



Ancient forests provide habitats to two-thirds of the world's land-based species of plants and animals, yet an area of ancient forest the size of a football pitch is destroyed every two seconds (source Greenpeace). Forests support up to 1.6 billion of the poorest people in the world, yet the majority of forests are not protected.

The Stern Report states that deforestation contributes 20-25% of global carbon dioxide emissions yearly and adds more to global emissions each year than the transport sector.

Meanwhile there is continued demand for timber and paper products.

Only by managing the world's forests responsibly can we ensure long-term timber supplies without jeopardising the wildlife or the future of the people who live and work in the forest. With a balanced approach which considers all the environmental, social and economic aspects of forest management, future supplies of timber can be assured.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international, non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting such responsible management of the world's forests. It was founded in 1993 in response to public concern about forest loss and to reward good forest management.

The FSC runs a global forest certification system that includes two key aspects: forest management and chain of custody certification.

That ensures that timber from forests managed to strict environmental, social and economic standards is traced from the forest to the end user. Safeguards are in place in FSC forests to protect rare, threatened and endangered species and their habitats.

Trees that are harvested are replaced or allowed to regenerate naturally. FSC also insists on indigenous peoples' rights and watercourse protection, ensuring that the forest and its dependent community will continue to thrive and guaranteeing future timber supplies.

The FSC Chain of Custody system ensures that FSC wood is accounted for as it passes along the supply chain. Each organisation that takes ownership of the timber, wood product or fibre must have systems to monitor the purchase, handling and sales of FSC material. This is audited by accredited certification bodies, which make sure that the systems are adequate to maintain the integrity of the FSC label before issuing a Chain of Custody Certificate, with a number unique to the organisation.

Group chain of custody has been developed to help smaller enterprises achieve FSC certification by reducing the costs of certification. Small businesses with fewer than 15 employees can become certified jointly under one certificate. A certification body audits a sample of members and carries out risk assessment of the entire group scheme, rather than auditing each individual business.

FSC chain of custody standards allow for three categories of product to be labelled:

- FSC 100% – all the wood fibre is from FSC-certified forests.
- FSC Mixed Sources – made from FSC-certified wood plus wood from other controlled sources, and may also include recycled material.
- FSC Recycled – made entirely from verified post-consumer reclaimed timber or fibre.

Controlled wood must be verified as being from known, legal sources with no outstanding social conflicts, no genetically modified trees, no clearance of natural forest for plantations and no uncertified high conservation value areas.

There is increasingly a demand from businesses and the general public for evidence that

products are being sourced responsibly. It is no longer considered sufficient to make vague claims such as "This paper is environmentally friendly" without being able to back those claims up.

The FSC chain of custody system gives the customer the guarantee that each link in the chain, from forest to end product, has been independently audited.

From food packaging to tissues, garden furniture to charcoal, the FSC label is appearing on more and more products and it's not restricted to wood products; it can also be found on other forest products such as venison, essential oils and latex for balloons and football.

The increasing prevalence of the FSC's 'tick-tree' logo has helped to raise awareness of the system and has subsequently led to an increase in demand. Consumer demand for FSC-certified timber and timber products creates a market pull that reaches back through the supply chain to the forest floor. The fact that there are now over 100 million hectares of FSC-certified forests worldwide demonstrates the impact on the ground of this consumer demand. Simply by choosing FSC products it is possible to make a real difference to forests, wildlife and people.

FSC UK is a registered charity, working to promote the FSC system in the UK. It offers a free basic advisory service, a technical helpline service for more in-depth support, and training courses. The charity also works to raise public awareness of the importance of responsible forestry and the role of FSC.

An independent UK survey carried out in January found that only 23% of those questioned had seen the ticktree logo before. However, once the concept of FSC was explained 22% of respondents stated that they would definitely choose FSC products in the future and a further 37% 'probably would'. Those results confirm FSC UK's belief that the British consumer wants to have the confidence to buy wood products safe in the knowledge that they are not damaging ancient forests.

The FSC logo gives that assurance and the survey findings demonstrate the importance of on-going marketing work to raise awareness of this.

There are a number of other forest certification schemes around but they do not have the same strict environmental, social and economic standards, or such a rigorous chain of custody; tracking timber from the forest to the final user. Therefore, FSC is the only one endorsed by the major environmental charities, including WWF, Greenpeace and the Woodland Trust.