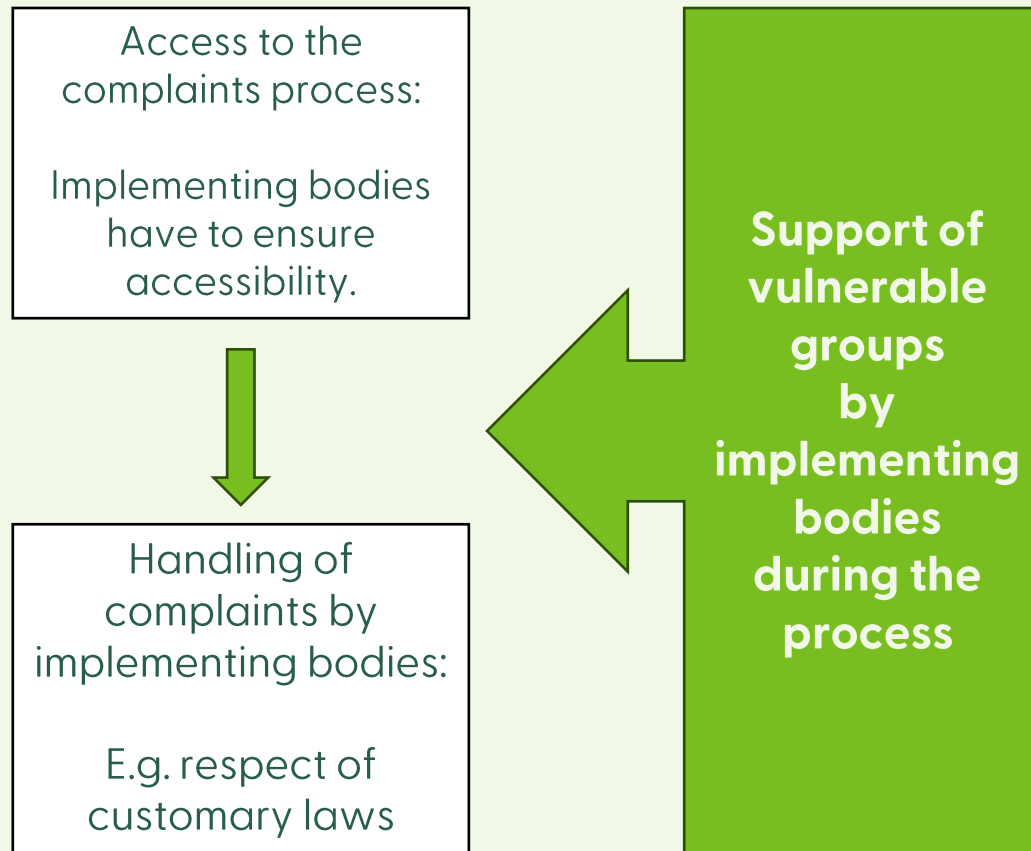
*The FSC statutes are the foundational legal documents that define how FSC operates. The above scope ensures alignment of the complaint mechanism with the FSC statutes.

The Role of FSC Network Partners

The FSC Network...

- has no formal role in handling complaints about FSC certification
- has a support role to guide, advise and promote dialogue
- does not judge the merits of complaints nor determines their outcome
- Draft 1-0 has soft language in describing the role
e.g. “The FSC Network may advise...”

Support measures for vulnerable groups such as Indigenous Peoples:



Support measures may include, but are not limited to:

Alternative formats to communicate and provide information in non-technical language

Payment exemptions for the reproduction or delivery of information by the defendant and implementing bodies

To adopt **procedural safeguards** for considering the social, economic, cultural, geographical, gender and age characteristics of the complainant

Use of **interpretation or translation** of languages

Promote regard for **traditional knowledge** and **intercultural dialogue**

Assistance in submitting complaints

Information about **external support channels** provided by governmental bodies, civil organizations, national human rights institutions and ombudsperson offices.

Ombuds Service: Example from FSC International's support measures

2.1. FSC International shall assess the need to **appoint independent ombudspersons with relevant expertise, language proficiency, and regional knowledge** to effectively address the concerns of complainants facing barriers to accessing FSC's complaints and appeals mechanism due to circumstances or conditions of vulnerability.

Alignment with Principle 31 on Grievance Mechanisms of the UNGPs



Introducing UNGP's effectiveness criteria and principles
for all Implementing Bodies
(CHs, CBs, ASI, FSC INT)

Other Key New Concepts Introduced

- Clear application of relevant principles in international law such as **subsidiarity**, **prevention**, and **precautionary** principles
- **Continuous and systemic learning** - Centralized capturing of all complaints in the system
- **Preventing abuse** of the complaints and appeals mechanism

Highlights of New Procedural Requirements

- Possibility to **reverse the burden of proof**.
- Provide and disseminate **easily accessible public information** to enable stakeholders to readily understand the process
- Requirements to **keep the parties informed** throughout
- Alignment on **timelines to handle complaints** with flexibility and clear provisions for extensions
- Take measures to **learn from the complaint** processes

A close-up photograph of several green leaves, likely from a rose bush, with numerous small water droplets resting on their surfaces. The leaves are vibrant green and show detailed vein patterns. A semi-transparent dark green rectangular box is positioned horizontally across the middle of the image, serving as a background for the text.

3. BUILDING A COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT TOOL

Update: System-wide Complaints Management Tool under development

Objective

- A tool to effectively manage complaints for FSC International, ASI, and CBs.
- Central database for complaints across the system.
- Allowing to continuously learn from complaints and address systemic issues.
- Ability to connect to existing complaint management systems of implementing bodies.
- Visibility for FSC Network of cases in their countries.

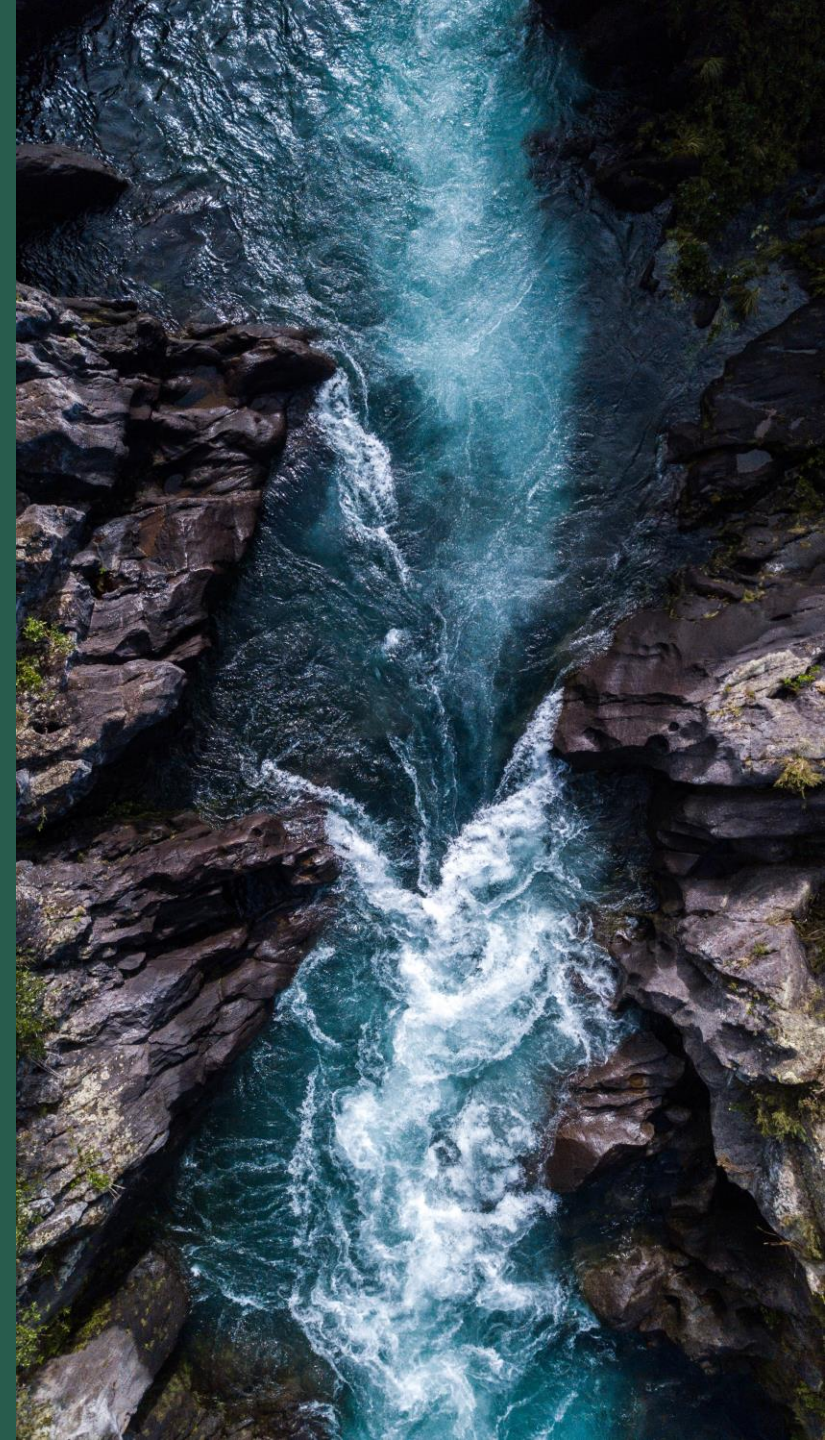
Timeline

End 2025:

Technical solution ready for FSC's testing. Use for complaints reaching FSC International.

2026:

Testing with, and rollout to ASI, then CBs. (TBC)



Q&A

Thank you



Forest Stewardship Council®
FSC® Global Development



Adenauerallee 134, 53113 Bonn, Germany

T +49 (0) 228 367 66-0

F +49 (0) 228 367 66-30

FSC Global Development © All rights reserved

FSC® F000100

www.fsc.org