

10 June 2022

FSC Genetic Engineering Learning Process outside of FSC-certified Area

Update: Appointment of independent panel of experts and process lead

This update follows the [announcement](#) shared in February 2022 regarding the commencement of phase one of a proposed two-phase multi-year learning process on genetic engineering (GE) in forestry outside of FSC-certified area. Genetic engineering remains unacceptable in FSC-certified forests and products and is only allowed in the FSC *Policy for Association* as a research project.

The aim of the FSC GE learning process is for FSC and its members to gain sufficient and trusted knowledge on developments in genetic engineering in forestry.

In February 2022 FSC issued a call for experts in the below four fields of expertise to join an Independent Panel of experts to assist FSC in developing a participation framework for developing research projects in learning about genetic engineering:

- GE technology including potentials and risks
- Governance to enable stakeholder involvement in social development
- Environmental and social impact assessment and risk management
- Shared value creation

More than 80 experts in these fields were contacted. The review and selection process by the FSC Board of Directors focused on ensuring representation on the panel for each of the these identified areas of expertise. FSC now announces the composition of the independent panel of experts:

- [Jason Delborne](#), Professor of Science, Policy, and Society, Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources, Genetic Engineering and Society Center, North Carolina State University
- [Steven Strauss](#), Professor, Oregon State University
- Andrew Blackwell, BNP Paribas; ARCADIS Consultants, Toronto, Canada
- [Juan Ramon Miguez](#), Senior Principal Consultant, 3sustainability - Environment, Society, and Governance
- [Keith Robert Hayes](#), Team leader and senior research scientist, CSIRO

FSC is committed to ensure diversity of perspective and expertise background in the panel of experts, and the FSC Board has therefore decided to keep open seats for additional areas of expertise, including bioethics and biodiversity, with a focus on female experts and experts from the Global South. The Board invites such additional experts to send in their letters of interest. The FSC Secretariat will also continue to proactively invite experts in these categories. Please contact g.boetkees@fsc.org if you would like further information. The continuation and/or composition of the panel of experts will be revisited as part of the Board's decision to continue or not continue the process in the last FSC Board meeting of 2022, based on outcomes of the FSC General Assembly in October.

Additionally, [REOS Partners](#) has been appointed as process lead to support and facilitate the discussions in the panel and the links to discussions in the FSC membership.

The panel of experts will have three tasks in the coming period:

1. To develop a participation framework for the learning project outside of FSC certified areas, including rigorous safeguarding, risk management, shared value creation and appropriate governance systems, including measures to minimize cost to FSC while avoiding conflicts of interest.
2. To be the contact point regarding questions related to the participation framework for certificate holders and research institutions that are developing specific proposals for participation in the learning project.
3. If the participation framework is accepted, they would also be asked to assess the final proposals from certificate holders and research institutions for participation in the multi-year learning project and provide recommendations for the Board's decision on the proposals.

The learning process does not imply any change in the *FSC Principles and Criteria*, nor in the *FSC Policy for Association (PfA)*. After the process when learnings have been gained, a discussion at the FSC General Assembly with members will occur. Based on these member discussions, which are currently expected during the FSC General Assembly 2025, next steps may be considered by the FSC Board of Directors.

FSC looks forward to working together with the independent panel of experts in the learning process to increase its knowledge and understanding on developments in genetic engineering in forestry.

For more information on the learning process please visit the [GE Learning Webpage](#) or contact engagement@fsc.org