SGEC's Position on the Cooperation and Collaboration

among International Forest Certification Systems

Executive Board

Sustainable Green Ecosystem Council

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1. Introduction

Based on the Forest Planning System and others that have taken root in Japan, the Sustainable Green Ecosystem Council (SGEC) was established in June 2003 as a unique forest management certification system optimally suited to the environment of Japan. In regard to SGEC's international approach, the following is emphasized in SGEC's General Policy which stipulates the framework of this certification system.

"SGEC will actively participate in international activities on forest certification and will endeavor to promote an awareness of their council while building solidarity with the international community".

The principle concepts of SGEC in regard to this approach are clearly described in this paper through the review of international cooperation and collaboration among various international forest certification systems of the past ten or so years.

2. Assessment of Deliberations on International Certification Systems

Various forest certification systems became internationally established after the mid-1990s. There have since been on-going deliberations in a variety of governmental and private sectors regarding the mutual recognition of these systems, methods of their evaluation and cooperation among them. Major topics among those discussions are: 1) the agreement on IPF guidelines[1]; 2) IFIR proposals for an international mutual recognition framework of forest certification schemes[2]; 3) the WBCSD "Legitimacy" Thresholds Model (LTM) [3]; 4) CEPI's matrix analysis, 5) the World

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[1] Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), "Report of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests on its Third Session", Para. 163(c), Geneva, Sept. 1996, E/CN.17/IPF/1997/2

[2] WG on mutual recognition between credible sustainable forest management certification systems and standards of the International Forest Industry Roundtable, "Proposing an International Mutual Recognition Framework", Feb. 2001

[3] World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD), "Forest Certification Systems and the" Legitimacy" Thresholds Model (LTM)", Oct. 2001

Bank/WWF QACC[4]; and 6) the TFD report on "Forest Certification: A Review of Impacts and Assessment Frameworks[5]".

Although there is progress in mutual recognition primarily between industrialized exporting countries in Europe and North America, in regard to the cooperation efforts inclusive of environmental organizations, initial ambitious schemes toward mutual recognition have not been realized. Moreover, a practical approach to establishing a framework for objective evaluation on the differences of certification systems has not been successful.

However, we consider that some progress has been made in the mutual acknowledgement among various systems of the reality that multiple systems will concomitantly exist in the future and that extensive dialogue among these systems has been premised by that acknowledgement.

3. SGEC's Position

3-1 SGEC's Position as Stated in SGEC's General Policy

In SGEC's General Policy, the role of SGEC in Asia as the certifying body of developed countries is underlined while also emphasizing the concept of internationalism in the following:

"SGEC will actively participate in the international activities on forest certification and will attempt to promote an awareness of their council while building solidarity with the international community, and will seek a structure of mutual recognition to reflect SGEC's international stance. Cooperation should be sought particularly with the socially and economically affiliated neighboring countries and regions in Asia, where there is strong commonality between the structures of their forests and forest industry, as well as the natural and cultural environments."

3-2 Stakeholder Expectations concerning SGEC

Such stakeholders who have an interest in the SGEC certification system are firstly, forest owners and distributors or wood processing manufacturers who, based on this system, provide information on their forest management levels and product history to their consumers and buyers; secondly, the consumers and buyers who want to know the environmental effects of the goods they

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[4] World Bank WWF Alliance for Forest Conservation and Sustainable Use," The Questionnaire for Assessing the Comprehensiveness of Certification Schemes/Systems (QACC)", May, 2003
[5] Ruth Nussbaum and Markku Simula(2004)," Forest Certification: A Review of Impacts and Assessment Frameworks"

purchase; and thirdly, environmental organizations, local and national governmental officers, and the general public who are interested in the environmental and social role of forests in Japan.

A common concern among the above-mentioned stakeholders on SGEC's international stance is that they would like a criterion standard and comparison results to confirm that the level of SGEC's certification system, is on par with other international systems, which have been established in consideration of international forest environment issues.

Some distributors or wood processing manufacturers are also showing interest in the mutual recognition between SGEC and certain internationally developing certification systems because a clear relationship between the systems would help them to establish better marketing strategies when dealing with products certified by other systems within the Japanese market.

However, the incentive to promote mutual recognition with a limited number of certification systems is not necessarily big for most wood industry participants, due to the low motivation to sell Japanese wood products in the international market, including within Europe and North America.

3-3 SGEC's Three Policies Regarding the Cooperation and Collaboration among International Certification Systems

Based on the above issues, SGEC is seeking cooperation and collaboration among international certification systems with the following principles in mind:

(1) Contribute to the establishment of international and objective evaluation of certification systems.

While various certification systems co-exist on an international scale, we, based on the philosophy of "respecting mutual positions while recognizing differences", endeavor to develop a position of equality and justice for forest certification systems worldwide where there is respect for the diversity of natural environments, civil society, lifestyles, culture and customs of each country and region through related international organizations such as the FAO and ITTO, as well as through non-unilateral venues of The Forestry Dialogue.

At the same time, while maintaining the future prospect of comprehensive mutual recognition, we will make every possible effort to contribute to the international operations to establish a framework to provide the objective evaluation of certification systems.

(2) Seek high international appraisal for SGEC

The framework for objective evaluation of various certification systems has been developed and proposed through the application of such tools as the Forest Certification Matrix of CEPI (Confederation of European Paper Industries), and the QACC (Questionnaire for Assessing the Comprehensiveness of Certification systems) of the World Bank/WWF. Alliance. As this framework has been founded upon the result of a number of system assessments, we actively seek international appraisal for the purpose of popularizing and improving SGEC's system.

(3) Promote cooperation with other certification systems in Asia

Recognizing the importance of certification system development particularly in Southeast and East Asia, we promote the exchange of information with relevant organizations concerning the certification systems in this area and to the extent possible will implement collaborative measures.