
[FSC Certification of Veracel: A turning point or business as usual?](#)

For over a decade WRM has been gathering, producing and disseminating information and analysis on the social and environmental impacts of fast wood plantations, characterized as large-scale, fast-growth tree monocultures. At the same time, we have been stressing that such plantations should not be certified, focusing on the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), this being the scheme certifying most of such plantations.

In spite of having launched in September 2004 a plantation certification review, the FSC has continued to certify fast wood plantations, thus undermining its own credibility and weakening local struggles against plantations. The Working Group established to study the issue presented its final report to the FSC Board in October 2006, but nothing seems to have changed since and the FSC has continued to certify uncertifiable fast wood plantations.

Within this context, the FSC-accredited firm SGS started to carry out the certification process of a company –Veracel Celulose- with a long and well-documented history of negative social and environmental impacts in Bahia, Brazil (see article below). The news about the possible certification of Veracel resulted in strong reactions by numerous organizations from Bahia and other parts of Brazil, that have been for years suffering the impacts and campaigning against these and other fast wood plantations. Although they were never formally “consulted” by SGS, they managed to make their voices heard.

In support to their opposition, a number of organizations -among which WRM- expressed their concerns to the FSC Board in a letter (http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/Letter_Board.html) dated 6 July, inviting Board members to visit the area accompanied by Brazilian organizations. The letter said that “during the visit, you will be able to meet with local communities and have first hand knowledge about their opinion on those plantations as well as their perception of the company seeking certification.”

The letter added that “such visit will provide you with a better understanding on why certification of plantations such as these is being opposed by so many organizations throughout the world and why the FSC loses credibility every time plantations like those of Veracel are FSC certified”.

However, the Board declined the invitation, responding that “We do not think that it is appropriate or the role of the board to intervene in a public consultation process nor directly in a certification evaluation”. (http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/Board_letter_07.pdf)

The obvious question is: then what is the Board’s role? The future of the little of what’s left of FSC’s credibility is at stake and the Board thinks it is not “appropriate” to intervene? Is turning a blind eye on the certification of fast wood plantations the role that the Board chooses to play? If this is the case, then the proposal put forward by one of our Brazilian partners would make sense. He said: “our campaign should not be focused on saying that Veracel does not deserve FSC; what we must now say is that FSC and Veracel deserve each other!”

The case of Veracel's plantations is absolutely clear and well documented. In no way can these plantations be considered to be an "environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests", and their certification would clearly violate the FSC mandate. Local people –the true stakeholders- are there to prove this to whoever is willing to ask them their opinion.

But it is also important to stress that Veracel is but a drop within a sea of millions of hectares of fast wood plantations already FSC-certified by SGS, SCS, Smartwood and other certification firms, that have made a mockery of the FSC system, through "consultation" processes that never consulted the true stakeholders and whose evaluations never took into account the full extent of the social and environmental impacts of such plantations.

Veracel must clearly not receive FSC certification, but at the same time it is essential that the FSC cease to certify fast wood plantations and that it begins to de-certify a large number of plantations that should have never received the FSC label. Only then will the FSC be able to comply with its own mandate.