

Nineteen years of FSC certification in New Zealand

Cyrielle Durand

Background

In June 2015, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) opened its New Zealand office (FSC NZ). With its establishment came the objective to ensure a more direct dialogue between FSC and its New Zealand stakeholders, get a better understanding of the domestic market and make the FSC brand more visible. At the global level, FSC passed the threshold of 30,000 certificates in early 2016. This number includes both the forest manager and chain of custody certificates. The growth in certified business reflects a growing consumer demand across the more than 100 countries where FSC operates. The growth in capacity also reflects the growing consumer recognition of the FSC brand in the last three years.

New Zealand is unique, with the overwhelming majority of its timber grown and harvested in plantations. This country has one of the highest rates of forest management certification in the world, with almost 70% of plantation forests certified. Over time, FSC has changed its perception of forest plantations and now recognises the importance of well-managed ones, not just as a productive resource, but also as a contributor to important environmental issues in the landscape in the absence of native forests.

The first New Zealand forest manager certificate was given to CraigPine Timber in 1998, a small company in Southland, followed by the very large former Fletcher Challenge Forest in 2000. Since then, 170 New Zealand companies have become certified to FSC's standards, many of which produce a number of different certified products. Of the types of products certified in the supply chain the vast majority are solid (71), rough (36) or engineered (27) wood. The balance are chip (33), which is largely consumed domestically and forms part of the supply of FSC paper and packaging. In this segment, there are a further 21 certificates related to printed materials, 18 to the supply of stationery and paper, and eight providing packaging and wrapping.

The number of certified business has largely remained stable over the past three years, with consolidation in the large FSC printer sector offset by new certificates in solid timber products. The FSC system relies heavily on the demand created by specifiers, procurers, consumers and retailers. The five-

year plan developed for New Zealand and Australia places an increasing focus on business development and trying to tap into rising demand for timber and renewable products.

Strategic plan to increase product demand and improve services

FSC's strategic plan globally includes a number of key focus areas relating to service provision, simplification of standards and growing its market share. In New Zealand, the primary area of focus of the



Waikato Show in Hamilton

new office is to increase consumer demand and market opportunities by working with retailers and certificate holders. The secondary area of focus is improving the quality of services to certificate holders to better equip them to promote and sell FSC products and get the most value from their FSC certification. FSC NZ has been actively promoting and trying to raise the visibility and understanding of FSC in both of these focus areas.

Consumer research undertaken by FSC NZ in 2015 showed that consumer recognition of the FSC brand is around one in five. The aim is to encourage consumers to think more carefully about their shopping choices and make FSC the positive way to do the right thing. Outside of product packaging or timber labelling, retailers facilitate the experience with the consumer. By engaging with large retailers and promoting FSC to the ethical and sustainability-focused consumer at key events (these consumers represent around 30% of all shoppers), the aim is to reinforce the value FSC offers to retailers and consumers. Simple actions produce great results.

For instance, from 8 to 10 April 2016, FSC sponsored by TetraPak attended the Waikato Show in Hamilton which registered 15,800 visitors (see photo). There was a high level of interest and people were surprised and pleased to realise that the product samples included some of the items they already buy at their local supermarket, without knowing they were FSC certified. This provides an opportunity to thank people for doing the right thing.

FSC is not alone in doing the job. Many organisations are promoting the positive impact that purchasing FSC can have. Zoos are a good example of key institutions that actively encourage responsible consumer choices. The New Zealand, Auckland, Wellington and Hamilton Zoos are actively educating people as part of their tours about what FSC is and how looking for the logo can inform a positive purchase.

One other focus for 2017 is to engage more actively with large retailers. An increasing driver of public companies and those with significant or growing brands is projecting a positive contribution to their community, or corporate social responsibility. Consumers and advocacy groups are increasingly putting pressure on suppliers to understand how their product is sourced and produced. In fact, four in five people in New Zealand and Australia expect corporates to be responsible in how they do business. FSC, with its forest to consumer assurances, provides a positive way to exercise this growing social duty, thus increasing the value of FSC for retailers and the visibility of the FSC brand for the benefit of all certificate holders.

Improving services to certificate holders to promote FSC

After 20 years of development, FSC has become the world's strongest forest certification system. It has immense global reach with products in 112 different

countries, 43 FSC offices around the world, a robust set of common global standards and a growing pool of 30,000 diverse and geographically spread certified businesses. But for the system to keep growing it needs to continue to add value to those who have made an investment in it.

FSC needs to provide the best possible services to certificate holders and equip them to promote and grow the market share of their certified products. To protect their investment, FSC needs to protect the integrity of the brand. This is why there is a continuing focus on looking for trademark infringements and improving online systems and platforms to improve the traceability of FSC products. For instance, in 2015 the FSC launched the Online Claims Platform (OCP), a digital tool that provides timely information about FSC products and the organisations that produce them. Amongst other features is the ability for certificate holders to connect with suppliers and customers via the digital platform to receive automatic updates when a supplier's FSC scope or certificate status changes. This saves time and improves the integrity of the system.

But more is coming and FSC's vision is continuing to expand. The Global Strategic Plan aims to more than double FSC's share of global forest-based trade by 2020 to 20%, and tap into the market trend in sustainability and advanced manufacturing of new products that is projected to grow considerably in the coming years.

In Australia, the number of consumers familiar with the FSC logo has doubled in the past five years. Amongst millennials almost one in three are familiar with the FSC logo, critically important as they will represent 30% of discretionary spending in 2020 and by 2030 be 75% of the workforce. This reflects the growing interest from consumers and retailers to make and inform positive and responsible purchases. This trend is understandably mirrored in New Zealand. Consumers are wanting ethical and responsible options and retailers are responding. For example, Countdown's homebrand hygiene products are largely FSC certified and Air New Zealand, which is massively investing in electric vehicles for its ground fleet, is purchasing fuel efficient aircraft and testing biofuel flights. In the 2016 Colmar Brunton Better Futures Report, 66% of Kiwis rated 'Responsible consumption and production' as 'Very important', while 'Impact on climate change' was the fastest-growing environmental concern.

Construction sector

In the construction sector, a growing number of architects and specifiers are focusing on timber for interior and exterior uses. Research from around the world is showing the value of using wood to reduce carbon, displacing carbon intensive materials like steel and concrete, and improving the internal building environment.

Studies show that inhabitants of largely timber buildings have lower blood pressure, are happier and

ultimately more productive. Many local governments are implementing strategies to promote timber such as Rotorua Council's First Wood Policy, which prioritises timber for public buildings. It is expected that other councils will adopt these policies in the future and FSC can play a key role in helping builders ensure that materials used come from responsible sources.

Olympic Games

At the international level, the Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Rio 2016 announced that all the furniture for athletes would be FSC certified and the event tickets would be printed on FSC certified paper. The goal was to demonstrate leadership in sustainability management at events held in Brazil. 'Using FSC certified materials will be a great opportunity to showcase responsible practices of production and consumption that avoid negative impacts on the environment,' said Tania Braga, Head of Sustainability, Accessibility and Legacy at Rio 2016.

Pacific Asia regional collaboration

FSC is also aware of the importance of a Pacific Asia regional collaboration, with five countries (China, Australia, Korea, Japan and India) counting for 80% of New Zealand forestry product exports. This is why it is important to keep working closely with the rest of the region by having annual meetings and regular communication.

New Zealand is on the right path and FSC must continue to work with its certificate holders across the region to help them use the FSC brand to tap into this growing community sentiment for responsible and positive purchases.

Cyrielle Durand is Business Development Manager at FSC Australia & New Zealand based in Auckland. Email: c.durand@nz.fsc.org.

2017 NZIF conference

The future of the NZ Forest Industry



**Novotel Lakeside
Rotorua**

3rd to 6th September 2017



New Zealand Institute of Forestry

- Te Pūtahi Ngāherehere o Aotearoa Incorporated -