

UKWAS Interpretation Panel: Membership, Terms of Reference and *Modus Operandi*

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A. Introduction

An Interpretation Panel provides the UKWAS Steering Group and users of the standard with advice on interpretation of the standard.

B. Membership

An independent chair and a secretary are appointed by the Steering Group.

For each competent interpretation request and taking account of the scale and sensitivity of the issue, the chair appoints a special panel to consider the matter on a task-and-finish basis.

In appointing panel members, the chair seeks to achieve a reasonable balance between economic, environmental and social stakeholders; members are drawn from the Steering Group and additional members may be appointed to provide technical expertise or to represent stakeholder groups not otherwise represented.

Panel members can be represented by a substitute at individual meetings when necessary.

So as to help achieve conformance with the requirements of the certification schemes, FSC UK and PEFC UK are invited to attend panel meetings and ensure that the panel has a full understanding of scheme requirements and of experience gained elsewhere.

C. Terms of Reference

1. At the request of standard-users¹ or the Steering Group:
 - a) To provide interpretation of the meaning of the standard.

2. At the request of the Steering Group:
 - a) To monitor compatibility with FSC, PEFC or other forest certification schemes' requirements.
 - b) To respond to suggestions and complaints.
 - c) To propose revisions to the standard (improvements & updating).
 - d) To comment on technical aspects of the standard raised in disputes.
 - e) To identify research needed to underpin the veracity of the standard.
 - f) To undertake other tasks as shall be determined by the Steering Group.

¹ Standard users may include accredited Certification Bodies, Certificate Holders or interested stakeholders.

D. Method of Working

1. Requests for interpretation shall be submitted to the secretary.
2. The Interpretation request(s) shall be made on specific issues in the standard. It should include clear and correct reference to the requirement(s) for which the interpretation is requested, some background information and a suggested interpretation response.
3. The secretary shall send acknowledgement of the request to the sender and advise them of the process by sending a copy of this Terms of Reference.
4. The chair shall consider whether the request is competent; in doing so full account should be taken of previous UKWAS interpretation notes and relevant FSC or PEFC interpretations. FSC UK and PEFC UK shall be requested to provide guidance on whether either has an existing interpretation(s) addressing the issue.
5. The secretary shall within 21 days of the request being received advise the sender of the outcome with, in the event it is deemed incompetent, reasons for the decision.
6. The chair and secretary shall agree a timetable for the consideration of a competent request and the secretary shall advise the sender.
7. Competent requests shall be circulated to the panel members and the certification schemes in advance of panel meetings.
8. Certification schemes and, on invitation, certification bodies, the relevant forestry authorities² or other invited experts shall attend meetings, or otherwise submit evidence, in an advisory capacity.
9. The panel shall gather and verify all necessary information to impartially and objectively evaluate the interpretation request or other tasks referred to it by the Steering Group.
10. The panel shall seek to make its decisions on the basis of consensus and the chair shall ensure that all stakeholder views are considered fully and that no single interest group dominates proceedings.
11. Draft Interpretation Notes and discussion papers shall be submitted to the Steering Group for comment and approval; initially any such approval shall be regarded as provisional.
12. FSC UK and PEFC UK shall be consulted prior to confirmation of the provisional approval so that any internal certification scheme process requirements can be completed; steering group approval shall be confirmed if no objection is raised within 40 days.
13. The secretary shall formally communicate the agreed interpretation to the sender once approved by the Steering Group.
14. Finalised Interpretation Notes shall be made available on the UKWAS website.

The Steering Group chair shall provide support to the panel's chair including with the appointment of external experts and in the facilitation process.

As far as possible the panel will seek to reach its decisions using emails and/or tele-conferencing but face-to-face meetings might be needed in some circumstances. Strict deadlines shall be set for panel members to respond to requests for information and feedback on drafts, etc.

E. Contact Point

For further information on the panel and for contact information see <http://ukwas.org.uk/ukwas-standard/interpreting-the-standard>.

² The relevant forestry authorities are the Forestry Commission (in England and Scotland), the Forest Service (in Northern Ireland) and Natural Resources Wales (in Wales) or their successor bodies.