

Appeal and Complaint Resolution Procedure

1 Policy

To ensure the public accountability of the certification process, all interested parties shall have access to procedures which consider appeals and complaints in a timely and fair way. This is the Soil Association Certification's Appeal and Complaint Resolution Procedure for the Forestry Department.

Through this policy, we aim to:

- Resolve issues that are within the work of Soil Association Certification Scheme standards and procedures.
- Identify improvements to standards and procedures so that future complaints are avoided.

2 Scope

This procedure relates to appeals and complaints. It is separate from the stakeholder consultation process for forest management (FM) certification which is described in IP-GEN-006 Consultation Policy and Guidelines (IP-GEN-006 is publicly available at: www.soilassociation.org/certification/forestry/)

NOTE: Soil Association Certification encourages all stakeholders with concerns in relation to forest management or controlled wood certification to engage fully with the stakeholder consultation process of the certificate holder and stakeholder consultation of the Soil Association prior to lodging an appeal or complaint. If you would like your comment to be considered as stakeholder consultation feedback please e-mail: ForestryConsultation@soilassociation.org Alternatively please find the phone number and address of our head office on the section 'Contacting us' on page 4. Regional contact details are found on our website.

3 Definitions

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction by any person or organisation presented to a certification body relating to the activities of that certification body and/ or the activities of their clients. In the context of Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®), a complaint must include:

- the name and contact information of the complainant
- a clear description of the issue, and
- evidence to support each element or aspect of the complaint.

Appeal: A request by the client to the certification body for reconsideration of a decision it has made relating to that client.

4 Information about Soil Association Certification's Appeal and Complaint Resolution Procedure

This procedure is made available in the following ways:

- All applicants for certification are told about the procedure as part of the application process.
- If you are consulted during the certification process, you'll be told about the appeal and complaint resolution procedure at this time.
- This procedure document is publicly available at:
www.soilassociation.org/certification/forestry/
- In addition, the procedure can be sent to anyone (including clients) on request.

NB. Soil Association Certification will not take any discriminatory action in relation to the submission of an appeal/complaint.

5 Summary of the Procedure for Handling Complaints and Appeals

Soil Association Certification will take the following steps in relation to a complaint or appeal:

- Acknowledge receipt of an appeal/complaint/submission of concern.
- Conduct an initial review of the submission to determine if it can be substantiated as an appeal or complaint.
- Provide an initial response, including an outline of the Soil Association Certification's proposed course of action to follow up on the complaint or appeal (as per 6.2 below) within two (2) weeks of receiving a complaint or appeal. Contact details for the Soil Association Certification person nominated to be engaged in the appeal or complaint process will be included in the initial response.
- Gather and verify all necessary information (as far as possible) in order to reach a decision
- Keep a record of all complaints and any actions taken.
- Allow the concerned party to have the opportunity to present the complaint or appeal to the nominated Soil Association Certification entity (as specified in 6.3 below).
- Keep parties informed of progress in evaluating the complaint/ appeal.
- Investigate the allegations and specify all the proposed actions in conclusion to the complaint or appeal within three (3) months of receiving the complaint or appeal.
- Notify the complainant when the complaint is considered to be closed, meaning that Soil Association Certification has gathered and verified all necessary information, investigated the concerns and taken a decision on the complaint.
- Respond to complaints and appeals in the same language that is used in the public summary certification report, or agree with the complainant on the language used.
- Retain the anonymity of the complainant in relation to the client, if this is requested by the complainant.
- Where necessary, inform the scheme owner that the complaint has been lodged.

Soil Association Certification will record and track complaints and appeals, as well as what actions need to be undertaken to resolve them.

Also see [Annex 1 Flow diagram for the Appeal and Complaint Process \(page 5\)](#).

6 Procedure

6.1 Initial Review

On receipt of a concern, comment or query an initial review shall be conducted to determine if a complaint or appeal has been raised in accordance with the definitions in Section 3 (Definitions):

- Soil Association Certification will confirm whether the complaint or appeal relates to certification activities for which it is responsible and, if so, shall address it.
- Soil Association Certification will offer to continue further discussion in an attempt to resolve the issue. NB. If appropriate, we may recommend that you raise the issue directly with the certified organisation first.
- If you want your concern to be treated as an appeal or complaint, but have not submitted the required information, Soil Association Certification will need you to include a clear description of the appeal or complaint, objective evidence to support each element or aspect of the complaint or appeal and your contact details before the matter can be considered in accordance with this procedure.
- We will treat anonymous complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction which are not substantiated as complaints as stakeholder comments and we will address them during the next audit. All stakeholder comments will be anonymised and included in the certification report along with the Soil Association response. All FSC FM public summary certification reports are available on the FSC database:
<http://info.fsc.org/certificate.php>

6.2 Evaluation of the complaint or appeal

The course of action proposed by Soil Association Certification will depend on the nature of the complaint or appeal and may include one or more of the following options in order to gather and verify all necessary information (as far as possible) to reach a decision:

- Desk based assessment of complaint or appeal, reviewing documents, photographs, letters and other evidence.
- Verification on site. If a complaint or appeal relates to the actions or activities of a client which require verification on site, we may think it best to make a site visit.

NB. Information about the client that is not publicly available and is obtained from sources other than the client (e.g. from a complainant) shall be treated as confidential, unless the source of information and the client give written consent to disclose it.

6.3 Decision resolving the complaint or appeal

If you want to make a complaint or appeal, you will be given the chance to present it to the decision-maker i.e. person (s) who have no conflict of interest and are able to make an unbiased decision.

Depending on the nature of the complaint or appeal, the decision resolving the complaint or appeal will be made by, or reviewed and approved by, person(s) not involved in the evaluation related to the complaint or appeal. One or more of the following methods will be used for making a decision on the complaint or appeal:

- A Soil Association Certification employee not involved in the evaluation and has no conflict of interest may make the decision resolving the complaint or appeal.
- A review of the decision and final approval may be conducted by the Head of Forestry at the request of the Soil Association Certification employee.
- The decision may be considered by the Soil Association Certification Limited's Certification Committee at the request of the Soil Association Employee or the Head of

Forestry. The Certification Committee shall not include members who have been involved in the decision or otherwise have a conflict of interest.

6.4 Decision to close the complaint

Soil Association Certification will notify you when the complaint is considered closed, meaning that Soil Association Certification has gathered and verified all necessary information, investigated the allegations, taken a decision on the complaint and responded to you, as the complainant.

6.5 Further Resolution

In the case of appeals, further information is available on request in the Soil Association Guidance on appeals process for licensees' (C277fm).

If you are not satisfied with the Soil Association Certification's decision;

For Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification issues, you can take your complaint to:

ASI - Accreditation Services International GmbH

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 69, 53113 Bonn, Germany

Phone: + 49 (228) 227 2370

Fax: + 49 (228) 227 237 30

E-mail: asi-info@accreditation-services.com

Soil Association Certification's FSC License Code is FSC® A000525.

As the ultimate step the complaint may be referred to FSC.

For Programme of Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC™) certification issues, you can take your complaint to the PEFC National Office or PEFC International:

PEFC International, 10, Route de l'Aéroport, Case Postale 636, 1215 Geneva – Switzerland

Phone: +41 (22) 799 4540

Fax: +41 (22) 799 4550

E-mail: info@pefc.org

Soil Association Certification's PEFC Licence code is PEFC/ 16-44-917

7 Contacting Us

Should you require any further information, please contact us at:

Soil Association Certification - Forestry Team

Spear House, 51 Victoria Street, Bristol, BS1 6AD

Email: forestry@soilassociation.org

Phone: +44 (0)117 914 2435

Website: www.soilassociation.org/forestry

Annex 1 - Flow diagram for the appeal and complaint process

