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A first for PEFC in Africa

The Gabonese Forest Certification Scheme (PAFC Gabon) is the first African scheme to meet PEFC's sustainability benchmark requirements. As of today, timber-based products originating from PAFC Gabon certified forests are permitted to use the prestigious PEFC label, thereby gaining access to all global markets requiring PEFC certification as proof for sustainability of forest management practices.



"Currently, over 90% of the world's certified forests are located in temperate forests in the Northern hemisphere," explained Ben Gunneberg, PEFC Secretary General. "Discussions, however, focus on sustainable forest management practices of tropical forests in the Southern hemisphere as these offer the most benefits to tackling some of society's biggest challenges, including addressing climate change, combating deforestation and forest degradation, and maintaining the world's precious biodiversity."

"More than two-thirds of Gabon is forested and the country is home to some of Africa's most biodiverse rainforests. The international recognition of the Gabonese scheme as the first in the Congo basin is therefore a step in the right direction," Mr. Gunneberg added.

Using ATO/ITTO principles, criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of African natural tropical forests, amongst others, national stakeholders in Gabon have been developing their standard and scheme through a multi-stakeholder consensus-driven process since the late 1990s - even before PEFC was founded. PEFC International notes that the standard setting was carried out correctly, even though the corresponding procedures were not sufficiently elaborated when the scheme development started. PAFC Gabon has in the meantime updated and modified these procedures to satisfy PEFC endorsement requirements. Given the enormous challenges faced by many African countries, reflecting the larger constraints of low income, weak policies and inadequately developed institutions, the result is that much more impressive and so far exceptional in the African context.

PEFC International has limited the endorsement of the Gabonese scheme to three years instead of the usual five years, which means that PAFC Gabon is required to start its revision process almost immediately, utilising its modified standard setting procedures. Minor issues concerning forest management sub-indicators will also be addressed during this process.

"By promoting sustainable forest management through certification in Gabon, our work contributes to the protection of the Congo basin forests, which constitutes the world's largest rainforest after the Amazon and spans six countries," said Mrs. Rose Ondo, Chairwoman of PAFC Gabon. "The onus of international forest certification systems is to provide qualitative and quantitative measures to distinguish and reward responsible forestry, thus making it more attractive to manage forests in a sustainable manner."

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NOTES

Australian Forestry Standard Limited is a Standards Development Organisation and a not-for-profit public company registered in July 2003. The company owns the standard development functions and manages the elements of the **Australian Forest Certification Scheme**. The Australian Forest Certification Scheme (AFCS) will:

- provide Australian and overseas consumers with an independent, internationally recognised third-party certification scheme for forest management in Australia
- promote a culture of 'continuous improvement' of the sustainable forest management practices in Australia
- support a market for forest products that are a result of sustainable forest management practices and value adding processes that maintain the integrity of the source forest certification and promote the broader environmental benefits of using wood-based
- products.

PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes) PEFC is a framework for the mutual recognition of credible national or regional forest certification schemes that have been developed based on internationally recognised requirements for sustainable forest management. Since its launch in 1999, PEFC has become the largest forest certification umbrella organisation covering national schemes from all over the world, delivering hundreds of millions of tonnes of wood to the processing industry and then on to the market place from over 200 million hectares of certified forests. PEFC has strong grass roots support from many stakeholders including the forestry sector, governments, trade associations, trade unions and non-governmental organisations.

Forest Certification Forest certification is a process, which provides an assurance mechanism to purchasers of wood and paper products that the wood used in the products comes from sustainably managed forests. Sustainably managed forests are those whose management implements performance standards based on internationally agreed environmental, social and economic requirements.