

NCT FSC® GROUP POLICY

NCT has been Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) certified as a group manager since November 1999. Approximately 69 845ha of plantations are certified under the NCT FSC Group Certification Scheme. This includes farms owned by member and the co-operative and accounts for 23% of the area registered with NCT.

FSC is a forestry assessment scheme that allows certified organisations to attach the FSC label to their products. Environmentally aware consumers are reassured that the product that they have purchased is derived from a well-managed (social, environmental, economic) forest.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the NCT group certification scheme is to offer NCT members FSC® Certification under a joint umbrella. This will result in improved plantation management and will assist members with marketing their forestry products.

GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the group is limited to timber growers who are committed members of the NCT Forestry Co-operative Limited (NCT) and who have signed a current GSC timber supply contract. Acceptance as a group member is subject to the applicant paying the required fees, agreeing to remain FSC certified for a minimum period of five years, subscribing to and successfully implementing the group management system.

ENDORSEMENT OF THE GROUP POLICY

Members agree to manage their forests, both exotic (plantations) and indigenous, in accordance to the 10 FSC principles and criteria and to adopt the policies as laid down by the NCT group management system. These principles require the forest owner or manager to do the following:

Principle 1: Compliance with laws and FSC principles

To comply with all laws, regulations, treaties, conventions and agreements, together with all FSC principles and criteria.

Principle 2: Tenure and use rights and responsibilities

To define, document and legally establish long-term tenure and use rights.

Principle 3: Indigenous peoples' rights

To identify and uphold indigenous peoples' rights of ownership and use of land and resources.

Principle 4: Community relations and worker's rights

To maintain or enhance forest workers' and local communities' social and economic well-being.

Principle 5: Benefits from the forest

To maintain or enhance long term economic, social and environmental benefits from the forest.

Principle 6: Environmental impact

To maintain or restore the ecosystem, its biodiversity, resources and landscapes.

Principle 7: Management plan

To have a management plan, implemented, monitored and documented.

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Principle 8: Monitoring and assessment

To demonstrate progress towards management objectives.

Principle 9: Maintenance of high conservation value forests

To maintain or enhance the attributes which define such forests.

Principle 10: Plantations

To plan and manage plantations in accordance with FSC principles and criteria.

NCT has adopted as reference documents the Environmental guidelines for commercial forestry plantations in South Africa (also referred to as Environmental guidelines) and the NCT silviculture manual.

These guidelines cover all aspects of commercial forestry, from planning and silviculture, through to harvesting. They also cover services, natural and cultural assets and recreational facilities. It is the responsibility of individual members to familiarise themselves with these documents and implement the applicable principles in the management of their plantations.

BINDING AGREEMENTS

Each member will sign an agreement to implement the group policies and to share the costs of certification. This agreement can only be changed by a majority vote taken at the annual group certification meeting. Any change to the agreement will be communicated to group members in writing.

GROUP MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL

The manager of the Forestry Technology services department will act as chairman of the group. The NCT Strategy and Planning forester will act as the group manager and will maintain group records.

The communication with clients, group members and the public in general will be undertaken by the NCT Public Relations and Communications officer.

NCT's Administration manager will ensure that members are informed of any changes in legislation that affect their operations. He will also be responsible for any legal aspects of the system's administration.

The NCT Strategy and Planning forester will assist with sustained timber yield planning.

The NCT Mapping co-ordinator will assist with mapping farms.

When certified timber is to be marketed through NCT, the chain-of-custody system administering timber as being certified, will be managed by the NCT Member Services department. The NCT Technical department will manage the chain-of-custody system when timber is not to be marketed through NCT.

Consultants from African Environmental Services will conduct the annual surveillance audits of group members' farms.

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AUTHORITY OF GROUP MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL

The management of the group is undertaken by NCT, who will recommend policy and monitor the activities of the various members and indicate what corrective actions are needed. Should corrective action fail to be taken within a reasonable space of time and following two written warnings from NCT, the offending member may be removed from the group.

In the event of the group chairman making the decision to expel an offending member of the group, the chairman will send a registered letter to the member informing him of the expulsion and the reasons therefore. The member will be entitled to lodge an appeal against his expulsion with the chairman providing such an appeal is in writing and is received within 30 days of the date of the chairman's registered letter of expulsion. The chairman will consider the merits of the appeal, consult with the group management personnel and make a final decision which he will communicate to the member by registered post. The chairman's decision will be final.

Each member, however, must realise that the responsibility of implementing the group schemes' procedures lies with himself and that his or her failure to comply could jeopardise the entire process or result in his or her expulsion.

Following the annual surveillance audits a meeting will be held with all members to discuss corrective actions and Group policies.

TRAINING OF GROUP MEMBERS

Workshops and/or farm visits will be held to train potential members of the group in the implementation of group policy.

Each member of the group will receive a certification file containing group policy documents and procedures for implementation. Members will be updated on plantation management issues through NCT's extension services.

CERTIFICATION AUDITS

Initially group members must undergo two audits:

Self audits will be conducted by members. Once completed to the satisfaction of the member the second party audits can take place. Copies of these audits must be documented in the certification file.

The second party audit, at the expense of the member, will be undertaken by NCT staff or by a consultant contracted by NCT.

All certified members shall make themselves available for third party audits conducted by the third party auditor.

An applicant will only be accepted into the group on passing the second party audit and once details of close-out of corrective actions have been faxed to the Strategy and Planning forester. A major CAR identified during an initial entrance audit will preclude an applicant from being accepted into the group. Once certified, members will continue with an annual surveillance audit.

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CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

Corrective Action Requests (CAR) will be identified during audits and will be divided into major and minor corrective actions:

Minor corrective action requests have to be attended to within a period of three months of the audit.

The implementation of these close-out details will be checked during the annual second party audit and records will be kept in the member's audit file. An inappropriate response to a minor corrective action request could result in this non-compliance being changed to a major corrective action.

Major corrective action requests are issued as a result of a disregard for the management system or as a result of having too many minor CAR's, such requests are viewed in a serious light. A member being issued with a major corrective action will be given a three month period to implement the requested action. A follow up visit will be conducted to ensure that faults have been rectified.

All costs associated with the re-audit of any non-complying member will be borne by that member. Failure to react appropriately to such a request will result in disciplinary action being instituted.

Any member who is issued with more than two major CAR's or more than 10 minor CAR's, within a one year period, will automatically be suspended from the group. This suspension will remain in place until the CAR's have been closed out. **POLICY REVIEW**

The NCT certification policy will be reviewed and updated at the end of each calendar year by the group management personnel. Any proposed changes in policy will be open for debate at a follow-up meeting for certified members. On adoption of any changes to the management system, NCT will forward an amended copy to all certified members. Members are then required to remove and destroy the outdated document and replace it with the current document.

COMPLAINTS

Stakeholder or member complaints and comments can be communicated directly to the NCT Strategy & Planning forester. These comments will be discussed at Forest Technology meetings and written responses will be sent to relevant stakeholders.

RESIGNATION FROM THE GROUP

Members wishing to resign from the group should make written representation to the NCT Strategy and Planning forester, PO Box 13363, Cascades 3202. The NCT Strategy and Planning forester will confirm to the member in writing of his removal from the system and discontinuation of membership.

A member's resignation will only be entertained if all monies owing by the member to the scheme have been paid. Upon resignation a member will not qualify for any refunds, pro-rata or otherwise, of any monies paid to the scheme during his period of membership.