

Forest certification in China: workshop on future strategies

China's exports of value-added products to Europe and North America have surged in recent years, and certification has become an important issue as China seeks to maintain and increase its market share in those regions. China has a long-term objective of developing a single, coherent national forest certification scheme.

To assist in the development of such an initiative, FAO, the State Forest Administration of China, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service and the Forestry Department of Zhejiang Province organized a workshop where concerned stakeholders could explore the various certification options available and national concerns and constraints. Held in Hangzhou from 21 to 23 July 2004, the workshop "Forest Certification in China: Latest Developments and Future Strategies" discussed the markets for certified wood products, the changing role of certification in achieving sustainable forest management, and how international cooperation can advance the certification process.

Representatives of several existing international certification schemes (the Forest Stewardship Council, the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative) and national initiatives (from the United Kingdom, Malaysia and Indonesia) presented the structures and processes of their schemes. Additional presentations were made on the current status of

certification in China, along with an analysis of the Chinese timber market.

Workshop participants recognized that the adoption of rigorous and verifiable national standards will make it possible to obtain endorsements from better known international certification schemes. Experiences from other national initiatives highlighted the importance of active participation of all stakeholders in the development of standards.

There are also concerns over the sources of the country's massive imports of timber. China will need to take measures to ensure that such imports come from sustainably managed forests, perhaps through the establishment of a regulatory body for monitoring the source of imported timber. Furthermore, certification and related attempts to improve forest management should not be limited to products for export; overall improvements in forest management should be the aim, considering the long-term benefits to the country, particularly in improving the environment and the stability of forest-based industries.

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