

1. Background

1.1 GFA Certification GmbH (GFA) is an international company specialized in independent third party certification.

1.2 Within the scope of accreditation the following services are carried out:

- a) Certification of forest management (FM) according to the FSC®-(FSC®A000511) and/or PEFC™-(PEFC/04-04-0099) standards,
- b) Certification of chain of custody (COC) for FSC, PEFC, RSPO,
- c) Certification according to the Sustainable Resources Verification Scheme (SURE)
- d) Certification according to the Gold Standard (GS)
- e) Certification according to the Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS)

1.3 GFA maintains a complaints process which has the following objectives:

- a) To register and address complaints about clients of GFA ("certificate holders") from stakeholders;
- b) To register and address complaints about GFA by stakeholders and clients of GFA;
- c) To ensure that complaints which need to be taken to a higher level are identified and dealt with appropriately.

2. Complaints from stakeholders & clients of GFA

2.1 Stakeholders and clients of GFA may wish to register a complaint with GFA about the management activities of FSC, PEFC, RSPO, SURE, GS or VCS certificate holders or GFA's certification management activities.

2.2 GFA can only become involved in dealing with complaints when they are related to the requirements of the FSC standards, the PEFC standards, RSPO SCC standards, the SURE standards or the requirements of the GFA certification program.

2.3 To be accepted and classified as a complaint, it shall be addressed to GFA (see contact details below) in writing and be submitted in German or English or in case of FSC FM certification in the local language the public summary report is published on the FSC website (www.info.fsc.org). The complaint shall include a detailed description of the situation of the basis for the complaint and include evidence to substantiate any complaint.

2.4 Complaints made about clients of GFA should be substantiated with objective evidence and accurate descriptions of locations, dates and people involved.

2.5 All certificate holders are required to have their own complaints system, for addressing complaints raised by stakeholders. Therefore any complaint about a certificate holder shall be submitted to the certificate holder in question first and have run through their complaints management system before being submitted to GFA.

2.6 If the complainant does not receive a response, or does not believe they have received an adequate response, the complaint should be addressed and sent to GFA (see contact details below).

2.7 GFA will investigate the complaint, gather and verify all necessary information (as far as possible) to progress the complaint and judge the relevance of the complaint. GFA will investigate the complaint in relation to the mentioned services.

2.8 GFA may issue corrective action requests, or may suspend a certificate in the event of a complaint being substantiated. GFA will respond to the complainant informing them of actions taken and results of any investigation. GFA will keep a record of complaints received and actions taken.

2.9 The decision resolving the complaint is made by, or reviewed and approved by, GFA staff not involved in the evaluation related to the complaint.

2.10 Upon receipt GFA provides an initial response whether the complaint relates to certification activities for which GFA is responsible, including if necessary an outline of the proposed course of action to follow up on the complaint, within two (2) weeks of receiving a complaint and will have investigated the allegations and specified all its proposed actions in response to the complaint within three (3) months of receiving the complaint.

2.11 GFA will register all complaints related to GFA FSC certificate holder with FSC.

2.12 GFA will register all complaints related to Gold Standard with Gold Standard and/or SustainCert and follow the GS Grievance approval procedure.

2.13 GFA will respond to the complaint in German or English or in case of FSC FM certification in the local language the public summary report is published on the FSC website (www.info.fsc.org).

2.14 GFA will retain the anonymity of the complainant in relation to the client, if this is especially requested by the complainant.

2.15 Complaints are allocated to a member of staff for investigation and response. Complaints against GFA staff and auditors are allocated to the GFA Managing Director and complaints about the GFA Managing Director are allocated the GFA Advisory Board for investigation.

2.16 Investigation and follow-up of a complaint may involve unscheduled surveillance audits, or may be checked at a forthcoming scheduled surveillance audit; internal audits of local affiliates or GFA partner offices may also be arranged in response to complaints.

2.17 GFA staff will review the file and decide upon any appropriate corrective action to be taken and the means by which it will be carried out. In the consideration of the file GFA may draw upon the specialist expertise of any members of the GFA certification decision board, or other experts as seen appropriate.

2.18 Complainants are informed about the results of the investigation and any action being taken as a result.

2.19 If in case of a FSC certification the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, they may refer the complaint to the attention of the Managing Director of ASI at the following address:

ASI - Assurance Services International GmbH
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 69, 53113 Bonn, Germany
Telefon: +49 228 227237- 0, Fax: +49 228 227237- 30
E-Mail: asi-info@asi-assurance.org

3. General obligations

3.1 The complainant cannot make any claim against GFA for reimbursement of costs or any other losses incurred.

3.2 Complaints based upon hearsay or anonymous submissions and expressions of dissatisfaction that are not substantiated as complaints by the complainant or by third parties, as well as complaints raised and published e.g. on websites, newspaper, etc. are not handled according to this complaints procedure shall not be accepted. Instead they are treated as stakeholder comments and addressed during the next audit.

3.3 GFA reserves the right to add to, delete or change this procedure without prior notification.

4. Contact details

GFA Certification GmbH
Alter Teichweg 15, 22081 Hamburg, Germany
Phone: +49 40 5247431- 0; Fax: +49 40 5247431- 999
E-Mail: info@gfa-cert.com