



Task Force Species information in FSC Product Groups



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1. Introduction and background information

Species information is a fundamental component for the management and control of FSC claims in the Chain of Custody system and it is therefore covered in the FSC normative framework. Key aspects covered in FM and CoC related documents include:

- a. Organizations need to maintain up-to-date information about all suppliers who are supplying materials used for FSC product groups, including names, certification code (if applicable), and materials supplied (STD-40-004 V3.1; clause 2.1).
- b. Organizations need to have relevant procedures in place and if requested, collect and provide information on species (common and scientific name) and country of harvest (or more specific location details if required by legislation) to direct customers and/or any FSC-certified organizations further down the supply chain that need this information to comply with timber legality legislation (STD-40-004 V3.1; clause 6.1 b).
- c. The requirements for the establishment of product groups for the control of FSC claims are defined in chapter 8 of the CoC standard. Clause 8.3 indicates that the organization shall maintain an up-to-date list of product groups specifying, among others, the species (including scientific and common names), where the species information designates the product characteristics.
- d. In addition, if the organization does not possess the requested information on species and country of origin, the request shall be passed on to the upstream suppliers until the information can be obtained.
- e. Access to information required by timber legality legislation is defined in the ADVICE-40-004-10 in the FSC Directive on Chain of Custody Certification (DIR-40-004 EN).

These issues are also an integral part of FSC verifying processes and are regular working subjects across different units within the FSC International. It is important to note that the species information of the existing FSC Certificate Holders is publicly available and can be found on the FSC Public Certificate Search (<https://info.fsc.org/certificate.php>).

In March 2020, FSC International published the ADVICE-40-004_19 which in its essence requires certificate holders to maintain up-to-date information on species used in their certified products and to make this information available to CBs/FSC/ASI on request and at the time of audits.

The advice note was effective from August 2020 with the planned transition period until 12th August 2021. This policy action generated a significant number of concerns from stakeholders indicating, among others, the challenges in the implementation of the Advice Note, as well as possible inconsistencies in the treatment of species information within the FSC system. Consequently, in December 2020, the advice note was withdrawn from the FSC Directive on Chain of Custody Certification (FSC-DIR-40-004).

There were several elements of the ADVICE-40-004_19 that were perceived by stakeholders as unclear, inconsistent, and unreasonable. To address these challenges, FSC International



seeks to establish a Task Force as outlined in this document to address these concerns and provide recommendations on the way forward. This Task Force will consider the species information from the Chain of Custody perspective mostly focusing on the product group, even though, this topic is of extreme relevance for the Forest Management part of the FSC system.

Applications are invited from interested stakeholders (market experts, CB representatives, ASI, Network Partners) to participate in this Task Force. The deadline for submitting applications is 16 March 2021.

2. Task Force objectives and expected outcomes

The main objective of the Task Force is to review the overall treatment of species information within the FSC system.

To achieve the main objective, the Task Force is expected to consider the following aspects:

- a. The relevant species information (what information should be collected, level of precision, etc.)
- b. Maintaining the database (How species information should be stored on the FSC database, and how it should be updated and used)
- c. Integrity risks associated with the absence of species information (i.e., Identifying and analysing previous risks, as well as categorizing and forecasting potential integrity risks in case changes are made to the way species information is captured/analyzed.
- d. Explore the policy actions to enable effective species information collection and management.
- e. Explore the use of new technology platforms for storing information and linking to other existing initiatives (Wood ID testing, blockchain, etc.)

The expected outcomes of this task force are:

- I. Recommendations on how the issue of wood species information is to be embedded in the FSC system in the long term, including consideration of all levels (feasibility, controllability, communication, etc.).
- II. Immediate policy actions to address integrity risks related to species information.

3. Selection process and responsibilities of Task Force members

The Task Force shall comprise of market experts, CB representatives, FSC Network Partners, ASI Representative and FSC International (members from the CoC, SCIP, TIU, and VCD teams).



The members of the Task Force will work together throughout the process, discussing issues and interacting with each other as a group through online calls, email communication, and meetings as necessary and required by the Task Force Coordinator. News items and other communications as required and relevant will be drafted by the Secretariat.

Task Force Coordinator (PSU staff member) will be appointed by the Director Policy Operations, to administer the process and to manage the task force. The Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the Task Force operates responsibly and following its Terms of Reference and the applicable procedures.

The selected Task Force Coordinator is also responsible for the overall project management. He/She is also responsible for coordinating with PSU staff and seeking other expertise, as necessary. The Coordinator will send the invitations to online calls and meetings, draft Agendas for the meetings, draft minutes of the meetings, and maintain recordings of the process. The coordinator will also provide the technical input, background for discussion, and guide the Task Force to achieve the outcome outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR).

Task Force Supervisor is appointed by the Director Policy Operations to supervise the process and to support the task force members in reaching its goals.

Policy Steering Group of FSC (PSG) shall advise and guide the Task Force when required.

Administrative assistant will support to the project will be provided by PSU administrative assistants. The working language of the Task Force is English.

4. Confidentiality and conflict of interest

Task Force members shall sign a confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement with FSC at the beginning of their work. Per default, non-attributable content of discussions and papers prepared by or presented to the Task Force is not considered confidential, unless otherwise specified. The Task Force operates according to Chatham House Rules (see Glossary). So, while members of the task force have full authority to share the non-confidential substance of discussions and papers, they shall not report or attribute neither the comments of individuals nor their affiliations outside of meetings, whether conducted face to face or virtual. Members are expected to declare any conflicts of interest, where they arise. This will cause the person(s) to be excused from the discussion and to abstain from participating in decision-making.

5. Deliberation and Decision Making

For the Task Force to meet and deliberate, there must be a quorum, defined as at least 50 percent (%) of the FSC Task Force members. The Task Force Coordinator will strive to select meeting dates that allow for full participation of all Task Force group members. All members must participate in each point of decision-making. If any of the member(s) is not present for a decision, then a provisional decision may be made, subject to participation by the absent



member(s). Quorum is required for any provisional decisions, and full member participation is preferred. The Coordinator and FSC Staff and any other supportive personnel shall not participate in any decision-making. If the task force is not able to agree on critical discussion points, PSU shall take a decision on how to move forward with the process.

6. Workplan and time commitment

The Task Force is expected to start functioning from April 2021, with a targeted completion date for all outputs by July 2021. The Task Force will conduct most of its work via bi-weekly meetings (2-hour calls, with additional weekly calls if needed) and e-mail or similar means of electronic communication, and through one-on-one calls with the coordinators when required. The timetable and the detailed work plan will be communicated to the selected members of the task force.



Annex 1: ADVICE-40-004_19 Species information in FSC Product Groups (amended and subsequently withdrawn)

ADVICE-40-004-19	Species information in FSC Product Groups (amended)
Normative reference	FSC-STD-40-004 V3-0 Clause 7.3, INT-STD-40-004_40, INT-STD-40-004_41
Approval date	11 March 2020 Amended on: 12 August 2020
Effective date and transition period	Effective date: 12 August 2020 Organizations have up to 1 (one) year to update their product groups, as of the effective date of this Advice Note, unless species information is relevant for FSC, ASI or certification bodies investigations as stated in other CoC requirements.
Terms and definitions	Assembled product: Product that is constructed from two or more forest-based components (e.g. solid wood and particle board), assembled together to form another product (e.g. furniture, musical instruments, plywood, laminated products, and packaging or printed materials containing different paper components).
Background	FSC-STD-40-004 V3-0, clause 7.3 c) specifies that organizations shall provide information about species in product group lists, where the species information designates the product characteristics. The current wording of this requirement is being interpreted in different ways by certification bodies and certificate holders. Species information is relevant for the establishment of product groups for the control of FSC claims and may only be substituted by another species provided that they are equivalent and do not change the output product characteristics, according to Box 04 of FSC-STD-40-004 V3-0. Due to laws on timber legality and advancements in wood identification technologies, the importance of transparency of species and origin of FSC certified products has increased. This Advice Note has the objective of clarifying the requirement, by addressing the request of being more specific on whether and how species information needs to be specified in FSC product groups.
Advice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Species information always designates the product characteristics and needs to be specified for all FSC product groups, including all packaging or printed materials containing different paper components (i.e. printed books and magazines). 2. Only the following cases are exempted from specifying the species information (unless this information is required by applicable timber legality legislation):



	<p>a) components or entire products that are made of pre-consumer reclaimed and/or post-consumer reclaimed materials (e.g. Laminated MDF and particle boards).</p> <p>b) paper components in assembled products (e.g. high- and low-pressure laminates)</p> <p>3. The Organization shall maintain the product group lists in their certification records and make them available during audits. It is not required that the lists are sent to certification bodies.</p> <p>4. Upon request by FSC, ASI or certification bodies, The Organization shall provide species information within ten (10) business days.</p> <p>5. Species information shall be determined by its scientific name (i.e. genus and species).</p> <p>6. The Organization shall maintain an up-to-date list of species information.</p> <p>7. For primary processors and organizations buying FSC material directly from a certified forest/ MU, The Organization shall maintain an accurate and complete list of species used in production.</p> <p>8. For secondary and tertiary processors (including printers etc.) and brokers/traders dealing in processed material, The Organization shall maintain an up-to-date list of species information based on information received from their certified suppliers. This information shall be made available during audits.</p> <p>9. The absence of species information and/ or inaccuracy of species information compared to source data (obtained from certified suppliers) shall be considered as a fundamental failure to achieve the objective of this Advice Note and shall, therefore, be considered as a major non-conformity.</p> <p>NOTE 1: The FSC wood identification program is a service that can support organizations in identifying the species in their products.</p> <p>NOTE 2: This Advice Note does not replace other FSC CoC certification requirements, such as clauses 1.7 or 6.1 in FSC-STD-40-004 V3-0.</p>
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Annex 2: Glossary

To this document, the terms and definitions given in FSC-STD-01-002 FSC Glossary of Terms, and the following apply:

Chatham House Rule: "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed". The Chatham House Rule has the aim to encourage openness and the sharing of information at meetings.

Policy: a documented principle. The objective of every FSC Policy shall be to further the mission of FSC in line with the aims and aspirations of its members and taking equal account of the concerns and interests of the three FSC chambers, and its 'northern' and 'southern' membership.

Consensus: general agreement, characterized by the absence of sustained opposition to substantial issues by any important part of the concerned interests. NOTE: Consensus should be the result of a process seeking to consider the views of interested parties, particularly those directly affected, and to reconcile any conflicting arguments. It need not imply unanimity (adapted from ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004).