
What is the Future of FSC Certification in South Africa?

The cuddly tree logo of the Forest Stewardship Council adorns the products of alien industrial tree plantations, as well as those of the real thing (forests, that is). It could mean virtually anything to the average person buying those products, but it is clear that the intention of the logo is to enhance the marketability of the timber products in question.

What those who subscribe to its use hope for, is that potential customers will experience good, warm, fuzzy feelings about their actions when choosing to buy furniture or other wood items bearing the logo. The publicity that precedes decisions in this regard pretty well guarantees acceptance: Soft-soaped shoppers with even the tiniest degree of social or environmental conscience are easy prey -even if it means they must pay a premium for the privilege!

"Sustainably Managed Forests" conjures up images of teeming life within wild woods where only sensitively selected trees are harvested. The impression created (wrong to be sure) is that buying wood products from trees such as these must surely guarantee a place in do-gooders' heaven!

Whilst there are forests that do give up real forest trees for human use, there are denizens of places where no forest ever grew, imposters, that make a mockery of centuries of wise and sensitive utilisation of Nature's bounty: false or fake things deviously described to mislead men and women -Industrial Timber Plantations.

Humankind must be made to believe that greed is good; that war is peace; that destruction is development; that wrong is right. That alien tree monocultures imposed on peoples and their places are FORESTS.

Forests my foot!! Anything but! Perhaps a new form of Apartheid, driving people off their land, is more like it.

Are we trying to fool everyone into believing that the purpose of life is to suck our planet dry in the shortest possible time? There are some that believe it will be good for the global economy. Every drop of water, every inch of land, every living thing; must be in corporate ownership, or control. And plantations are the way. Praise almighty Profit!

There is a myth promoted by those who wish to steal from the future -that sustained growth in consumption is the same as the wise limitation of natural resource utilisation. They also sell the 'fast food' lie that false forests can be substituted for the real thing, and that it will be possible for the world to carry on wasting wood without worry!

Ignore the consequences: destruction of biodiversity; pollution and loss of water resources; loss of livelihoods and starvation! Who has the right to claim that their actions are sustainable? Only those who follow can judge what we do today.

The FSC was really aiming to do what was right. Really wanting to give consumers an option that would benefit all. Trying to take the pressure off over utilised and badly managed forests, and also to ensure that good corporate behaviour is rewarded.

But the bottom line is that timber plantations are not forests. Superficial likeness is purely that. They are so different in so many respects. Only ignorance, or stupidity, or deliberate deceit, can allow otherwise. If it is necessary to have some timber plantations, as is the case in this country, South Africa, then by all means have a certification system for timber derived from plantations that are well managed, in the right place, and benefit local people.

The timber that is produced and currently exported in a raw form from so-called developing countries, should be processed and given added value where employment is needed most: inside those countries, in the area where it is grown, by the local people. The FSC must establish a completely separate set of guidelines for the owners of industrial timber plantations to apply to their activities. Also to design an appropriate symbol to denote 'plantation' as opposed to forest, and to educate timber growers and consumers alike.

If they continue to follow their misguided present path, it will undermine all their positive achievements.

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