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| **BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON:** | **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES RELATING TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN PLANTATION FORESTRY INDUSTRY** |

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## A. BACKGROUND

1. South Africa is a country of low average rainfall. The natural vegetation is classified into six biomes, viz. Savanna (33,4%), Nama-Karoo (28,5%), Grassland (25,7%), Succulent Karoo (6,7%), Fynbos (5,7%) and Forest (0,02%).
2. The Forest Biome is concentrated in the Southern Cape and up the eastern seaboard of South Africa, where rainfall is sufficiently high for growth. It has been widely damaged as a result of early (1700 onwards) exploitation for construction and mining timber. As a result, the government of the day initiated a tree plating programme consisting of alien Pinus spp, Eucalyptus spp and Acacia spp to satisfy the demands of an increasing human population.
3. The SA Forest Industry today covers an area of 1,371 625 ha and is concentrated mostly in the Grassland Biome and the grass components of the Savanna Biome where rainfall exceeds 750 – 800mm per annum.
4. Very little of the industry has been established at the expense of natural forests. Where this has happened, it has been as a result pf natural forests destroyed through over-exploitation 200 to 300 years ago, and subsequently planted to introduced species.
5. The negative environmental impacts associated with the planting of introduced species was first recognised through a reduction in streamflow. Experiments to measure these impacts were put in place in the 1950's and by 1972, an afforestation permit was required to plant trees which took into account the negative impacts of the trees on streamflow. By 1998 this permit had been replaced by the need for a water use licence issued in terms of the National Water Act which recognised plantation forestry (and <u>only</u> plantation forestry) as a streamflow reduction activity. It also introduced regulations for charging for

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water use for plantation forestry according to a formula established through a National Pricing Strategy.

6. In the last two decades, the negative impact of a monoculture plantation forestry industry using introduced species on biodiversity, particularly grassland biodiversity, has received increasing attention.
7. The Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act has categorised most of the commercial tree species as invasive weeds, due to their propensity to "escape" from their planted compartments and "invade" natural adjoining vegetation.
8. The recently enacted National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act has given further emphasis to this impetus by restricting the growing, transporting, cultivation etc. of both alien and invasive species. As yet, these categories have not been identified and the industry awaits further moves in this respect.
9. Between 1980 and 2003, new afforestation increased by 364 912 ha (or a 19,5% increase). During the same period, a total of 77 745 ha was converted out of timber to other use, mostly farming use. Net new afforestation over this period was thus 287 167 ha.
10. The average net new afforestation from 1980 to 2003 was thus 11 965 ha per annum. This peaked in the years 1985 to 1995, and has shown a steady decline over the last decade, with 2003 showing a negative net addition to planted area of – 2447 ha.
11. In recent years, most conversions to forestry have been in previously converted land (i.e. land that was not virgin).
12. South African forestry has probably the highest extent of certified forests internationally. Thus 62,2% of plantation area in the country is certified to the FSC standard only and another 18,3% to both the FSC standard and the ISO 14001 Environmental Management System standard, making a total area of 1,088,071 ha or 80,5% of all plantation area certified to the FSC standard. These include both corporates and individual farmers, as well as group certification schemes. The challenge currently facing us is certification of farmer's plantations whose size averages only a few hectares. These are mainly emerging farmers representative of the original inhabitants of South Africa.

## B. Authorisation Process for new plantations

1. For new land an applicant is required to

- Undertake an environmental impact assessment through an independent environmental practitioner
- Obtain an authorisation from the lead agency in the region
- At the same time, obtain a water use licence from the agency responsible for such licences
- Comply with the conditions of the authorisation which would typically include
    - Distances of trees from a water source and/or wetland
    - Slope of land that may be planted (usually requires permission from the agricultural agency)
    - Time frame in which to complete the planting programme
    - Distances from sensitive environmental and/or cultural features

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## C. South African Forest Certification National Initiative

1. A National Initiative, or the launch of such an initiative, is imminent in South Africa.
2. This is largely due to the need expressed by various certified owners to move away from the interpretation of international principles and criteria encompassed in the FSC standard and develop a South African specific set of principles, criteria and indicators.
3. This has also been precipitated by progress in the establishment of principles, criteria, indicators and standards for sustainable forest management being developed under the National Forest Act. Completion and implementation is expected within the next 6 – 12 months.
4. The NI will obviously place a lot of emphasis on these SFM PCI and S when developing certification standards.

## D. Issues of Concern

1. As significant effort and both financial and human resources have gone into FSC certification in South Africa, the industry is rightly concerned that the revision of the FSC Plantation Principle take cognisance of the circumstances pertaining to South African Forestry and will participate fully and constructively in the debate. The industry fully supports the philosophy that forestry ranges in a continuum from introduced monoculture plantations through to natural species rich forests in tropical, subtropical, temperate and boreal regions of the world. It fully subscribes to the view that certification has brought significant improvement in forest management, encompassing environmental, social and economic benefits.

   The South African forestry industry thus wishes to ensure that these benefits continue to be realised without creating additional burdens to the certified organisation or farmer. Indeed, the industry will strive to ensure a more equitable access to forest certification than currently exists, particularly for emerging indigenous farmers, without compromising the integrity of the standard.

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