

Welcome

It is a great honour and pleasure to see that so many people representing such a wide range of environmental, social and economic interests have come to participate in this meeting on certification and plantations.

I know that this assembly of stakeholders represents a very wide diversity of opinions, views and experiences and I am convinced that by putting forward your views and sharing them with others you will strengthen and improve FSC's policies and practices.

As most of you are aware, a number of FSC certified plantations have met with heavy criticism from some environmental and social stakeholders. Some larger plantation managers have expressed concerns over what they see as costly and overly-prescriptive restrictions, whilst FSC's SLIMF Initiative has been trying address concerns about the cost and rigidity of FSC certification for small and community-based operations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there have also been concerns from certification bodies that some of FSC's requirements are ambiguous and difficult to interpret.

FSC must address these various concerns in order to fulfill its objectives and maintain our most valuable asset - our wide credibility.

Thus, this meeting represents the starting point for an in-depth review of FSC's policies and procedures for the certification of plantations. This review aims to identify, debate and hopefully resolve underlying conflicts and concerns and to develop widely recognised and supported standards for environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable plantation management. Throughout this process, we aim to honour FSC's core values of fairness, transparency and stakeholder participation.

However, it is important to stress that 'FSC' in itself cannot resolve these conflicts or set standards for forest management – the role of the FSC is to provide a forum, and facilitate a process, where the FSC members and other stakeholders can discuss, negotiate and develop solutions themselves. This is FSC's unique strength.

In this meeting today you will be starting this process by putting forward your concerns, and discussing and listening to the views of others. I trust that this will be a fruitful starting point and wish you all a very successful meeting.

.... with that I'll hand you over to Matthew, who will deal with some logistics and start things off...