

FWP 08

Ymateb gan : Y Cyngor Stiwardiaeth Coedwigoedd
Evidence from : Forest Stewardship Council

Executive summary

- FSC certification can help to raise and independently assure standards of management in both private and public woodlands.
- FSC forest management certification contributes to and provides assurance of Welsh Government delivery against the *Woodlands for Wales* strategic themes **responding to climate change, woodlands for people, a competitive and integrated forest sector**, and **environmental quality**.
- FSC UK urges the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee to recognise the value of FSC certification in promoting responsible forest management.

Introduction to FSC UK

1. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is a global, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the promotion of responsible forest management worldwide. Our vision is that the world's forests meet the social, ecological, and economic rights and needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations, and our mission is to promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests.
2. FSC operates an independent, third-party forest management and chain of custody certification scheme, to enable businesses and consumers to make informed choices about the forest products they buy, and create positive change by engaging the power of market dynamics. The detail of FSC's vision of responsible forest management is expressed through our international Principles and Criteria, which form the basis for nationally adapted forest stewardship standards.
3. FSC UK is the national office of the Forest Stewardship Council in the United Kingdom. FSC UK is independent of FSC International. It sets forest management standards for the UK by inputting into the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS), promotes the FSC system, and provides an information service. FSC UK (Ephesea UK) is a charity registered in England and Wales (No. 1130203) and a non-profit making company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (No. 06792524).

The Welsh Government's delivery of *Woodlands for Wales*

4. The UK Woodland Assurance Standard, as the national forest stewardship standard approved by FSC, builds on and in some cases exceeds the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard, the UK Government's approach to sustainable forestry. The UKWAS process provides economic, environmental and social stakeholders the opportunity to agree standards of management consistent with FSC's Principles and Criteria; the quality of these standards and the credibility and transparency of FSC's processes are recognised by organisations such as the RSPB, WWF and the Woodland Trust.
5. According to Forestry Statistics 2016, in March 2016 some 141,000 hectares of woodland were FSC certified in Wales, including all of the Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE) and 24,000 ha of private sector woodland. FSC forest management certification provides independent assurance that these forests are being managed responsibly.
6. FSC UK warmly welcomes the continuing FSC certification of the management of the WGWE by Natural Resources Wales (NRW). We also welcome the commitments in *Woodlands for Wales* to actively promote the benefits of certification, to support improvements in access to certification for small woodland owners, and to streamline the administration of grant aid for certified woodlands. We already engage informally with Welsh Government, but would be delighted to work together more closely to achieve common aims.
7. As the standard-setting body, it would not be appropriate for FSC UK to comment on any specific features of the FSC-certified management of the WGWE by NRW. However, we firmly believe in the value of FSC certification as a market linked driver for improving forest management, and as credible assurance of the standard of management of both private and public forests. In this way, FSC certification contributes to both delivery against the strategic themes of *Woodlands for Wales*, and assurance of that delivery.
8. Through the international Principles and Criteria, and their national interpretation in UKWAS, FSC forest management certification contributes to and provides assurance of Welsh Government delivery against:
 - a. **Responding to climate change**, by encouraging the diversification of woodlands and the sustainable production of timber, woodfuel, and other products and services;
 - b. **Woodlands for people**, through requirements for consultation with local communities, the provision of public access, and the provision of local communities with equitable opportunities for employment and to provide supplies and services;
 - c. **A competitive and integrated forest sector**, through requirements for training, and by providing access to markets which demand FSC-certified products; and,

- d. **Environmental quality**, through requirements for the maintenance and enhancement of conservations values in all woodlands, but particularly ancient semi-natural woodland and plantations on ancient woodland sites, and for the protection of features of the historical environment.
9. We urge the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee to recognise the value of FSC certification as a market linked driver for improving forest management, and as credible assurance of the standard of management of both private and public forests. With this recognition, we trust that the Welsh Government will commit to maintaining FSC certification of the WGWE, and to promoting and supporting certification of private woodlands, in line with *Woodlands for Wales*.
10. Specifically, the Welsh Government could better ensure delivery of the four strategic themes of *Woodlands for Wales* by providing incentives towards FSC certification through grant schemes to assist private forest owners to meet the requirements of UKWAS and hence deliver on management of woodlands for environmental, social and economic benefit. Certification also offers a system for independent verification of delivery of these objectives.

Other issues relating to *Woodlands for Wales*

11. We do not feel that it would be appropriate for us to comment on the contribution of *Woodlands for the Wales* to the delivery of duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, or on how the strategy will be considered in the context of emerging policies, plans and statements.
12. Regarding the challenges and opportunities that arise from leaving the European Union, we see the promotion in *Woodlands for Wales* of independent third-party certification as an important contribution to ensuring that Welsh forest products have the best possible access to markets in the future.
13. We urge the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee to recognise the potential contribution of FSC certification, and its internationally recognised standards and branding, to the future economy of Wales by providing the best possible access to forest product markets in Europe and beyond.