
Will the FSC certify Aracruz Celulose's plantations?

The future credibility of the Forest Stewardship Council is at the crossroads. Aracruz Celulose, one of the largest tree plantation companies and the world's largest producer of bleached eucalyptus pulp has applied for FSC certification for part of its land holdings (95.500 hectares, of which 56.500 hectares of eucalyptus plantations), located in the state of Bahia, Brazil.

For those who have been following and supporting the struggle of the Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous peoples against this company, this may come as a major shock. After years of struggle the company -with support from the Brazilian security forces- imposed last year a "solution" on the indigenous peoples (see details in WRM bulletin 11). But in spite of that, what remains undeniable is that Aracruz took over large areas of their territory and that the future of that imposed agreement remains uncertain. This has been recently very clearly expressed by the Tupinikim and Guarani in an "open letter to society" of 3 September 1999.

That is probably the reason explaining why the company is not yet applying for certification for its plantations in the state of Espirito Santo -home of those indigenous peoples- and has instead initiated the process in the neighbouring state of Bahia. If it succeeds in getting FSC certification there, then it will probably apply for the rest. However, social and environmental impacts of its large-scale plantations are as well documented and local opposition is as strong in Bahia as in the state of Espirito Santo, so Aracruz will not have an easy task to get what it wants: certification from a credible organization such as the FSC.

Much will depend on whether the US-based certifier (Scientific Certification Systems -SCS) carries out a truly independent and participatory assessment or if it doesn't. If it chooses the former, then we are certain that Aracruz's plantations will not be certified. Unfortunately, its first steps have been -to say the least- worrying. More than 50 regional and local organizations and individuals have already complained in a letter addressed to SCS on 1 September 1999 for its non compliance with FSC-guidelines regarding stakeholder participation.

We believe that FSC members should monitor this process very closely, because the future credibility of certification in general and of the FSC in particular is at stake. Aracruz -the same as eucalyptus- is a symbol of a type of forestry which generates large scale negative social and environmental impacts. The same can be said about most -if not all- other plantation companies and about other tree species used in large scale monocultures. But Aracruz, whose history is one of occupation of lands of indigenous and other local peoples, of deforestation, depletion of water resources and the disappearance of local plants and animals, portrays itself as being environmentally and socially responsible. Obtaining FSC certification would be its final victory and would leave the door wide open for the certification of large scale plantations all over the world. Will FSC NGO members let this happen?

For more information on this issue, the following is available in our web page:

- Open letter to society, by the Executive Commission of the Tupinikim and Guarani and the

- A dictatorship-type action gives Aracruz a spurious victory (WRM bulletin 11).
- Brazil: the paradigmatic case of Aracruz (WRM bulletin 13).
- The environmental and social effects of corporate environmentalism in the Brazilian market pulp industry.