



Accreditation and Certification Requirements for the CB under PEFC Endorsed NCCF FM and ToF Certification Scheme

NCCF-STD- ACR- 2.1/2025

Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF)

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Foreword

The Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF) is a not for profit organization registered under Societies Registration Act, 1860. NCCF is involved in developing Forest Certification scheme in the country. It is an institutional mechanism to ensure collaborative and streamlined efforts for development of National Forest Certification System and Standards. It aims to promote the implementation of improved Forest practices in the country and further the development of healthier, sustainable: economically beneficial, environmentally responsible and socially appropriate in accordance with national policies, institutional frameworks and sustainability usage norms.

The Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF) is the National Governing Body of the National Forest Certification Scheme and Standards (NFCSS) and has overall responsibility for the smooth working/functioning of the NFCSS while maintaining its credibility.

This document describes the procedures to be followed for the accreditation and certification requirements for CB operating the NCCF FM and ToF certification scheme. This document shall be considered as organization specific document and shall be applicable for certification scheme developed by NCCF.

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1. Scope

This document defines the requirements for the approval of the Certification Bodies intending to operate with the Forest Management certification standards established by Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF).

2. Normative References

- a. *ISO/IEC 17065: 2012: Conformity assessment — Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services*
- b. *PEFC Annex 6: Certification and Accreditation Procedures*
- c. *PEFC ST 2003:2012: Requirements for Certification Bodies operating Certification against the PEFC International Chain of Custody Standard*
- d. *ISO 9000:2005: Quality Management systems - Fundamentals and vocabulary*
- e. *ISO 9001:2005: Auditing practices group guidance on third party auditor impartiality and conflict of interest*
- f. *ISO/IEC 17000:2004 Conformity Assessment - Vocabulary and general principles*
- g. *ISO/IEC 17024:2012-11: Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies operating certification of persons*
- h. *ISO 19011:2018: Guidelines for auditing management systems*
- i. *ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004: Standardization and related activities – General vocabulary*
- j. *ISO/IEC Guide 60:2004: Code of good practice for conformity assessment*
- k. *PEFC ST 2001: PEFC Logo Usage Rules - Requirements (hereinafter PEFC Logo usage rules)*
- l. *NCCF–STD-LOGO-01/2017: NCCF Logo usage requirements*

3. Terms and Definitions

Accreditation Body: An accreditation body is an organization delegated to make decisions, about the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of a CB. In case of NCCF FM certification, an accreditation body should be signatory of the applicable IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA).

Affected stakeholder: A stakeholder who might experience a direct change in living and/or working conditions caused by the implementation of a standard, or a stakeholder who might be a user of a standard and therefore is subject to the requirements of the standard.

Note 1: Affected stakeholders include neighbouring communities, Indigenous people, workers, etc. However, having an interest in the subject matter of the standard (e.g., NGOs, scientific community, civil society) is not equal to being affected.

Note 2: A stakeholder who might be a user of the standard is likely to become a certified entity, e.g., a forest manager in the case of a forest management standard, or a wood processing enterprise in the case of a chain of custody standard.

Audit Programme: Arrangements for a set of one or more audits planned for a specific time frame and directed towards a specific purpose (Source: definition is based on ISO 19011:2018 clause 3.4).

Audit plan: Description of the activities and arrangements for a specific audit (Source: definition is based on ISO 19011:2018 clause 3.6).

Appeal: Formal request by client to CB or NABCB for reconsideration of a decision made by NCCF.

Appellant: Individual or organization filing an appeal.

Application Reviewer: the person(s) that is (are) responsible for the application review, prepares the audit process and checks if an applicant for certification appears to be ready and prepared for an audit.

Audit: Systematic, independent, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact and other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine the extent to which applicable requirements are fulfilled.

Auditor: a person competent to conduct an audit.

Audit team: is made up of one or more auditors, one of whom is appointed to be the audit team leader. When necessary, audit teams are also supported by technical experts and/or further personnel (e.g. interpreter), who assist auditors but do not themselves act as auditors.

Audit Team Leader: an auditor who is competent to lead the audit and the audit team.

Certification Body: Third –party Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) operating under the NCCF certification scheme to certify against FM standard.

Certification: third-party attestation related to products, processes, systems or persons.

Certified Area: The forest area covered by a certificate. In case of a group forest certificate the area represents the sum of forest areas of the participants

Chain of Custody Standard: PEFC ST 2002: Chain of Custody of Forest Based Products – Requirements.

Client: Organization, including a multi-site organization, that is applying for or whose Forest Management has been certified.

Certificate: a document issued under the rules of a certification system, indicating that adequate confidence is provided that a duly identified product, process or service is in conformity with a specific standard or other normative document.

Competence: the demonstrated ability to apply knowledge, skills and personal attributes in order to achieve intended results.

Complainant: Person or organization filing a complaint.

Complaint: Written expression of dissatisfaction (other than appeal) by any person or organization presented to a CB relating to the NCCF activities of that CB and/ or the NCCF activities of their clients. In the context of NCCF, a complaint includes 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.

Conflict of Interest: situation in which a party has an actual or perceived interest that gives, or could have the appearance of giving, that party an incentive for personal, organizational, or professional gain, such that the party's interest could conflict, or be perceived to conflict with, the conduct of an impartial and objective certification process.

Certification decision maker: A person or a group of persons (e.g., a committee) that has not been involved in the audit process and is assigned by the CB to make the certification decision.

Corrupt practice: Corrupt practices include bribery of public officials; embezzlement, trading in influence, abuse of function, and illicit enrichment by public officials; and bribery and embezzlement in the private sector, as well as money-laundering and obstruction of justice, in alignment with by the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

Documented information: Information required to be controlled and maintained by an organization using any format and media, from any source.

Defendant: Person or organization against whom a complaint has been filed.

Dispute: Umbrella term covering the complaints and appeals submitted to/related to NCCF.

Expired certification: The certification is not renewed after the certificate expiry date.

Group Forest Certificate: A document confirming that the group organization complies with the requirements of the sustainable forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification scheme.

Group Forest Certification: Certification of the group organization under one group forest certificate.

Group Organization: A group of participants represented by the group entity for the purposes of implementation of the sustainable forest management standard and its certification.

Group certification: Certification of the group organization under one group forest certificate.

Group entity: A legal entity that represents the participants, with overall responsibility for ensuring the conformity of forest management in the certified area to the PEFC endorsed forest management standard and other applicable requirements of the forest certification system. For this purpose, the group entity is using a group management system.

Note: The structure of the group entity should follow the operations, number of participants and other basic conditions of the group organization. It may be represented by one person.

Information and communication technologies: Information and communication technologies, ICT, is the use of technology for gathering, storing, retrieving, processing, analysing, and transmitting information. It includes software and hardware such as smartphones, handheld devices, laptop computers, desktop computers, drones, video cameras, wearable technology, artificial intelligence, and others. The use of ICT may be appropriate for auditing/assessment both locally and remotely (Source: IAF MD4:2023).

Note: *The term “group organization” is a specific form of a “multisite organization”.*

Major Non-Conformity: The absence of, or failure to implement and maintain, one or more applicable requirements of the standard, that may result in a systemic risk to the function and effectiveness of the forest management and/or effects confidence in the client organization’s claims on certified raw material.

Note: *A major non-conformity may be an individual nonconformity or a number of minor but related nonconformities, that when considered in total are judged to constitute a major nonconformity.*

Minor Non-conformity: A single failure to fulfill the requirements of the standards that may result in no systemic risk to the function and effectiveness

Observation: An evaluation finding that does not warrant nonconformity but is identified by the audit team as an opportunity for improvement.

Participant: A forest owner/manager covered by the group forest certificate, who is able to implement the requirements of the forest management standard in a certified area.

Note: The term “ability to implement the requirements of the forest management standard” requires the entity to have a long-term legal right, tenure right, or traditional or customary tenure rights to manage the forest and would disqualify one-off contractors from becoming participants in group certification.

Where regional or national systems allow contractors without long-term management rights for a specific forest area to participate in group certification, the system shall ensure that these contractors can only make PEFC claims for material originating from certified areas of participants or individually certified forest owners/managers with long-term legal or tenure management rights

Special audits: Special audits are unplanned, or otherwise outside the audit programme, and may be done on short notice.

Note: Special audits may be necessary due to scope extension, or to investigate complaints or substantiated concerns.

Reviewer: A person or a group of persons (e.g., a committee) that has not been involved in the audit process and is assigned by the CB to review all the information and results related to the audit.

Substantiated concern: Information or complaint supported by proof or evidence, indicating a serious failure to conform with the requirements of the PEFC endorsed national or regional forest certification system and/or there is a reputational risk for PEFC.

Note: Substantiated concerns can be concerns of third parties, as well as concerns of the client itself.

Suspended certification: The certification is temporarily invalidated by the CB.

Technical expert: A person who provides specific knowledge or expertise to the audit team (Source: definition based on ISO/IEC 17021:2015, clause 3.14.).

Note: Specific knowledge or expertise is that which relates to the organization, the process, or activity to be audited.

Terminated certification: The certification has been voluntarily cancelled by the client during the validity of the certification cycle

Note: *The definitions given in ISO 19011, ISO/IEC 17000 and PEFC ST 2003:2012 are applicable.*

Verbal forms for the expression of provisions:

“shall”: indicates requirements strictly to be followed to conform to the standard.

“should”: indicates that among several possibilities one is recommended as particularly suitable, without mentioning or excluding others, or that a certain course of action is preferred but not necessarily required. A CB can meet these requirements in an equivalent way provided this can be demonstrated and justified.

“may”: indicates a course of action permissible within the limits of the document.

“can”: used for statements of possibility and capability, whether material, physical or causal.

4. Role of NCCF, CB and NABCB:

Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF): NCCF is a standard setting organization which developed the standards for forest management certification of forest products and is the Scheme owner for FM and ToF certification.

Certification Body (CB): Third –party Conformity Assessment Body operating under NCCF certification scheme to certify against the FM and ToF standard.

The National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB): NABCB provides accreditation to Certification Bodies based on assessment of their competence as per the Board's criteria based on applicable international standards and in accordance with NCCF Standards and Guidelines contained herewith.

4.1 Accreditation process

A. Witnessing for grant of FM/ToF scopes

• **If a CB is already ISO 17065 accredited for PEFC CoC or any other scheme, the following applies:**

1. An extension of scope will be granted for both FM and ToF Certification Schemes, with one witness audit required for FM. Since FM is more complex than ToF, this audit will suffice for addition of both FM and ToF scopes.
2. If a witness audit is conducted only for ToF (among FM and ToF), FM cannot be awarded, as FM is a more complex scheme than ToF. Only ToF scope will be added.

3. If a witness audit is conducted only for FM (among FM and ToF), ToF can be awarded without a separate witness audit.
4. If FM is the only additional scope, then only the FM witness audit is required.
5. If ToF is the only additional scope, then only the ToF witness audit is required if FM is not already in scope of CB. If FM is already in scope, ToF can be added without witness with an offsite desk review.

- **If a CB is not ISO 17065 accredited for PEFC CoC or any other scheme**, and the CB applies only for FM Certification Scheme, then as per NABCB procedure, 2 witness audits are required. Similarly, if the application is only for ToF, then 2 witness audits of ToF scheme are required for the ToF scheme.

6. However, if the CB applies for both FM and ToF scopes, 2 witness audits are needed, preferably one each in FM and ToF. One FM witness audit is a must due to its higher complexity.
7. If the CB applies for both FM and ToF, and a witness audit is conducted for only ToF, then a separate witness audit for FM must be conducted for grant of FM scope.

B. Witness Audits after the Award of Accreditation Certificate:

1. NABCB procure has not specified any numbers of witness audits during accreditation cycle. However, for reaccreditation, it says the initial accreditation procedure would be followed. Since initial accreditation for ISO 17065 requires at least 2 witness audits, regardless of number of schemes, it follows that at least 2 witness audits must be done during the accreditation cycle.
2. Therefore, after the award of accreditation, within an accreditation cycle of 3-4 years, minimum two witness audits are required for both FM and ToF Certification Schemes, with preferably one audit for FM and the other for ToF. However, if CB is unable to offer any FM audit, NABCB may reaccredit for both FM and ToF with a condition that first FM audit after reaccreditation will be witnessed. OR
3. For CB that are ISO 17065 accredited for PEFC CoC, along with FM and ToF, NABCB would expect in a three or four years accreditation cycle, one witness audit for CoC, one witness audit for FM, and one witness audit for ToF.
4. In case the risk analysis requires more witnessing than above, NABCB will seek additional witnessing and provide the reasons to the CB (as also scheme owner).

5. General Requirements

- ❖ The criteria against which the client organization's Forest Management is evaluated are those outlined in latest version of the Forest Management Standard, Group Management Certification Standard and relevant mandatory appendices.

Note: *The latest version of the NCCF standards and their amendments are available at NCCF Website www.nccf.in.*

- ❖ **Accreditation Scope:** The CB shall conduct its certification operations according to their granted accreditation scope and in conformity with the requirements specified in this standard.
- ❖ CB shall be accredited by an accreditation body that is signatory of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) for product certification.
- ❖ CB shall comply with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17065, and be accredited with ISO/IEC 17065.
- ❖ The CB shall inform the affected clients within 30 days after the reduction, withdrawal or suspension of their accreditation scope. The clients shall be informed to seek certification from another accredited CB within 6 months to keep their certification valid, as applicable.

5.1 Legal and contractual matters

5.1.1 Certification agreement

5.1.2 The CB shall establish a legally enforceable certification agreement with the client.

5.1.3 The certification agreement with the client shall clearly specify:

- The applicable ISO/IEC standard/s against which the CB is operating.
- The CB's accreditation status, scope of accreditation, and the accreditation body that issued the accreditation; and,
- The PEFC notified CB status, scope of the notification, and notification issued by NCCF

5.1.3.1 The certification agreement shall include, at least, the following content:

- Implementation of the requirements:
 - Client's commitment to fulfil the certification requirements, including appropriate implementation.
 - Client's commitment to implement changes in an agreed transition period when there are changes in the certification requirements.
 - Client's commitment to keep records for the compliance with the certification requirements for the duration of the current cycle plus the previous certification cycle.
 - Client's obligation to inform the **CB** within 30 days of changes that may affect its ability to conform with the certification requirements.

- Audit process:
 - e) Client's commitment to provide access during the certification process to observers from **accreditation bodies**, PEFC council and NCCF as well as representative/s of workers and trade unions (e.g., for witnessing activities or validation audits), upon request.
 - f) Client's commitment to make the necessary arrangements for the conduct of the audits and investigation of complaints.
 - g) The conditions under which the **CB** may conduct **special audits**, as per 9.6.3, and the client's commitment to accept those.
- Trademarks use:
 - h) Client's commitment to use the PEFC trademarks and the accreditation trademarks and CB trademarks in compliance with any applicable requirements and consistent with the scope of certification, and to not make any references or claims that may be misleading or unauthorized or may bring PEFC, NCCF, **certification bodies** or **accreditation bodies** into disrepute.
 - i) Upon suspension, withdrawal, or termination of certification, client's commitment to discontinue its use of all advertising matter that contains any reference to the certification and take action and measures as required by the PEFC endorsed **NCCF FM certification scheme** (e.g., the return of certification documents), as appropriate.
 - j) Upon suspension, withdrawal, or termination of certification, or if PEFC's endorsement of the system or standard they are certified against is suspended or terminated, client's commitment to stop any use of the PEFC claims or PEFC trademarks.
 - k) If the **client** provides copies of the certification documents to others, the documents shall be reproduced in their entirety or as specified in the PEFC endorsed **NCCF FM and ToF certification scheme**.
 - l) Client's commitment to keep records of all complaints and **substantiated concerns** received that relate to compliance with certification requirements.
 - m) Client's commitment to take appropriate action with respect to complaints and any deficiencies that affect compliance with the requirements for certification.
 - n) Client's commitment to make records of all complaints and **substantiated concerns** available to the **CB**, the **accreditation body** and/or, NCCF, on request.
 - o) Client's commitment to allow any visits/assessments by NCCF as the scheme owner either with the CB or the accreditation body or by itself.

5.2 Integrity

The CB shall maintain integrity at all times. It shall implement systems and measures to require all its personnel, internal and external, to maintain their integrity. The CB's system for maintaining integrity shall include measures such as a Code of Integrity and Conduct, which must be signed by all individuals (internal and external) involved in the CB's activities, a policy on gifts, guidelines for handling situations when offered inducements, and so on.

Note 1: Integrity is defined as the quality of being honest and having consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values.

5.3 Independence

The CB shall be independent, neither owned by nor linked to any entity that is engaged in prohibited activities as detailed in clauses 4.2.6 and 4.2.7 of ISO 17065.

5.4 Management of impartiality

5.4.1 CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065:2012

5.4.2 The **CB** shall put in place procedures to ensure that personnel involved in the certification activities are free from conflict of interest and independent from the **client**.

5.4.3 The CB shall identify risks to its impartiality on an on-going basis. This shall include those risks that arise from its activities, from its relationships, or from the relationships of its personnel. However, such relationships may not necessarily present a CB with a risk to impartiality. If a risk to impartiality is identified, the CB shall be able to demonstrate how it eliminates or minimizes such risk. This information shall be made available to the NCCF.

5.4.4 Within a period of 3 years, personnel shall not be used to review, audit or make a certification decision of clients for which they have provided consultancy or worked for.

5.5 Confidentiality (Between CB and NCCF and/or PEFC)

5.5.1 CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

5.5.2 The **CB** shall comply with all applicable privacy and data protection laws.

5.5.3 The **CB** shall commit to a data protection related agreement with the PEFC Council and when appropriate, also with NCCF. The agreement shall specify each party's rights and obligations concerning the protection of personal data. It regulates the particularities of data processing – such as its scope and purpose – as well as the relationship between the controller and the processor.

5.6 Risk based approach

5.6.1 **Certification bodies** operating sustainable forest management certification shall follow a risk-based approach. (Source: ISO 17021-1).

5.7 Legal Requirement

5.7.1 Legal Responsibility: CB Shall conform with the requirements of the ISO/IEC 17065.

- The CB shall have a legally enforceable certification agreement signed by the CB and the client prior to the main evaluation. Certification agreement shall consider the responsibilities of the CB and its clients and the same shall be made available to NABCB or NCCF upon request

5.7.2 The CB shall ensure that its certification agreement requires the clients comply to:

- a. the client shall inform the CB within 10 working days, of changes that may affect its ability to conform with the certification requirements.

Note: Examples of changes can include the following:

- the legal, commercial, organizational status or ownership,
- organization and management (e.g. key managerial, decision-making or technical staff),
- modifications to the product or the production method,
- contact address and production sites,
- major changes to the quality management system.

b. Regarding the obligations of the client

- i. conform with all applicable certification requirements including any conditions set by the CB for granting or maintaining certification;
- ii. disclose current or previous application or certification with any other forestry certification schemes in the last five (5) years, if any;
- iii. agree to the conduct of evaluations at the required intervals, including the CB's right to carry out unannounced or short notice audits; participation of the observers, if applicable.
- iv. agree to witness audits and other surveillance activities of the accreditation body;
- v. agree, that a complaint is first handled according to the CB's dispute resolution procedure and if not resolved, then referred to accreditation body (NABCB) and ultimately to NCCF, in case of disagreement with audit findings related to NCCF normative documents;
- vi. making claims regarding certification consistent with the scope of certification and not making any claims of conformity (or near conformity) with NCCF certification requirements until and unless certification is granted;
- vii. the client does not use its product certification in such a manner as to bring the CB into disrepute and does not make any statement regarding its product certification that the CB may consider misleading or unauthorized;

- viii. the client keeps a record of all complaints made known to it relating to compliance with certification requirements and makes these records available to the CB when requested, and
 - takes appropriate action with respect to such complaints and any deficiencies found in products that affect compliance with the requirements for certification;
 - documents the actions taken;
 - ix. the client provides copies of the certification documents to others, the documents shall be reproduced in their entirety.
 - x. agree, that in case of reduction, suspension or withdrawal of the scope of CB's NCCF accreditation, the certification of the affected clients will be suspended within six (6) months after the date of reduction, suspension or withdrawal of the respective scope of NCCF accreditation;
- c. Regarding the rights of the CB, NABCB and NCCF
- i. agree, that the CB has the right to delay or postpone its decision on certification, in order to take account of new or additional information which has not already been considered in its audit report and which, in the opinion of the CB, could affect the outcome of its evaluation;
 - ii. agree, that the CB shall not be obliged to grant or maintain certification, if activities of the client conflict with the obligations of the CB as specified in its accreditation contract with NABCB, or which, in the sole opinion of the CB, reflect badly on the good name of the CB;
 - iii. agree, that the CB and NCCF have the right to revise the requirements of certification within the period of validity of the certification, including the revision of costs and fees; agree, that the CB, NCCF and NABCB have the right to access confidential information, examine documentation deemed necessary, and access to the relevant equipment, location(s), area(s), personnel, and bodies providing outsourced services to clients;
 - iv. agree, that the CB has the right to use information which is brought to its attention, to follow up on misuses of the NCCF trademarks and of the intellectual property rights held by NCCF;
 - v. acknowledge the title of the NCCF's intellectual property rights and that NCCF retains full ownership of the intellectual property rights and that nothing shall be deemed to constitute a right for the client to use or cause to be used any of the intellectual property rights;
 - vi. agree, that the CB has the right to suspend and/ or withdraw its certification with immediate effect if, in the sole opinion of the CB, the client is not in conformity with the conditions specified for the maintenance of certification;

5.7 Liability and Financing

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

5.8 Non-Discriminatory Conditions

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

5.9 Publicly Available Information (Between CB and NCCF and/or PEFC)

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065.

In addition, the following shall apply:

- a) The CB shall provide a link to the NCCF website and FM certification scheme on its website.
- b) The CB shall provide information about the applicants, certified clients, suspension and withdrawals publicly without request on its website
- c) The CB shall provide without request information on its complaints and appeals procedures.
- d) The CB shall maintain its impartiality statement, (through publications, electronic media or other means), and make available upon request.

6 Structural Requirements

6.1. Organizational structure and top management

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

6.1.1. The management of the CB shall identify the board, group of persons, or person having overall authority and responsibility for each of the following:

- complaint mechanism;
- impartiality of NCCF certification;

6.2. Mechanism for safeguarding Impartiality:

6.2.1. General Requirements

6.2.1.1. The CB shall ensure its integrity always in its verification/certification activities, and shall work in a credible, independent, non-discriminatory and transparent manner.

6.2.1.2. The CB shall act impartially and avoid any conflict of interest that may compromise its ability to make impartial decisions.

6.2.1.3. The CB shall ensure that there are no constraints that might influence its judgment or endanger its independence of judgment in relation to its verification/certification activities, inter alia, by having sufficient human resources, either through internal or external resources, and financial resources and stability.

6.2.1.4. If the CB is part of a larger organization, it shall ensure that no conflict of interest exists between its verification/certification functions and the functions of other parts of the organization.

6.2.1.5. If the CB has related bodies, the CB shall ensure that no conflict of interest exists between its verification/certification functions and the functions of the related bodies.

6.2.1.6. The CB shall ensure that it and its personnel (internal and external) have no relationship that creates threats to its impartiality.

6.2.2. Safeguarding impartiality at the Policy Level

6.2.2.1. The CB shall establish, document and implement a policy on safeguarding impartiality, demonstrating its understanding of the possible influence that can be exerted on it as an organization and/or on its personnel when performing its verification/certification functions, and stressing its commitment to fully address that issue.

6.2.2.2. The CB shall ensure that its policy on safeguarding impartiality is understood and implemented at all levels of the organization.

6.2.2.3. The CB shall ensure its impartiality at the policy level, inter alia, by:

- a. having the top management's commitment to safeguarding impartiality in the CB's verification/certification functions as evidenced through a defined institutional structure and impartiality policy and procedures, appropriate implementation of such policy and procedures and operation and conduct of its activities;
- b. having a statement that describes its understanding of the necessity of impartiality in verification/certification functions, how it manages conflict of interest and how it ensures the objectivity of verification/certification functions;

- c. taking action to respond to any threats to its impartiality arising from the actions of other parts of the organization, persons outside of the organization, outsourced entities, related bodies or other bodies or organizations;
- d. maintaining a professional environment and culture in the organization that supports behavior of all personnel that is consistent with impartiality.
- e. the CB shall make publicly available its policy for safeguarding impartiality.

6.2.3. Safeguarding impartiality at the Organization Level

6.2.3.1. The CB shall have a documented structure that safeguards impartiality of its operations.

6.2.3.2. The CB shall consult stakeholders in evolving its impartiality related policy and procedures and risk analysis.

6.2.3.3. One way of consulting the stakeholders is to have a committee (optional) that safeguards the CB's impartiality in its verification/certification functions and ensures that the policy on safeguarding impartiality and related procedures and other systems are effectively implemented.

6.2.3.4. The impartiality committee (if exist) shall:

- be independent from all verification/certification operations of the CB, and shall report directly to the CB's top management;
- have in its composition the participation of key interested parties with a balanced representation of each of them;
- have a chairman who shall be a person independent from the activities of the certification program;
- have documented terms of reference. This committee shall meet regularly, at least once a year, and a complete record of its proceedings shall be maintained;
- approve the conflict-of-interest analysis and the mitigation measures as well as monitor and review the implementation of the systems to safeguard the CB's impartiality (conflict of interest analysis, procedures and mitigation strategies and actions);
- have access to all verification/certification files or records and be able to review them, if needed. This committee need not intervene in or review each verification/certification activity, but may need to review them to fulfill its mandate;
- prepare an annual synthesis report of its activities, which shall be included in the CB's annual report to the Board to be submitted in accordance with the NCCF accreditation procedure. This report shall be presented to the NABCB upon request.

6.2.3.5. In cases where the impartiality committee identifies issues through the monitoring or review of the implementation of the CB's systems to safeguard impartiality, it shall report the instance to the CB's top management. If the top management does not follow the advice of the impartiality committee, this committee shall have the right to report the instance to the Board through the NCCF secretariat.

6.2.3.6. The CB shall enable a NCCF assessment team, upon request, to observe meetings of the impartiality committee, as part of the CB's accreditation process.

6.2.4. Safeguarding impartiality at the Operational Level

6.2.4.1. Analysis of threats against Impartiality:

- a. The CB shall establish, document, implement and maintain a procedure for analyzing potential threats against impartiality.
- b. The CB is required to carry out a conflict-of-interest analysis at least once a year and whenever a significant change occurs in the CB activities, such as changes in the organizational structure or of the legal status and mergers with or acquisitions of other organizations.
- c. The conflict of interest or risk analysis shall cover all potential situations other than the prohibited activities which do not need any analysis.
- d. In the conflict-of-interest analysis, the following activities of the CB or its related bodies, but not limited to those activities, shall be considered as threats to impartiality:
 - Any involvement in consultancy related to Certification activities;
 - Providing training on NCCF FM activities;
 - Offering/payment of commissions for promotion or new business;
 - Other organizational considerations such as performance targets in financial terms or in terms of a specific number of NCCF certification scheme.
- e. While carrying out the conflict-of-interest analysis, the CB shall:
 - i. Identify and document its actual/proposed involvement in NCCF certification activities other than verification/certification and carry out and document an analysis of actual and potential risk to impartiality;
 - ii. Identify and document all related bodies and identify actual/potential risks to impartiality, including potential conflicts arising from any such relationships;
 - iii. Disclose and document, in a transparent and comprehensive manner, the following information, as a minimum: the general types of activities carried out by the CB, its parent organization, related bodies, and personnel. The disclosure and documentation shall be detailed for all organizations and personnel listed above with regard to activities related to CB project activities;
 - iv. Clearly define the functions of its related bodies and their relationships with the CB when describing its organizational structure. Mitigation of threats against Impartiality.

6.2.4.2. The CB shall establish, document, implement and maintain a procedure for the mitigation of threats against its impartiality.

6.2.4.3. The procedure referred to in above clause shall describe which mitigation strategies and actions are to be taken and how they will be implemented and shall include the review of the mitigation

strategies and actions whenever a change in the conflict-of-interest analysis has occurred. The mitigation actions may be through, inter alia:

- Prohibitions - certain defined activities shall not be carried out;
- Restrictions - certain defined activities may be carried out, but in a restricted manner with clearly defined control points to ensure mitigation;
- Disclosures.

6.2.4.4. The procedure for mitigation shall ensure the following, at a minimum:

- a. The CB shall not conduct the certification of a NCCF scheme if the parent organization, an outsourced entity or a related body has been engaged in any function that has been identified as a threat to impartiality, such as those listed in conflict-of-interest analysis, relating to the NCCF certification Project activity;
- b. The CB shall not outsource any function to an outsourced entity that is engaged in the verification/certification of NCCF certification activity;
- c. The CB's activities shall not be marketed or offered as linked with the activities of an organization that provides services in respect of development, financial assistance and consultancy for NCCF certification activities. The CB shall not state or imply that the verification/certification of a NCCF FM project activity would be simpler, easier, faster or less expensive if a specified consultancy/financing organization is used;
- d. The CB shall require its personnel, internal and external, to reveal any potential conflict of interest known to them. The CB shall use this information as input to identify threats to impartiality raised by the activities of such personnel or by the organizations that employ them, and shall not use such personnel, internal or external, unless any potential conflict of interests has been addressed and the measures taken to address these potential conflicts have been documented and implemented. If during the course of a verification/certification, such instances become known, the personnel concerned shall be removed from the verification/certification immediately;
- e. The CB shall require its personnel, internal and external, to report any situation of influence or pressure from project participants that may threaten their independence during the verification/certification of NCCF Standards. Based on such report, the CB shall take appropriate actions to ensure its independence in its verification/certification activities;
- f. The conditions in the CB's contracts with project participants shall not link the CB's payments to the final outcome of the verification/certification activities;
- g. The CB's personnel involved in verification/certification activities shall be bound by the CB's impartiality policy and act impartially in their work through contractual or employment conditions and assignment conditions for each verification/certification;

6.3. Review of Effectiveness

- 6.3.1. The CB shall analyze and review, at least once a year, all data and information relevant to impartiality, such as the conflict-of-interest analysis, the mitigation strategies and actions undertaken, any non-conformity raised regarding impartiality and the corrective actions implemented to correct the non-conformities.
- 6.3.2. Based on the data/information referred to above, the CB shall carry out, once a year, an analysis of the process to safeguard impartiality and a review of its effectiveness.
- 6.3.3. The recommendations of actions resulting from the review of the process of safeguarding impartiality shall be reported to the CB's top management. The CB shall keep a record of this review.

7 Resource Requirements

7.1. General Considerations

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065.

- 7.1.1. The CB shall ensure that personnel involved in the certification activities have the relevant and appropriate knowledge and competencies corresponding to these activities, including PEFC-specific knowledge.
- 7.1.2. Any personnel involved in PEFC certification shall have at least basic knowledge of the PEFC system and certification criteria appropriate to their roles and responsibilities.
- 7.1.3. The CB shall ensure a workplace that is safe, provides equal opportunities, is non-discriminatory, promotes gender equality, and is free from workplace intimidation and harassment. Appropriate training and internal policies should be implemented.

7.2 Auditors

7.2.1 General

The CB shall have a documented process to ensure that auditors have personal attributes, knowledge, and skills in accordance with the requirements of the PEFC endorsed certification system.

7.2.3 Education

- 7.2.3.1 The CB shall ensure that auditors have the knowledge corresponding to at least a tertiary education in forestry. Note: Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges.

- 7.2.3.2 The CB shall ensure that auditors have taken formal forestry related courses.

7.2.3.3 The specific education relating to forestry (requirement 7.2.3.2) can be substituted by working experience in this sector if the CB can demonstrate it is equivalent to the required education.

7.2.4 Working experience

7.2.4.1 The CB shall ensure that auditors have a minimum of three years of full- time professional experience in a relevant discipline (e.g., forestry and trees outside the forest,).

7.2.4.2 The number of years of total work experience may be reduced by one year if the auditor has completed a tertiary education in forestry.

Note: Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges.

7.2.5 PEFC forest management training

The CB shall ensure that new auditors have received and successfully completed initial training recognized by the PEFC Council on the PEFC endorsed certification system or systems for the country/countries where they conduct audits before they start their auditing activities. Note: The PEFC website provides further information on training options

7.2.6 Audit training

The CB shall ensure that auditors have successfully completed training in audit techniques based on ISO 19011.

7.2.7 Audit experience

For the first qualification of an auditor, the CB shall ensure that the auditor has performed, as auditor-in-training, at least 5 man-days of forest management or equivalent audits (e.g., trees outside the forest, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry or related sector) under the leadership of a qualified audit team leader within the last year.

Note: The 5 man-days period as auditor-in-training should cover different types of audits (initial, surveillance and recertification).

7.2.8 Competencies

7.2.8.1 The CB shall ensure that auditors demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas:

- a) Principles, objectives, requirements, criteria, and indicators of the PEFC forest management standard Benchmarks, PEFC ST 1003, Sustainable Forest Management - Requirements and PEFC ST 1002, Group Forest Management - Requirements as implemented by the PEFC endorsed

certification system, as applicable.

- b) Audit principles, procedures, and techniques, and how to apply them appropriately to different audits while ensuring that audits are conducted in a consistent and systematic manner.
- c) Managing an organization, including organizational size, structure, functions and relationships, general business processes, risk management and cultural and social aspects.
- d) Appropriate knowledge of the socio-demographics, sustainability issues, cultural issues (including gender equality), indigenous interests and values and indigenous treaties, where applicable, and industrial relations in the region of application of the forest management requirements.
- e) Knowledge of legislation, regulations, or other relevant requirements, including:
 - Contracts and agreements and/or collective bargaining agreements (as applicable).
 - Forest governance and law enforcement system of the country, including those covering social, workers and trade union rights and occupational safety and health of workers.
 - International conventions relating to worker rights (ILO core conventions).
 - International treaties and conventions relating to forestry, forest trade, and tree-based products.
- f) The principles of forest management based on techniques, including: inventory, planning, protection, management of forest ecosystems, identification and management of ecologically important forest areas, carbon stocks and biodiversity, as well as technical aspects of forest operations, and their potential impacts.
- g) Understanding of and ability to interpret Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as it applies to forest monitoring and management.
- h) Management and control of online documents, data and records, confidential data, data privacy and protection; and
- i) Application of risk assessment techniques.

7.2.8.2 The CB shall ensure that the audit team consists of individuals who collectively have all the required competencies for the scope of the audit.

7.2.9 Maintenance of the qualification as an auditor

7.2.9.1 PEFC (NCCF) forest management training

7.2.9.1.1 To maintain the auditor qualification, the CB shall ensure that qualified auditors participate in a PEFC (NCCF) forest management refresher training recognized by the PEFC Council whenever a new version of the forest management standard(s) they are qualified to audit, or the standards with requirements for SFM certification bodies, is published.

7.2.9.1.2 The CB shall ensure that such refresher training is successfully completed before conducting audits against the revised standard

7.2.9.2 Audit experience

7.2.9.2.1 To maintain the auditor qualification, the CB shall ensure that the auditor has performed a minimum of 5 man-days of forest management or equivalent audits (e.g. trees outside the forest, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry or related sector,) per year.

7.2.9.2.2 In exceptional circumstances, such as statutory leave, long-term illness, or lack of opportunities to provide certification services, auditors unable to comply with 7.2.9.2.1 shall perform 20 hours of forest management audits under the supervision of a qualified auditor within two years, or undergo a formal evaluation of competencies by the CB prior to the auditor taking back auditing activities.

7.3 Audit team

7.3.1 General requirements

7.3.1.1 The audit team shall comprise auditor(s) fulfilling the requirements defined in 7.2.8.

7.3.1.2 The CB shall have documented procedures for selecting and appointing the audit team, including the audit team leader.

7.3.1.3 The CB shall consider gender balance within the audit team.

7.3.2 Technical experts

7.3.2.1 The CB may engage technical experts to support the audit team. Technical experts shall be independent of the client, and their names, qualifications and affiliations shall be included in the audit report.

7.3.2.2 The CB shall ensure that any potential conflict of interest is declared and managed.

7.3.2.3 The CB shall ensure that technical experts report to the audit team leader, only operate under their scope, do not make certification decisions, and do not create findings.

7.3.3 Translators and interpreters

7.3.3.1 Translators and interpreters used in the audit shall be independent of the client.

7.3.3.2 In cases where independent translators and/or interpreters are not available, the names of the translators and their links with the client shall be included in the audit report.

7.3.3.3 The CB shall make sure that any potential conflict of interest is managed.

7.4 Reviewers and certification decision makers

7.4.1 General

7.4.1.1 The CB shall be responsible for and shall retain authority of its decisions relating to certification.

7.4.1.2 The CB shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker are independent of the audit team and the client.

7.4.1.3 The CB shall ensure that the personnel involved in the reviewing and decision-making process have a legally binding relationship with the CB that covers personnel's compliance with the requirements in this standard.

Note: The reviewer and the certification decision maker may be the same individual.

7.4.2 Education

7.4.2.1 The CB shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker have the knowledge corresponding to at least a tertiary education in forestry. Note: Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges.

7.4.2.2 CB. Certification decisions can be taken by one or more individuals with at least one of them having taken a formal forestry course.

7.4.2.3 The specific education relating to forestry (requirement 7.4.2.2) can be substituted by working experience in this sector if the CB can demonstrate it is equivalent to the required education.

7.4.3 Working experience

7.4.3.1 The CB shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker have relevant experience according to the type of audits to be reviewed.

7.4.3.2 The CB shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker have a minimum of three years of full-time experience in conformity assessment.

7.4.3.3 The number of years of total work experience may be reduced by one year if the reviewer and certification decision maker have completed tertiary education in a relevant discipline (e.g., forestry, trees outside the forest).

Note: Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges.

7.4.3.4 A qualified PEFC forest management auditor is considered as already meeting the minimum working experience required.

7.4.4 PEFC forest management training

7.4.4.1 The CB shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have received initial training recognized by the PEFC Council on the PEFC endorsed NCCF FM certification scheme or systems for the country/countries where they conduct their certification activities.

7.4.4.2 The CB shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have successfully completed the training before they start their certification activities. Note: The PEFC website and/or NCCF website provide further information on training options.

7.4.5 Audit training

7.4.5.1 The CB shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker have successfully

completed training in audit techniques based on ISO 19011.

7.4.6 Audit experience

7.4.6.1. For the first qualification of a reviewer or certification decision maker, the CB shall ensure that the reviewer or the certification decision maker has participated as an observer in forest management or equivalent audits (e.g., trees outside the forest, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry or related sector) covering at least eight hours. The observation shall include the opening meeting, part of the office assessment, part of the field assessment, and the closing meeting.

7.4.7 Competencies

7.4.7.1 The CB shall ensure that the reviewer or certification decision maker demonstrates the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas:

- a) Principles, objectives, requirements, criteria, and indicators of the PEFC forest management standard Benchmarks, PEFC ST 1003, Sustainable Forest Management - Requirements and PEFC ST 1002, Group Forest Management - Requirements as implemented by the PEFC endorsed certification system, as applicable.
- b) Knowledge of the socio-demographics, sustainability issues, and cultural issues (including gender equality), indigenous interests and values and indigenous treaties, where applicable, and industrial relations in the region of application of the forest management requirements.
- c) General knowledge of legislation, regulation, or other relevant requirements pertaining to forest management, labour issues, and data privacy and protection.
- d) The principles of forest management.
- e) Management and control of online documents, data and records, confidential data, data privacy and protection; and
- f) Application of risk assessment techniques.

7.4.7.2 The CB shall ensure that the team of reviewers and certification decision makers consists of individuals who collectively have all the required competencies for the scope of the audit.

7.4.8 Maintenance of the qualification as a reviewer or certification decision maker

7.4.8.1 PEFC forest management training

7.4.8.1.1 To maintain the reviewer or certification decision maker qualification, the CB shall ensure that the qualified reviewer or certification decision maker participates in a PEFC forest management refresher training recognized by the PEFC Council whenever a new version of the PEFC forest management standard(s) they are qualified to conduct their corresponding certification activities against, or the standards with requirements for SFM certification bodies, is published.

7.4.8.1.2 The CB shall ensure that such refresher training is successfully completed before the reviewer or

certification decision maker conducts their certification activities against the revised standard.

7.4.8.2 Audit experience

7.4.8.2.1 To maintain the reviewer or certification decision maker qualification, the CB shall ensure that the qualified reviewer or certification decision maker has participated as an observer in forest management or equivalent audits (e.g. trees outside the forest, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry or related sector) covering at least 16 hours every two years, and includes part office assessment, part field assessment, and a closing meeting.

Note: The observation may take place remotely using ICT.

7.5 Personnel records and annual monitoring

7.5.1 The CB shall maintain records of personnel’s compliance with the requirements of this chapter.

Note: Records can be available in digital format.

7.5.2 The CB shall monitor the performance of forest management auditors annually, applying methods such as reviewing audit reports or clients’ feedback, etc., based on the frequency with which they conduct audits and the level of risk linked to their activities.

7.5.3 As part of the monitoring, the CB shall conduct an observation of each forest management auditor at least every five years.

7.5.4 The CB shall maintain documented information on the performance of forest management auditors.

7.5.5 The CB shall use the monitoring of auditor performance and observations to identify training needs.

Table1: Overview of qualification requirements

	Auditor	Reviewer and certification decision maker
E d u c a t i o n	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For Forest Management(FM)Standard: Tertiary education(college or university qualification) in forestry. For ToF Standard: Educational qualification (college/university degree) in forestry/ agriculture/ agroforestry/ life sciences/ environmental science. 	

<p>W o r k i n g e x p e r i e n c e</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of three years of full-time professional experience in a relevant discipline (e.g., forestry, trees outside the forest,). • May be reduced by one year if the auditor has completed a tertiary education in forestry, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant experience according to the type of the audits to be reviewed. • Minimum of three years of full-time experience in conformity assessment. • May be reduced by one year if the reviewer and certification decision maker have completed a tertiary education in a relevant discipline (e.g., forestry, trees outside the forest,). • A qualified PEFC forest management auditor is considered as already meeting the minimum working experience required.
<p>T r a i n i n g</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful completion of IRCA-registered or equivalent (e.g. QCI registered) “ISO management standard auditor course” ISO 9001:2015 and trained in ISO 19011 course on auditing techniques ensuring that the auditor satisfies and fulfills the requirements of both the standards. • Successful completion of NCCF auditor training. 	
<p>A u d i t e x p e r i e n c e</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The auditor has performed, as auditor- in-training, at least 5 man-days of forest management or equivalent audits under the leadership of a qualified audit team leader within the last year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reviewer or the certification decision maker has participated as an observer in forest management or equivalent audits covering at least eight hours. The observation shall include the opening meeting, part of the office assessment, part of the field assessment, and the closing meeting.
<p>C o m p</p>	<p>See requirement 7.2.8</p>	<p>See requirement 7.4.7</p>

e t e n c i e s		
Maintenance of the qualification		
T r a i n i n g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresher training recognized by the PEFC Council whenever a new version of the PEFC forest management standard(s) they are qualified to conduct their corresponding certification activities against, or the standards with requirements for SFM certification bodies, is published. • Refresher training is successfully completed before conducting certification activities against the revised standard. 	

Au dit ex pe rie nc e	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 5 man-days of forest management or equivalent audits per year. • In exceptional circumstances such as statutory leave, long-term illness or inability of opportunities to provide certification services, auditors unable to comply with 7.2.9.2.1 shall perform 20 hours of forest management audits under the supervision of a qualified auditor within two years, or a formal evaluation of competencies by the CB prior to the auditor taking back auditing activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate as an observer in forest management or equivalent audits covering at least 16 hours every two years, and includes part office assessment, part field assessment, and a closing meeting.
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8. Information requirements

8.1 Public information (reg. CB and Client)

8.1.1 General

8.1.1.1 On request, the **CB** shall provide **clients** and potential **clients** with details of their fee structure and the estimated cost of obtaining and maintaining certification.

8.2 Certification documents

8.2.1 Certification documents (CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065)

8.2.1.1 The **certificate** shall include, as a minimum, the following information:

- a) identification of the **CB**
- b) name and address of the **client**
- c) unique certificate code
- d) type of **certificate** (individual or group forest)
- e) place and date of issue
- f) the date of granting, extending or renewing certification and the expiry date or recertification due date
- g) logo and/or signature of issuing party
- h) scope of certification and standard or standards against which certification is issued
- i) accreditation mark of the **accreditation body** as prescribed by the accreditation number (including accreditation number where applicable)
- j) the logo of the **PEFC endorsed NCCF FM certification scheme** and the PEFC logo with the CB's PEFC trademarks licence number (with a link to the PEFC website and a note that indicates that information on endorsed systems by PEFC is publicly available on the [PEFC website](#)); and,
- k) a note indicating that the updated information on the number of hectares covered by the **certificate** and the number of **participants** (if **group forest certificate**) can be checked on the PEFC database

8.2.1.2 The effective date on a certification document shall not be before the date of the certification decision.

8.2.1.3 The certificate code shall be comprised of four pieces of information, each of them separated by a dash, in this order: AAA-PEFC NCCF-FM-##### (-#), where:

- AAA is the abbreviation of the **CB**. "AAA" is a variable length upper-case abbreviation of the **CB** that issued the **certificate**. It only contains upper case English alphabet characters (A-Z) without any spacing. "CC" is the ISO 3166 Alpha 2 country code (<https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#search>) used to differentiate national CB offices from their central office.
- PEFC: PEFC is the abbreviation of Programme for endorsement of Forest Certification
- NCCF: NCCF is the abbreviation of Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests.

- For **PEFC endorsed NCCF ToF certification system**, the FM abbreviation can be replaced by ToF accordingly.
- #####: The numeric identification of the certified entity given by the **CB**.
- (-#) Optionally, the numeric identification of the group **participant** given by the **CB**, if any.

Note 1: The brackets () should not be included in the certificate number, they are for indication only.

Note 2: The **CB** can decide on the numeric identification, in terms of length and digits, and also of the optional numeric identification of the group **participants**.

Example 1: XWZ-PEFC NCCF-FM-877506 (XWZ is a hypothetical abbreviation for a non-existing **CB**).

8.2.1.4 The **CB** shall coordinate its abbreviation with the PEFC Council or NCCF prior to use. Two **certification bodies** shall not have the same abbreviation.

Note: The accepted abbreviation for a **CB** is displayed on the PEFC website, under the [Find Certification Bodies](#) section.

8.2.1.5 **Certification bodies** shall use the same abbreviation with all certificate codes on any PEFC recognized **certificate** they issue against a PEFC endorsed forest management standard.

8.2.1.6 If an individual **certificate** covers several forest areas, those areas shall be described on the **certificate**, or an appendix to the **certificate**. Otherwise, the **certificate** shall include a reference to the PEFC database or the corresponding **PEFC recognized database** for the information related to the **certified areas**.

Note: **PEFC recognized databases** are available from the PEFC International database, accessible from the [PEFC website](#).

8.3 Reference to certification and use of marks

8.3.1 Where the **CB** uses the PEFC trademarks on the certification document, or for any other purposes linked to the **PEFC endorsed NCCF FM certification scheme**, the use shall only be carried out based on a valid licence issued by the PEFC Council or NCCF, and in accordance with PEFC ST 2001, *PEFC Trademarks Rules – Requirements*.

8.3.2 The **CB** shall advise the **client** that the PEFC trademarks on the issued **certificate** only refer to the client's compliance with the **PEFC endorsed NCCF FM certification scheme** and do not confer any right to the **client** to use those trademarks unless the **client** holds a valid PEFC trademark licence.

Note: The **client** can obtain a PEFC trademark licence from the PEFC Council or the NCCF based on the country where the **client** has its headquarters.

8.4 Confidentiality (reg. CB and Client)

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

8.4.1 The **CB** shall limit the collection of personal data from the **client** to what is essential for the

certification purposes. The collection of personal data shall always be conducted in compliance with any applicable legislation.

Note: A way to achieve this is by providing generic information as contact person, and generic emails instead of personal emails, e.g., certification manager, certificationmanager@xmail.com.

8.5 Information exchange between the CB and NCCF

8.5.1 The **CB** shall immediately inform the NCCF, when certification is granted, suspended, terminated, withdrawn, its scope is changed or any other changes affecting the certification or the information that **certification bodies** shall report to PEFC.

8.5.2 The **CB** shall collect and report information, as required by the NCCF.

8.5.3 The **CB** shall verify the area in hectares at each audit and advise NCCF of any change at least annually.

8.5.4 On request, the **CB** shall provide to NCCF any information related to the certification process and the **client**, such as the full audit report or information on open nonconformities, when there is a concern of reputational risk for PEFC.

8.6 Engagement of affected stakeholders

8.6.1 General

8.6.1.1 The **CB** shall verify the effectiveness of the client's process for the engagement of **affected stakeholders** during the audit process.

8.6.1.2 During the audit process, the **CB** shall consider the information, if any, provided by the **affected stakeholders**.

Note: This engagement process is not intended to bypass the regular complaints process of the **client** and the **CB**.

8.6.2 Engagement process for affected stakeholders

8.6.2.1 The **CB** shall have documented procedures for the engagement of **affected stakeholders**. This procedure shall ensure that any such engagement does not adversely impact impartiality, independence, and confidentiality with respect to the operations of the **CB** or the **client**.

8.6.2.2 The **CB's** procedure for the engagement of **affected stakeholders** shall include the following steps:

- a) verification of the effectiveness of the identification of stakeholders by the **client**
- b) ensuring public notification of the audit by the **client**
- c) engagement with **affected stakeholders** during the audit process, as necessary
- d) summary of the affected stakeholder engagement process in the summary audit reports

8.6.3 Identification of affected stakeholders

8.6.3.1 The **CB** shall require the **client** to provide, in advance of the audit:

- a) information on the client's identification of **affected stakeholders**
- b) the relevant needs and expectations of these stakeholders

Note: PEFC ST 1003, *Sustainable Forest Management - Requirements*, requires in clause 4.2 that the PEFC SFM certification holders shall determine the relevant needs and expectations of the **affected stakeholders**. b) refers to such identification, as reflected in the applicable **PEFC endorsed NCCF FM certification scheme**.

c) how they are considered within the forest management

8.6.3.2 The **CB** shall consider such information when planning the audit.

8.6.4 Public notification of the audit

8.6.4.1 The **CB** shall ensure that the dates of an initial or recertification audit are publicized to **affected stakeholders**, no less than 30 days prior to the audit.

8.6.4.2 The announcement may be made by the **client** or by the **CB** itself.

8.6.4.3 The announcement shall explain that during the audit process, the auditors will assess the client's engagement with **affected stakeholders** and shall require the **client** to seek expressions of interest, in writing, from **affected stakeholders**.

8.6.5 Engagement with affected stakeholders during the audit process

8.6.5.1 The **CB** shall consider feedback received and evaluate its relevance to the assessment of the certification requirements. The **CB** shall consult with **affected stakeholders** as part of the audit process, as appropriate to the feedback received and to any requirements of the standards.

8.6.5.2 The **CB** shall employ effective, culturally appropriate means to consult **affected stakeholders**.

8.6.5.3 The **audit plan** should allocate sufficient time for engagement with **affected stakeholders**.

8.6.6 Summary of affected stakeholder engagement process in summary audit reports

8.6.6.1 The summary audit report shall describe the **affected stakeholder** engagement process, including how affected stakeholder's comments were taken into account and any issues arising from the process.

8.6.6.2 The **CB** shall ensure that the summary audit report does not include any confidential information provided by the **affected stakeholders**.

9. Process requirements

9.1 Pre-certification activities

9.1.1 Application

9.1.1.1 CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065.

9.1.1.2 The **CB** shall require the applicant **client** to provide the following information as part of the application for forest management certification:

- a) Name and address of applicant **client**, corporate entity (if applicable), and legal status (including legal business registration).
- b) Whether it is an individual or a **group forest certificate**.

- c) Area proposed for certification.
- d) Brief description of the forest proposed for certification and its management.
- e) Summary of technical facilities or resources (e.g., chemical storage, depots, maintenance facilities, firefighting facilities, administrative offices, etc.).
- f) Any relevant information to assess if the application is to be treated as a transfer of certification instead of a new application.
- g) Declaration on the participation of the applicant **client** or the legal predecessor in PEFC or in another certification system for the purpose of forest management in the last five years. This shall include, but not be limited to, suspension, withdrawal, or termination of the certification in the last five years, identified nonconformities, certification decision, justification and any corrective actions that may have been taken and their resolutions.
- h) Name of consultant/s engaged for PEFC certification implementation purposes, if any.

Note 1: The information does not have to be obtained at first contact with the applicant **client**, but at least before the application review takes place.

Note 2: The **CB** may require additional information.

9.1.2 Application review (CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065)

9.1.2.1 The **CB** shall consider applications when all information listed under 9.1.1 has been provided.

Note: 9.1.2.13, 9.1.2.14 and 9.1.2.15 describe the requirements that the **CB** shall follow when the application is a transfer of an existing **certificate** from one **CB** to another and not a new application.

9.1.2.2 The **CB** shall have a documented procedure for the review of applications.

9.1.2.3 The **CB** shall ensure that the application review identifies and assesses the complexity and scale of the activities covered by the forest management subject to certification.

9.1.2.4 The **CB** shall have a documented procedure to ensure that it has the competence and capability to provide certification services to the applicant **client**.

9.1.2.5 The **CB** shall maintain a record of the justification for the decision to accept an application.

9.1.2.6 The **CB** shall refuse to provide certification services if it lacks the competence or capability to do so.

9.1.2.7 Prior to acceptance, the **CB** shall define criteria for the acceptance of the applicant **client**.

9.1.2.8 The criteria for acceptance shall identify any current or historical engagement in **corrupt practices** of the applicant **client**, or any legal predecessor.

9.1.2.9 The **CB** shall evaluate the applicant **client** against the criteria, including, when relevant, any legal predecessors, and keep records of the evaluation. The evaluation shall determine the suitability of the applicant **client** for certification prior to acceptance.

9.1.2.10 The **CB** shall reject applications where there is evidence of current engagement in **corrupt**

practices.

- 9.1.2.11** In the case of historical engagement in **corrupt practices**, the **CB** shall not accept the application unless there is evidence that the engagement in **corrupt practices** has stopped and that the applicant **client** or its legal predecessor is not subject to any ongoing investigation and/or sanctions.
- 9.1.2.12** The **CB** shall assess the information provided by the applicant **client** on its participation, or its legal predecessor's participation, in PEFC or in another certification system for the purpose of forest certification. If participation in PEFC or another certification system was suspended, withdrawn, or terminated, the **CB** shall investigate the commitment and capacity of the applicant **client** to comply with PEFC certification requirements. If the investigation shows an inability or significant likelihood of failure to comply, the application shall not be further processed until the applicant **client** has demonstrated that it has the ability and commitment to comply.
- 9.1.2.13** When the **CB** determines that the application is to be treated as a transfer of an existing **certificate** issued by another accredited **CB**, the **CB** shall operate according to IAF MD2.
- 9.1.2.14** In the case of transfer of certification, the **CB** shall ensure that any open **major nonconformities** are closed prior to accepting the transfer of the **certificate**.
- 9.1.2.15** Transfer of certification is only possible if the accepting **CB** is recognized by PEFC for the same system and according to the same accreditation standard.
- 9.1.2.16** The **CB** shall communicate to the applicant **client** the result of the application review in writing. If the application is rejected, the **CB** shall provide the justification to the applicant **client** in writing.

9.1.3 Audit programme

- 9.1.3.1** The **CB** shall develop an **audit programme** that covers at least a certification cycle. The **audit programme** shall be maintained as **documented information**.
- 9.1.3.2** The **CB** shall confirm the **audit programme** with the **client**. The **CB** shall ensure that the **client** agrees with the way the audit will be conducted and the schedule of the audit.
- 9.1.3.3** The certification cycle shall not exceed five years.
- 9.1.3.4** When defining the **audit programme**, the **CB** shall consider the information and the results of the application review and the information from prior audits, where applicable.

Note: Guidance for preparing the **audit programme** is provided by ISO 19011, clause 5.

- 9.1.3.5** The **CB** shall identify season-specific activities and ensure that these are covered within the five-year **audit programme**.

Example: Season-specific activities are, e.g., forest establishment, seeding and planting or forest fire reduction and related site preparation activities, or inventory that may only happen at a certain season.

- 9.1.3.6** The **CB** shall include in each audit (surveillance audits and initial and recertification audits) an

assessment of any requirements that cover the following areas, as appropriate:

- a) forest conversion and requirements related to degraded forest
- b) maintenance, conservation, or enhancement of biodiversity and significantly high carbon stock
- c) requirements related to ecologically important forest areas
- d) compliance with fundamental ILO conventions
- e) legal compliance obligations
- f) Indigenous peoples' rights, customary and traditional rights related to the forest land
- g) health, safety and working conditions

9.1.3.7 Where the **CB** considers that feedback is critical to assess the client's compliance with certification requirements that may impact **affected stakeholders**, such as those related to human rights, local communities, customary and traditional rights related to forest land, and health, safety and working conditions, or any other requirements, the **CB** shall seek feedback from **affected stakeholders**.

9.1.4 Risk-based approach

9.1.4.1 The **CB** shall determine and document the risk profile associated with each **client**.

9.1.4.2 The **CB** shall periodically review the risk profile and adjust the **audit programme** and the **audit plans** accordingly.

9.1.4.3 The **CB** shall ensure that the **audit programme** and **audit plans** for each **client** are developed in consideration of the client's risk profile.

9.1.4.4 The **PEFC endorsed certification system** shall specify the indicators to be considered as part of the risk assessment.

Note 1: The risk profile will assist in determining the duration of the initial and Stage 2 (certification) assessments and the development of the **audit programme** and **audit plans**, including surveillance and recertification assessments.

Note 2: Information on how to conduct a risk assessment can be found in ISO 31000.

9.1.5 Determining audit time

9.1.5.1 The **CB** shall have a procedure to calculate audit time as defined by the **PEFC endorsed NCCF FM certification system**.

9.1.5.2 The **CB** shall determine the audit time, and the justification for the determination shall be maintained as **documented information**.

9.1.5.3 Determination of audit time by a CB

- The CB shall have documented procedures for determining audit time, and for each client organization the CB shall determine, with input from the auditor and / or technical expert, the time needed to plan and accomplish a complete and effective audit of the client organization's forest management. The audit time determined by the CB, and the justification for the determination, shall be recorded.
- In determining the audit time, the CB should consider among other things, the following aspects:
 - a) the requirements of the forest management standard(s),
 - b) size and complexity of the client organization's operation, geographical and natural conditions
 - c) any outsourcing of any activities included in the scope of forest management standard,
 - d) the results of any prior audits, including those of client organisation's management systems,
 - e) number of sites and multi-site considerations,
 - f) quality/ level of confidence of the internal monitoring programme.
 - g) area covered by the certificate and changes to the certified area
 - h) forest types, locations, silviculture and geography
 - i) number of participants, size and structure
 - j) number of effective full
 - k) time workers (including contractors and subcontractors)
 - l) number and location of offices, depots, workshops, visitors' facilities, fire towers and/or other infrastructure that is fundamental to the management of the forest
 - m) season-specific activities
 - n) other issues such as surrounding transport, roads, and sale of forest products, if applicable
 - o) management system, including complaints resolution process, the effectiveness of the client's internal monitoring, internal audit and review processes
 - p) risk indicators and results from the risk assessment as per 9.1.4.
 - q) geolocation of the forest management unit and potential checks using remote sensing tools to identify risk for deforestation or degradation within the area

Table 2: Number of Audit days on-site as per Forest Area

Forest Area	Number of audit days On-site
< 1000 ha	1 to 2
1,001 – 5,000 ha	2 to 4
5,001- 10,000 ha	4 to 8
10,001 – 25,000 ha	8 to 12
25,001 – 75,000 ha	12 to 16
75,001- 150,000 ha	16 to 18
1,50,001 – 3,00,000 ha	18 to 22
3,00,001 – 6,00,000 ha	22 to 26
6,00,001-10,00,000 ha	26 to 32
>10,00,000 ha	32 to 40

The above is an indicative table with the range of on-site audit days for calculating audit days on field. It is most probable that the calculated on-site audit days by individual CB will be within the mentioned range, however, CB can modify the audit days, if required, with a proper justification.

The audit days can only be decreased on in the following cases –

- a. The site is very small to the number of personnel (for e.g. forest complex only)
- b. Mature system and no outstanding Major and Minor non- conformities from previous year audit.
- c. Pre-assessments or pre-preparedness audits
- d. Single generic activities

9.1.6 Sampling

9.1.6.1 The CB shall develop a sampling plan that considers the risk assessment results.

9.2 Planning of Audits

9.2.1 Determining audit objectives, scope and criteria

- i. The CB shall clearly define the scope, the extent and boundaries of the audit, such as participants, sites, organizational units, activities and processes to be audited.
- ii. The **CB** shall plan the tools and audit techniques that will be used during the audit. It shall be clearly defined for which purpose the tools and techniques are used and which requirements are covered by which tools and techniques, if applicable.

iii. The **CB** shall consider the following criteria when defining the scope:

- a) Representation: the client's operations and processes shall be randomly but representatively considered. The **CB** shall determine the processes that it considers important to be evaluated. The effectiveness of these processes shall be reflected in the audit report.
- b) Protection: areas with high impact on the achievement of the objectives of the forest management standard and identified ecologically important forest areas shall be considered.
- c) Correction: high risk areas and areas with previously identified nonconformities shall be considered.
- d) Prevention: the areas to be audited shall be determined by the **CB** after its risk assessment.

9.2.2 Audit plan

9.2.2.1 The **CB** shall have documented procedures to establish a risk-based audit plan for each audit and selected **participant**. The **audit plan** shall provide the basis to conduct and schedule the audit activities.

9.2.2.2 The **CB** shall consider existing complaints and **substantiated concerns** when planning the audit.

9.2.2.3 The **audit plan**, including the dates for the audits, shall be communicated no less than ten days in advance and agreed upon with the **client**.

Note: Guidance for preparing the **audit plan** is provided by ISO 19011:2018, clause 6.3.2.

9.2.2.4 The **CB** shall define the timelines for the submission of the audit report by the **CB** to the **client** for confirmation of the findings.

Note: The **CB** may increase the timelines for submission of the audit report in circumstances where more time is needed to assess fully the information that has come to hand during an audit. In such circumstances, the **CB** shall advise the **client** accordingly and provide written justification for the additional time. The **CB** shall note any such change in the summary audit report.

9.3 Initial certification

9.3.1 Stage 1

9.3.1.1 The Stage 1 audit has the function of a document and "readiness" review. The scope of this Stage 1 audit shall comprise, at least:

- a) Confirming the scope and objective of the certification audit.
- b) Confirming the **participants**, locations, and activities covered by the sustainable forest management system.
- c) Auditing the client's forest management documentation.

- d) Evaluation of any forest management area specific conditions, as applicable.
- e) Evaluating the client's procedures for internal audits and management system integrity and the effectiveness of their implementation.
- f) Determining the conformity of the client's procedures for using the PEFC trademarks and using the PEFC endorsed certification system trademarks, if applicable.
- g) Evaluating the client's identification of **affected stakeholders**, their needs and expectations, and how those are considered within the forest management, and consider feedback received from **affected stakeholders** during the public notification of the audit and evaluate its relevance.
- h) Determining risks to be considered in the Stage 2 audit.
- i) Finalising the **audit plan** for the Stage 2 audit.

9.3.1.2 The Stage 1 audit may be conducted remotely using **ICT**, according to 9.4.3.

9.3.1.3 Preparation for main evaluation

- ❖ The CB shall use the results of pre-evaluations in the preparation of a subsequent main evaluation.
- ❖ Preparation for main evaluation shall include:
 - The CB shall inform NCCF at least 45 days prior to the onsite visit of main- evaluation. The NCCF shall release a 30 days stakeholder announcement via NCCF Website which states the client's intention to pursue the NCCF Certification. The stakeholder announcement shall invite stakeholders to meet with audit team, or to submit written submission if preferred.
 - Stakeholders comments/response pertaining to the client's operations and certification shall be addressed by the CB as a part of main evaluation report.
 - For stakeholder announcement, the CB shall provide the following information to NCCF:
 - Name of client;
 - Name and Contact Details of CB;
 - Name and address of sites to be audited;
 - Description of evaluation are;
 - Type of forest Area;
 - HCV area (if declared/disclosed)
 - A brief outline of the process that stakeholders should follow to meet the audit team or submission of comments.
 - an explicit analysis of the overall responsibility for full compliance with the applicable NCCF forest

management requirements (e.g. by land owner, resource manager) as well as of the delegated responsibilities for the implementation of selected requirements (e.g. by contractors).

- Documents and records: The CB shall collect copies of key documents or records that may be used in preparation for the main evaluation, such as management plans, inventory results, management system documentation, maps, legal documents, etc.
- National legislation and guidance: The CB shall identify and obtain copies of relevant national and local laws and administrative requirements which apply in the country or region in which the evaluation is to take place.
- Potential main evaluation team members: The CB may contact, interview and/or brief potential personnel for a subsequent main evaluation.

9.3.2 Stage 2

9.3.2.1 The **CB** shall assess the client's implementation of the system requirements, including its forest management system, processes, and procedures. The Stage 2 audit shall include an in-the-forest assessment of the client's forest management activities. Where appropriate, the **CB** may conduct parts of the Stage 2 audit remotely using **ICT**, in accordance with 9.4.3.

Note: Examples of elements of the **audit plan** where **ICT** could be used are interviews with employees, and review of information in electronic format.

9.3.2.2 The **audit plan** for the Stage 2 audit shall be adapted based on any **substantiated concerns** and the findings from the review conducted in the Stage 1 audit.

9.3.2.3 Stage 2 Audit: Main Evaluation

- ❖ Stage 2 shall take place at the office and the area of the client organisation. The audit plan for the stage 2 audit is adapted based on the findings of the stage 1 audit and shall be submitted to the client at least three weeks before the onsite audit.
- ❖ The CB shall conduct an explicit analysis of the area included in the scope of the evaluation in term of forest management units and the structure and system in place. This will form the basis for the subsequent evaluation of the management and for sampling of the population of forest management units.
- ❖ The CB shall assess the documentation and records applicable at each level of the management and display conformance to the standard requirements (Refer Annex 3 for the suggestive list of documents).
- ❖ The CB shall evaluate the tracking and tracing of forest products within the scope of the certification from the forest area up to the forest gate and the procedure for the identification of products

- ❖ The CB shall select the forest management units (FMUs) for the evaluations as followings –
- Classify the FMUs in the scope of evaluation as sets of ‘like’ FMUs for sampling, based on the forest type, management type, natural vs. plantations, etc.
- For each set of ‘like’ FMUs, the CB shall select a minimum number of units ‘S’ for evaluation by applying the following formula –

Table 3. Sample Category and number of management units to be evaluated

Sample category	Size Class (ha)- (X)	Main evaluation	Surveillance	Re-evaluation
Category (A) Management Units (State Government Forest/ JFMCs/VFCs)	>15,000	$S = X$	$S = 0.7 * X$	$S = 0.7 * X$
	1,000-15,000	$S = 0.4 * X$	$S = 0.2 * X$	$S = 0.3 * X$
Category (B) Management Units (Famers/Individuals/ Community)	100-1,000	$S = 0.8 * \sqrt{X}$	$S = 0.6 * \sqrt{X}$	$S = 0.6 * \sqrt{X}$
	Less than 100	$S = 0.6 * \sqrt{X}$	$S = 0.3 * \sqrt{X}$	$S = 0.4 * \sqrt{X}$

- S is the management units that must be evaluated and must be rounded to the upper whole number to determine the number of units to be sampled.
- X is the total number of the management units in a set of categories.
- ❖ The auditors shall visit a sufficient variety and number of sites within each FMU selected for evaluation as to make direct, factual observations as to conformity with the requirements of the NCCF standard. Examples of sites that may be assessed are listed in Annexure 4.
- ❖ Auditors shall also select sites for inspection based on the critical areas of risks, high intensity managed forests, etc.
- ❖ Stage 2 shall assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the forest management standard on the defined forest management area.

9.4 Conducting audits

9.4.1 Conducting the opening meeting

In cases where some or all elements of the audit are conducted remotely, the **CB** may conduct the opening meetings remotely using **ICT** according to IAF MD4, and any other requirements established by this standard.

9.4.2 Conducting the closing meeting

9.4.2.1 The audit team leader shall conduct a closing meeting with the certification management and senior management of the **client** to present the audit findings, and any recommendations related to continued certification. The list of attendees in this meeting shall be recorded.

9.4.2.2 The audit team leader shall ensure that the **client** is able to understand the conclusions and especially all the nonconformities found.

9.4.2.3 In cases where some or all elements of the audit are conducted remotely, the **CB** may conduct the formal closing meeting remotely using **ICT** according to IAF MD4 and any other requirements established by this standard.

9.4.3 Remote audits

9.4.3.1 The **CB** may use, where appropriate, **ICT** methods to conduct remote audits for:

- a) Stage 1 of the initial certification
- b) elements of the surveillance audits or a full surveillance audit
- c) **special audits**
- d) non-field parts of Stage 2 of the initial certification audit
- e) non-field parts of the recertification audit

Example: Non-field parts of Stage 2 of the initial audit or recertification audit are the closing meeting, closure of nonconformities or administrative work.

9.4.3.2 Audits may include **ICT** methods beyond requirement 9.4.3.1 when exceptional circumstances do not allow the auditors to conduct an in-field visit of the **client**.

Note: Exceptional circumstances include restrictions because of national or local rules or health risks.

9.4.3.3 The **CB** shall have documented procedures for conducting remote audits or parts of audits remotely using **ICT**, which includes, as a minimum:

- a) criteria and indicators to assess the appropriateness of the use of **ICT**
- b) risks associated with its use and how they may impact audit effectiveness
- c) available technology and how it will be used
- d) eligibility criteria of the **client** (e.g., accessibility of digital files, access to documented management system)
- e) **client** capacities

9.4.3.4 The **CB** shall conduct an assessment of the risks and opportunities associated with the use of **ICT** and the justification of their use. The **CB** shall maintain **documented information** on this assessment.

9.4.3.5 Certification processes may include **ICT** when:

- a) The effectiveness and/or efficiency of the audit can be increased with **ICT** while maintaining the integrity of the audit/assessment process.
- b) The **CB** can justify that the audit techniques used deliver sufficient confidence in the client's compliance with the certification criteria.
- c) The **CB's** assessment as per 9.4.3.4, according to its procedure to conduct remote audits as per 9.4.3.3, results in a low risk when conducting the audit or part of the audit remotely.
- d) The **client** has a centrally controlled management system accessible remotely and provides the **CB** with the necessary records to conduct the audit or parts to the audit remotely.

9.4.3.6 The **CB** shall ensure that auditors using **ICT** have been provided with appropriate training and are qualified for the use of **ICT**.

9.4.3.7 The **CB** shall seek confirmation of acceptance from the **client** prior to the use of **ICT** during the audit.

9.4.3.8 Prior to the audit, the **CB** shall define the **ICT** to be used and ensure its efficiency and effectiveness through testing and any other appropriate means.

9.4.4 Audit Report

- Report on the Stage 1 audit along with findings shall be presented to the organization prior to the Stage 2 audit.
- The content of all reports on Stage 2 audits, surveillance audits and reassessment audits shall:
 - i. include a recommendation on certification by the audit team to the **CB**;
 - ii. be sufficient for the **CB** to make an informed decision on certification;
 - iii. allow for traceability of the objective evidence upon which the evaluation was based to establish conformance or non-conformance with the requirements of the forest management standard;
 - iv. include a summary of the most important observations, positive as well as negative, regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the forest management system;

- v. where possible, include suggestions for continuous improvement;
 - vi. support the conclusions reached by the audit team.
- Additionally, the report shall contain a summary of the certified forest area and the audit results(i.e. a Summary Report).
 - CB shall submit the draft report to client within 45 days of audit for review of findings and factual correction. Client must submit their confirmation to CB on Draft Report within 30 days of submission.
 - CB shall submit the Final Report to client within 75 days of date of audit.
 - Where applicable, reports (e.g. of surveillance and recertification audits) shall document the clearing of each nonconformity revealed previously.
 -

9.4.5 Technical Review of Audit Report

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

- a. The CB shall ensure that the reviewer is competent to review the documents and taking final decision.

9.5.6 Identifying and recording audit findings

- a. The CB shall inform the client of all non-conformities. Audit findings shall be classified as Major Nonconformities, Minor Nonconformities and Observations. Definitions of Major, Minor or Observations shall be followed while grading the non-conformities.
- b. If Major Non-Compliances are issued in Evaluation Audit or Re-certification Audit, CB shall not issue the Certificate until unless Major Non-compliances are satisfactorily closed. If the client doesn't address the Major Non-conformity within 6 months of detection, then another on-site evaluation shall be required.
- c. Major and minor nonconformities identified in the surveillance audits shall result in corrective action(s) by the client organization resolving the nonconformities. The corrective action plan, including a timeframe shall be reviewed and accepted by the CB. The time period for completion of the corrective action(s) for major nonconformities identified in surveillance audits and their verification by the CB shall follow the rules of the CB but not exceed 3 months. Corrective action(s) for minor nonconformities shall be verified in 12 months or next audit whichever is earlier. If Minor Non-Compliance(s) is not closed within 12 months, then CB shall upgrade the Minor Non-compliance into Major Non-compliance with 3 months' time.
- d. Corrective action(s) for all nonconformities identified in audits shall be verified by the CB by site visit or other appropriate forms of verification.

- e. The standard requires that if specific natural conditions do not allow the implementation of corrective actions of Major non-conformities within the timeframes, the CB can give an exemption. The maximum time-period is 6 months and the justification shall be documented.
- f. The audit evidence to determine the conformity with the forest management standard shall include relevant information from external parties (e.g. government agencies, community groups, conservations organizations, etc.) as appropriate.
- g. If 5 or more Major Non-compliances are issued in surveillance audit, then CB shall suspend the Certificate of client and it'll be reinstated only after successful closure of all Major-Non- Compliances.

9.4.7 Summary audit report

9.4.7.1 In addition to the audit report, the **CB** shall prepare a summary of the audit report.

9.4.7.2 The summary audit report shall include, as a minimum, the following information:

- a) Name and description of the **CB**, the client's name and description, and the report's date.
- b) Number of hectares at the time of the audit.
- c) Description of the **certified area**.
- d) Audit scope, objectives, and process, including standard/s and applied certification criteria, a summary of risk assessment, and if remote technology is used, technology and justification for the use.
- e) Summary of the **audit plan**, including dates, stakeholder engagement process, locations and activities assessed, audit duration (split by proportion spent on-site and remotely – where relevant) and number of **participants** on the audit team, its qualifications and experience.
- f) Audit results:
 - i. summary of findings demonstrating conformity or nonconformity
 - ii. brief description of any **major nonconformities** and verification of the effectiveness of the actions taken to address the nonconformities
 - iii. brief description of **minor nonconformities**
 - iv. evaluation of the effectiveness of the action taken to address any **minor nonconformities** in previous audit reports, and
 - v. recommended certification decision

9.4.7.3 The summary audit report shall not include confidential data.

9.4.7.4 The **CB** shall provide a copy of the summary audit report to the **client**, the PEFC Council, and/or NCCF.

9.4.7.5 On request by either the **client**, the PEFC Council, or NCCF, the **CB** shall provide a copy of the summary audit report in English.

9.4.7.6 The summary audit report shall be made publicly available on the PEFC database, which is externally accessible through the [PEFC website](#).

9.4.8 Cause analysis of nonconformities

9.4.8.1 The **CB** shall classify nonconformities identified during the audit as major and minor.

9.4.8.2 The **CB** shall require the **client** to:

- determine the root cause of the nonconformity
- develop a corrective action plan to address the identified cause
- specify a timeframe for completion, and
- assign responsibilities for the implementation of the action plan

9.4.8.3 Before the action plan is implemented, the **CB** shall assess the action plan provided by the **client**, including the timeframe and personnel responsible. As part of the assessment, the **CB** shall verify that the action plan adequately addresses the nonconformities.

9.4.8.4 When an action plan is rejected, the **CB** shall explain why and allow the client to review and re-submit it.

9.4.9 Effectiveness of corrections and corrective actions

9.4.9.1 The **CB** shall evaluate the effectiveness of corrective action(s) for all nonconformities identified in audits prior to closing the nonconformities.

9.4.9.2 The **CB** shall verify **major nonconformities** on-site unless verification can be undertaken without on-site verification using **ICT**. The **CB** shall justify and document why verification can be undertaken through **ICT**.

9.4.9.3 The time period for completion of the corrective action(s) for **major nonconformities** identified in audits and their verification by the **CB** shall follow the rules of the **CB** but not exceed three months.

9.4.9.4 If specific natural conditions or extraordinary circumstances do not allow the implementation of corrective actions within the timeframes described in 7.4.7.3, the **CB** may give an exemption. The maximum time period is 12 months, and the justification shall be documented.

Example: Extraordinary circumstances could include a pandemic situation, civil conflict, lack of security, or a natural disaster.

9.4.9.5 The **CB** shall verify the effectiveness of corrective action(s) for **minor nonconformities** no later than at the next audit.

9.4.9.6 Where the actions taken to address a **major nonconformity** have not effectively addressed the issue within the time frame agreed with the **CB**, the **CB** shall either suspend or withdraw the **certificate**, as appropriate.

9.4.9.7 The **CB** shall have procedures for immediate suspension or withdrawal of the **certificate** in cases of identification of non-reversible nonconformities or in case of intentional corrupt or fraudulent activities by the **client**.

Note 1: Non-reversible nonconformities are deliberate, serious, and significant **major nonconformities** that cannot be remedied in a reasonable time frame.

Note 2: Fraudulent activities include infringement of legislation.

9.5 Certification decision

9.5.1 General

9.5.1.1 Before granting initial certification and recertification, the **CB** shall:

- a) review, accept and verify the correction and corrective actions for any **major nonconformities**
- b) review and accept the plan for correction and corrective actions for **minor nonconformities**

9.5.2 Certification status

9.5.2.1 The **CB** shall define the status of the certification as:

- Valid
- Suspended
- Withdrawn
- Terminated
- Expired

Note: Additionally, when a national or regional forest management standard or certification system loses PEFC endorsement or the endorsement is suspended, the PEFC Council considers any **certificates** issued against the standard or system as not PEFC recognized. The status is correspondingly updated on the PEFC website and **clients** affected by the suspension or termination are no longer allowed to make PEFC claims or use the PEFC trademarks in any way.

9.5.2.2 If certification is terminated, suspended, or withdrawn, or the PEFC Council suspends or terminates the endorsement of the NCCF FM certification system, the **CB** shall inform the **client** that any further use of the PEFC trademarks and claims is not allowed. In case of suspension, the **CB** shall monitor whether the **client** is in compliance.

9.6 Maintaining certification

9.6.1 Surveillance activities

9.6.1.1 Surveillance audits shall be carried out at least annually. The **CB** shall carry out at least four

surveillance audits before the certificate's expiry date.

Note 1: Annually means once every twelve months, plus or minus three months.

Note 2: If the **certificate** is valid for less than five years, the number of surveillance audits can be reduced accordingly.

9.6.1.2 In justified circumstances, the frequency of surveillance audits may be increased by the **CB** according to the level of overall risk related to the profile of the **client** and the results of previous audits.

9.6.1.3 Parts of the surveillance audit or the full surveillance audit, where appropriate, may be conducted remotely using **ICT** in accordance with 9.4.3 if:

- a) no **major nonconformity** was raised during the previous audit
- b) **minor nonconformity/ies** can be verified remotely, and
- c) the **client** has a centrally controlled management system accessible remotely and provides the **CB** with all the records required to conduct the audit

9.6.1.4 The **CB** shall not carry out more than two consecutive full surveillance audits using completely remote means.

9.6.2 Recertification

9.6.2.1 The **CB** may re-issue a certificate that has expired, based on the re-evaluation of the certificate holder's conformity with all aspects of the applicable **NCCF** and additional (e.g. contractual) certification requirements.

9.6.2.2 Re-evaluation shall follow the same procedures as for the main evaluation.

9.6.2.3 The revaluation shall be completed, and decision taken before expiry to avoid the Termination.

9.6.2.4 The **CB** can request **NCCF** (subject to request acceptance) to extend the validity of the certificate for one month if the audit is fixed. If certificate is not renewed within extended 30 days, then Certificate will be terminated.

9.6.2.5 The recertification audit shall take place on-site. Certain parts of the recertification audit, such as the opening meeting, the closing meeting, and closure of **minor nonconformities** or other administrative processes, e.g., system documentation, review of the internal audit or of the client's management review, may take place remotely, as per 9.4.3. The **audit plan** shall identify which components of the audit can be effectively conducted remotely.

9.6.3 Special audits

9.6.3.1 General

9.6.3.1.1 The **CB** may conduct different types of **special audits**, according to the requirements of this chapter.

9.6.3.1.2 The full **special audit**, or certain components of the **special audit**, such as the opening and closing meetings, or closure of **minor nonconformities** and administrative processes, may take place remotely, as per 9.4.3. The **audit plan** shall identify which components of the audit can be effectively conducted remotely.

9.6.3.2 Expanding scope

The **CB** may conduct expanding scope audits when a request for scope extension is made by the **client**. Scope expansion requires an assessment to decide whether the extension can be granted.

Note: Expanding scope audits may happen where there is a significant change to the defined certified forest area. An expansion of scope may happen, for example, to accommodate new forest types or a significant change in the forest management.

9.6.3.3 Unannounced or short-notice audits

9.6.3.3.1 Unannounced or short-notice audits may take place when the **CB** has a **substantiated concern** that the **client** is knowingly breaching a requirement in the standard.

9.6.3.3.2 The **CB** may suspend or withdraw a **certificate** if the **client** does not accept an unannounced or short-notice audit without justified circumstances.

9.6.3.3.3 The **CB** shall define the conditions under which it carries out unannounced or short-notice audits and inform the **client** accordingly.

9.6.3.3.4 The conditions shall include the investigation of **substantiated concerns** and other reasons.

9.7 Appeals

CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

9.7.1 The **CB** shall have a documented appeals process whereby **clients** can appeal certification decisions.

Note: The term appeal is defined in ISO 17000:2020.

9.7.2 The **CB** shall make publicly available its appeal procedure, including clear timelines.

9.8 Complaints

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

9.8.1 The **CB** shall have a documented complaints process whereby any person or organization can raise complaints in relation to the certification process.

Note: The term complaint is defined in ISO 17000:2020.

- 9.8.2 This process shall include at least a publicly available mechanism for stakeholders to report instances of potential misrepresentation or corruption.
- 9.8.3 The **CB** shall make its complaints process publicly available, including clear timelines.
- 9.8.4 The **CB** shall inform the complainant about its investigations, the corresponding results and, when necessary, the action to be taken by each party.
- 9.8.5 The **CB** shall inform NCCF within seven days of becoming aware of a **substantiated concern**. The **CB** shall also inform the **client** and/PEFC Council when appropriate.
- 9.8.6 On request by the **NCCF**, the **CB** shall provide the details of the investigation, including the results, related to a **substantiated concern** and complaint about a **client**. On request, the information shall also be provided to the PEFC Council.
- 9.8.7 On request by NCCF, the **CB** shall provide a summary of the complaints it has received, as they pertain to the **PEFC endorsed NCCF FM certification system**. This summary shall be provided in English upon request by NCCF.

Note: The **NCCF** will specify the specified period of time that the summary should cover and the information the summary should cover. This summary may cover:

- a) identification of the appellant/complainant (subject to disclosure)
 - b) identification of the **client**, including certificate number (if **group certification**, identification of the **participant/s** affected by the complaint)
 - c) description
 - d) subject of the complaint
 - e) summary of the complaint handling process
 - f) requirement not complied with
 - g) evidence
 - h) outcome/resolution of the complaint
- 9.8.8 The **CB** shall provide to the PEFC Council and NCCF, on request, any information of their investigation of a **substantiated concern** received against a **client**.

10 Management system requirements

10.1 General

- 10.1.1** The **CB** shall have a system in place to maintain knowledge of and track changes in local, national, and international legislation on forest management applicable to its **clients**.
- 10.1.2** On request, the **CB** shall provide to the PEFC Council or NCCF any information necessary for PEFC monitoring activities, including, but not limited to, management of risks of conflict of interest or impartiality and CB rules and procedures for identifying and dealing with non-compliance by **clients**.
- 10.1.3** In addition to the complaints and appeals mechanisms, the **CB** shall conduct monitoring activities to identify and mitigate misrepresentation or corruption
- 10.1.4** The **CB** shall protect the confidentiality and safety of **affected stakeholders** or any other person providing information in relation to PEFC certification, such as complaints and appeals.

10.1 Internal audits of the CB

- 10.1.1 On request, the **CB** shall provide a summary of the results of its annual internal audits, limited to the performance of PEFC forest management certification, to the PEFC Council or NCCF.

10.2 The management system of the CB shall address the following:

10.2.1 General management system documentation

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

10.2.2 Control of documents

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

10.2.3 Control of Records

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

10.2.4 Directory of certified clients

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

10.2.5 Management Review

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

10.2.6 Corrective Actions

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

10.2.7 Preventive Actions

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

10.2.8 Records

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

11 Audit team selection and assignment

11.1 The CB shall have documented procedures for selecting and appointing the audit team, including audit team leader. The translators used in the audit shall be independent from the client organization. In cases non-independent translators are not available the names of translators and their links with the client organization shall be included in the audit report.

11.2 The CB shall have a process for selecting and appointing the audit team, considering the competence needed to achieve the objectives of the audit.

11.3 An audit team shall always include at minimum a qualified Lead auditor, technical expert, social and local expert (if required)

Note: *The 'team' may consist of a single qualified auditor who is then also the leader of the 'team'.*

11.4 At least one (1) audit team member shall be:

a. familiar with the local language of the area in which the audit takes place;

b. resident of India.

c. a designated independent interpreter (if required), who is not an employee or consultant of the client under evaluation; or

d. fluent in the corporate language, if the client provides a written declaration that confirms that all of the following criteria are met:

- all relevant records and procedures relating to FM requirements are written and understood in the corporate language; and
- all management staff and those with FM responsibilities can communicate fluently in the corporate language.

11.5 A forest management audit team shall include auditor(s) and/ or technical experts with the experience and qualifications to audit all aspects of the NCCF Principles and Criteria, taking account of the scale and complexity of the area to be assessed.

11.6 The competence of an audit team may be supplemented by that of technical expert(s). In this case the following requirements shall apply:

- the time spent by technical experts shall be specified separately in the audit plan;
- their participation in the audit shall be limited to the task they are requested to do and each technical expert shall be assigned to the responsibility of a specific auditor in the audit team;
- the technical expert(s) should be accompanied by the auditor to whom they are assigned;
- if deemed necessary, the technical expert(s) may be allowed to perform interviews and other specified tasks unaccompanied, as instructed by the audit team leader;
- technical expert(s) shall neither make conclusions on the conformity with certification

requirements nor communicate them to the client.

12. Public Information (reg. upcoming audits of certified clients)

- ❖ The CB shall inform the NCCF about upcoming scheduled Evaluation, Re-Evaluation and Surveillance audits of Forest Management before 1 month of main evaluation. NCCF will make this information publicly available via NCCF website.
- ❖ The CB shall inform and provide the information about certificate issued to NCCF within 7 working days from the date of issuance of the certificate
- ❖ The CB shall make a summary of FM Audit Report which shall be made publicly available by NCCF within 90 days from the date of audit. Confidential data can be excluded. The summary shall include at least the following:
 - Information about the certificate holder
 - Name and contact information, Scope of Certificate (area details, Certificate type, management units), Group members, Production Forest details, Conservation areas details, etc.
 - Audit scope and objectives
 - Audit plan (dates and locations, activities, etc.)
 - Audit team (Name, Qualification and brief experience)
 - Audit results (weaknesses and strengths found, corrective action requests)
 - Stakeholder comments (if any)
 - Use of pesticides and other chemicals used; Certificate Decision

13 Suspending, withdrawing or reducing the scope of certification

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

13.1.1 The CB shall advise the NCCF in writing, within 2 business days if there is any changes in the validity and scope of the certification, certification is suspended or withdrawn, or where there are any changes in decisions relating to the status of certification of an organization, and the reasons for those decisions. When a nonconformity with certification requirements is substantiated, either as a result of surveillance or otherwise, the CB shall consider and decide upon the appropriate action.

13.1.2 If client has not resolved the cause of suspension within 12 months, then CB shall terminate the certificate.

14 Changes affecting certification

The CB shall conform with ISO/IEC 17065

14.1.1 When NCCF introduces new or revised requirements that affect the client, the CB shall ensure these changes are communicated to all clients. The CB shall verify the implementation of the changes by its clients and shall take actions.

15 Information exchange for certificate transfer between a CB and its clients

Certificate Transfer: In case of the transfer of a certification to a new CB, existing CB shall ensure that its clients provide information on any other CB they are enrolled with for forest management certification.

- 15.1 The CB shall have documented procedures to handle certificate transfers including:
- the outbound transfer of their own clients to a different CB; and
 - the inbound transfer of clients from a different CB.
- 15.2 Should a client opt to change CB at any point after certification (i.e., transfer of certificate during surveillance) the client shall:
- notify NCCF in writing of the details of the certificate transfer, including the reason for the transfer;
 - provide the current CB with a notice of NCCF certificate transfer, identifying the new CB; and
 - provide the new CB with a copy of their last assessment report.
- 15.3 Prior to accepting a client transfer, the new CB shall review all available information regarding previous conformity assessments.
- 15.4 Where the new CB has doubts or concerns about the status of non-conformities that were raised in audits by the previous CB, or any other material aspect of previous conformity assessments, the client shall authorize the previous CB to share additional audit history information with the new CB to ensure that all outstanding non-conformities are resolved.
- Note:** *The new CB may determine, after having completed a desk-based review of the information, that it is necessary to perform a surveillance audit or conformity assessment of the transferring client before issuing a certificate.*
- 15.5 Considering the requirements on impartiality, the CB may provide advice or knowledge to the client in case that information originates NCCF, such as FAQ's, guidance documents, etc.
- 15.6 The CB informs its clients about the conditions which result in short notice or unannounced audits.

List of Abbreviations

1. CoC: Chain of Custody
2. FM: Forest Management
3. CB: Certification Body
4. PEFC: Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification
5. NCCF: Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests
6. NABCB: National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies

Annexes

Annexes to this document provide requirements for or guidance on issues that are not enforced through the accreditation process.

Annex 1 – Accreditations accepted by the NCCF

- a. NCCF requires that forest management and trees outside forests certification shall be carried out by certification bodies who are accredited by Accreditation Body, a member signatory of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) for product certification. The scope of the accreditation shall explicitly cover the NCCF FM and/or ToF standard in its valid version and/or with reference to any future changes and amendments adopted by the NCCF and presented at the NCCF official website (www.nccf.in) . The scope of accreditation shall also explicitly state ISO/IEC 17065, this document and other requirements against which the CB has been assessed

- b. The F M and/or ToF certificates issued by the accredited CB (and its affiliates) shall bear the accreditation body logo/symbol.

Annex 2 – Notification of certification bodies

- a. For performing the certifications against NCCF FM and ToF certifications, the Certification Bodies shall be notified by the NCCF and its certificates, recognized by the NCCF.
- b. The NCCF notification requires the CB to pay PEFC Notification Fee and PEFC Logo Fee (to be collected from Certificate holder) as specified by the NCCF. Fee Policy is available at NCCF Website.

In order to ensure the independence of certification bodies, NCCF notification conditions decided by the NCCF shall only cover:

- a. administrative conditions (e.g. communication of the CB with the NCCF Council, transfer of information, etc.)
- b. financial conditions (fees imposed on certified entities),
- c. compliance with requirements for certification bodies verified through accreditation as described in this standard.

The NCCF notification conditions shall not discriminate against certification bodies or create trade obstacles.

Note: -- For the issuance of PEFC chain of custody Certificates, CB are required to refer PEFC 2003:2020. NCCF does not set additional, scheme specific requirements for CB intending to operate in CoC certification.

Annex 3 – Examples of Documentation and Records

Note: *This not a complete list nor is the CB required to inspect all documents listed here. Document review process may vary from forest and management type*

- Copies of applicable laws
- Management plan / working plan
- Concession agreements
- Documentation showing tenure and land use rights
- Land/forest map
- Work instruction
- SOPs for contractor; contractor contract
- Agreement with communities
- SOPs for silvicultural activities
- Wildlife management and evaluation plan
- Environmental impact assessment
- Social impact assessment
- Harvesting and production records
- Chemical use records
- Communications with stakeholders
- Purchasing and sales documentation

Annex 4 – Examples of Sites

Note: *This not a complete list nor is the CB required to select all the sites listed here surveillance. Sites selection may depend on various factors including - forest type, silvicultural operations, management type, etc.*

- Harvested sites
- Areas under harvesting
- Working coups
- Seed orchards
- Nurseries
- Protected areas
- Areas with high conservation area
- Workmen facilities – accommodation, amenities, drinking water
- Areas used by communities/forest dwellers/ scheduled tribes within or near the forest area
- Water catchment – within the forest boundaries
- Sites where chemicals – pesticides or fertilizers have been used and storage area
- Monitoring sites
- Trial plots
- Areas jointly managed by communities and forest department
- Production forest areas in a sufficient variety of conditions including slopes, different silvicultural systems including areas of:
 - a. Marked for thinning
 - b. Recently thinned
 - c. Marked for harvesting
 - d. One/five/ten after harvesting

Appendix 5 (normative): Supplementary requirements for certification bodies providing certification against ToF (Trees outside Forests) requirements

Forest Management	Trees outside Forests
<p>5.1.2.2 Education</p> <p>5.1.2.2.1 The CB shall ensure that auditors have the knowledge corresponding to at least a tertiary education.</p> <p>Note: Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges.</p> <p>5.1.2.2.2 The CB shall ensure that auditors have taken formal forestry related courses.</p> <p>5.1.2.2.3 The specific education relating to forestry (requirement 5.1.2.2.2) can be substituted by working experience in this sector if the CB can demonstrate it is equivalent to the required education.</p>	<p>5.1.2.2 Education</p> <p>5.1.2.2.1 The CB shall ensure that auditors have the knowledge corresponding to at least a tertiary education.</p> <p>Note: Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges.</p> <p>5.1.2.2.2 The CB shall ensure that auditors have taken formal forestry related courses and/or courses related to disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification</p> <p>5.1.2.2.3 The specific education relating to forestry or TOF (requirement 5.1.2.2.2) can be substituted by working experience in this sector if the CB can demonstrate it is equivalent to the required education.</p>
<p>5.1.2.3 Working experience</p> <p>5.1.2.3.1 The CB shall ensure that auditors have a minimum of three years of full- time professional experience in a relevant discipline (e.g., forestry, trees outside the forest).</p> <p>5.1.2.3.2 The number of years of total work experience may be reduced by one year if the auditor has completed a tertiary education in forestry, biodiversity, or natural resources management.</p>	<p>5.1.2.3 Working experience</p> <p>5.1.2.3.1 The CB shall ensure that auditors have a minimum of three years of full- time professional experience in a relevant discipline (e.g., forestry, trees outside the forest, biodiversity, natural resources management).</p> <p>5.1.2.3.2 The number of years of total work experience may be reduced by one year if the auditor has completed a tertiary education in forestry/agriculture/agroforestry/life sciences/environmental science,</p>

<p>Note: Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges.</p>	<p>Note: Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges.</p>
<p>5.1.2.4 PEFC endorsed NCCF forest management training</p> <p>The CB shall ensure that new auditors have received and successfully completed initial training PEFC endorsed certification system or systems for the country/countries where they conduct audits before they start their auditing activities.</p> <p>Note: The PEFC website provides further information on training options.</p>	<p>5.1.2.4 PEFC endorsed ToF training</p> <p>The CB shall ensure that new auditors have received and successfully completed initial training PEFC endorsed certification system or systems, including a specific module on PEFC TOF certification, for the country/countries where they conduct audits before they start their auditing activities.</p> <p><i>Note 1:</i> National or regional forest certification systems may have separate training for SFM auditors and for TOF auditors.</p>
<p>5.1.2.6 Audit experience</p> <p>For the first qualification of an auditor, the CB shall ensure that the auditor has performed, as auditor-in-training, at least 40 hours of forest management or equivalent audits (e.g., trees outside the forest, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry or related sector, biodiversity, natural resources management) under the leadership of a qualified audit team leader within the last year.</p> <p>Note: The 40-hour period as auditor-in-training should cover different types of audits (initial, surveillance and recertification).</p>	<p>5.1.2.6 Audit experience</p> <p>For the first qualification of an auditor, the CB shall ensure that the auditor has performed, as auditor-in-training, at least 40 hours of management audits in disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF or equivalent audits (e.g., forest management, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry, TOF, or related sector, biodiversity, natural resources management) under the leadership of a qualified audit team leader within the last year.</p> <p>Note: The 40-hour period as auditor-in-training should cover different types of audits (initial, surveillance and recertification).</p>
<p>5.1.2.7 Competencies</p> <p>5.1.2.7.1 The CB shall ensure that auditors demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Principles, objectives, requirements, criteria, and indicators of the PEFC forest management standard Benchmarks, PEFC ST 1003, Sustainable Forest Management - 	<p>5.1.2.7 Competencies</p> <p>5.1.2.7.1 The CB shall ensure that auditors demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Principles, objectives, requirements, criteria, and indicators of the PEFC forest management standard Benchmarks, PEFC ST 1003, Sustainable Forest Management -

<p>Requirements and PEFC ST 1002, Group Forest Management - Requirements as implemented by the PEFC endorsed certification system, as applicable.</p> <p>b) Audit principles, procedures, and techniques, and how to apply them appropriately to different audits while ensuring that audits are conducted in a consistent and systematic manner.</p> <p>c) Managing an organization, including organizational size, structure, functions and relationships, general business processes, risk management and cultural and social aspects.</p> <p>d) Appropriate knowledge of the socio-demographics, sustainability issues, cultural issues (including gender equality), indigenous interests and values and indigenous treaties, where applicable, and industrial relations in the region of application of the forest management requirements.</p> <p>e) Knowledge of legislation, regulations, or other relevant requirements, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Contracts and agreements and/or collective bargaining agreements (as applicable). ii. Forest governance and law enforcement system of the country, including those covering social, workers and trade union rights and occupational safety and health of workers. iii. International conventions relating to worker rights (ILO core conventions). iv. International treaties and conventions relating to forestry, forest trade, and tree- based products. 	<p>Requirements and PEFC ST 1002, Group Forest Management - Requirements as implemented by the PEFC endorsed certification system, as applicable.</p> <p>b) Audit principles, procedures, and techniques, and how to apply them appropriately to different audits while ensuring that audits are conducted in a consistent and systematic manner.</p> <p>c) Managing an organization, including organizational size, structure, functions and relationships, general business processes, risk management and cultural and social aspects.</p> <p>d) Appropriate knowledge of the socio-demographics, sustainability issues, cultural issues (including gender equality), indigenous interests and values and indigenous treaties, where applicable, and industrial relations in the region of application of TOF management requirements</p> <p>e) Knowledge of legislation, regulations, or other relevant requirements, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Contracts and agreements and/or collective bargaining agreements (as applicable). ii. Forest and/or TOF (as applicable) governance and law enforcement system of the country, including those covering social, workers and trade union rights and occupational safety and health of workers. iii. International conventions relating to worker rights (ILO core conventions). iv. International treaties and conventions relating to forestry and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF, forest and/or TOF trade, and tree-based products
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<p>f) The principles of forest management based on techniques, including: inventory, planning, protection, management of forest ecosystems, identification and management of ecologically important forest areas, carbon stocks and biodiversity, as well as technical aspects of forest operations, and their potential impacts.</p> <p>g) Understanding of and ability to interpret Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as it applies to forest monitoring and management.</p> <p>h) Management and control of online documents, data and records, confidential data, data privacy and protection; and</p> <p>i) Application of risk assessment techniques.</p> <p>5.1.2.7.2 The CB shall ensure that the audit team consists of individuals who collectively have all the required competencies for the scope of the audit.</p>	<p>f) The principles of forest and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF management based on techniques, including: inventory, planning, protection, management of forest ecosystems and/or TOF ecosystems (as applicable, according to the disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification), identification and management of ecologically important forest areas and ecologically important non-forest areas, carbon stocks and biodiversity, as well as technical aspects of forest operations, and their potential impacts.</p> <p>g) Understanding of and ability to interpret Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as it applies to TOF monitoring and management.</p> <p>h) Management and control of online documents, data and records, confidential data, data privacy and protection; and</p> <p>i) Application of risk assessment techniques.</p> <p>5.1.2.7.2 The CB shall ensure that the audit team consists of individuals who collectively have all the required competencies for the scope of the audit.</p>
<p>5.1.2.8 Maintenance of the qualification as an auditor</p> <p>5.1.2.8.1. PEFC endorsed NCCF forest management training</p> <p>5.1.2.8.1.1 To maintain the auditor qualification, the CB shall ensure that qualified auditors participate in a PEFC endorsed forest management refresher training whenever a new version of the forest management standard(s) they are qualified to audit, or the standards with requirements for SFM certification bodies, is published.</p>	<p>5.1.2.8 Maintenance of the qualification as an auditor</p> <p>5.1.2.8.1 PEFC endorsed NCCFToF training</p> <p>5.1.2.8.1.1 To maintain the auditor qualification, the CB shall ensure that qualified auditors participate in a PEFC endorsed NCCF ToF refresher training that includes a TOF module Council whenever a new version of the forest management standard(s) and/or TOF requirements they are qualified to audit, or the standards with requirements for TOF certification bodies, is published.</p>

<p>5.1.2.8.1.2 The CB shall ensure that such refresher training is successfully completed before conducting audits against the revised standard.</p>	<p>5.1.2.8.1.2 The CB shall ensure that such refresher training is successfully completed before conducting audits against the revised standard.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> National or regional forest certification systems may have separate training for SFM auditors and for TOF auditors.</p>
<p>5.1.2.8.2 Audit experience</p> <p>5.1.2.8.2.1 To maintain the auditor qualification, the CB shall ensure that the auditor has performed a minimum of 40 hours of forest management or equivalent audits (e.g. trees outside the forest, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry or related sector, biodiversity, natural resources management) per year.</p> <p>5.1.2.8.2.2 In exceptional circumstances, such as statutory leave, long-term illness, or lack of opportunities to provide certification services, auditors unable to comply with 5.1.2.8.2.1 shall perform 20 hours of forest management audits under the supervision of a qualified auditor within two years, or undergo a formal evaluation of competencies by the CB prior to the auditor taking back auditing activities.</p>	<p>5.1.2.8.2 Audit experience</p> <p>5.1.2.8.2.1 To maintain the auditor qualification, the CB shall ensure that the auditor has performed a minimum of 40 hours of audits of disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification management or equivalent audits (e.g., forest management, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry or TOF related sector, forestry, biodiversity, natural resources management) per year.</p> <p>5.1.2.8.2.2 In exceptional circumstances, such as statutory leave, long-term illness, or lack of opportunities to provide certification services, auditors unable to comply with 5.1.2.8.2.1 shall perform 20 hours of forest management audits and/or audits against disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification under the supervision of a qualified auditor within two years, or undergo a formal evaluation of competencies by the CB prior to the auditor taking back auditing activities.</p>
<p>5.1.4 Reviewer and certification decision maker</p> <p>5.1.4.2 Education</p> <p>5.1.4.2.1 The CB shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker have the knowledge corresponding to at least a tertiary education.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at</p>	<p>5.1.4 Reviewer and certification decision maker</p> <p>5.1.4.2 Education</p> <p>5.1.4.2.1 The CB shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker have the knowledge corresponding to at least a tertiary education.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at</p>

universities, technical schools, or colleges.	universities, technical schools, or colleges.
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<p>5.1.4.2.2 The CB shall ensure that reviewers and certification decision makers have taken formal courses in forestry.</p> <p>5.1.4.2.3 The specific education relating to forestry (requirement 5.1.4.2.2) can be substituted by working experience in this sector if the CB can demonstrate it is equivalent to the required education.</p>	<p>5.1.4.2.2 The CB shall ensure that reviewers and certification decision makers have taken formal courses in forestry and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification.</p> <p>5.1.4.2.3 The specific education relating to forestry and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification (requirement 5.1.4.2.2) can be substituted by working experience in this sector if the CB can demonstrate it is equivalent to the required education.</p>
<p>5.1.4.4 PEFC endorsed NCCF forest management training</p> <p>5.1.4.4.1 The CB shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have received initial training on the PEFC endorsed certification system or systems for the country/countries where they conduct their certification activities.</p> <p>5.1.4.4.2 The CB shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have successfully completed the training before they start their certification activities.</p> <p>Note: The PEFC website provides further information on training options.</p>	<p>5.1.4.4 PEFC endorsed NCCF ToF training</p> <p>5.1.4.4.1 The CB shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have received initial training on the PEFC endorsed certification system or systems, including a specific module on PEFC TOF certification, for the country/countries where they conduct their certification activities.</p> <p>5.1.4.4.2 The CB shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have successfully completed the training before they start their certification activities.</p> <p>Note 1: The PEFC website provides further information on training options.</p>

<p>5.1.4.7 Competencies</p> <p>5.1.4.7.1 The CB shall ensure that the reviewer or certification decision maker demonstrates the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas:</p> <p>a) Principles, objectives, requirements, criteria, and indicators of the PEFC forest management standard Benchmarks, PEFC ST 1003, <i>Sustainable Forest Management - Requirements</i> and PEFC ST 1002, <i>Group Forest Management - Requirements</i> as implemented by the PEFC endorsed certification system, as applicable.</p>	<p>5.1.4.7 Competencies</p> <p>5.1.4.7.1 The CB shall ensure that the reviewer or certification decision maker demonstrates the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas:</p> <p>a) Principles, objectives, requirements, criteria, and indicators of the PEFC ToF standard Benchmarks, PEFC ST 1003, <i>Sustainable Forest Management - Requirements</i> and PEFC ST 1002, <i>Group Forest Management - Requirements</i> as implemented by the PEFC endorsed certification system, as applicable.</p>
<p>b) Knowledge of the socio-demographics, sustainability issues, and cultural issues (including gender equality), indigenous interests and values and indigenous treaties, where applicable, and industrial relations in the region of application of the forest management requirements.</p> <p>c) General knowledge of legislation, regulation, or other relevant requirements pertaining to forest management, labour issues, and data privacy and protection.</p> <p>d) The principles of forest management.</p> <p>e) Management and control of online documents, data and records, confidential data, data privacy and protection; and</p> <p>f) Application of risk assessment techniques.</p>	<p>b) Knowledge of the socio-demographics, sustainability issues, and cultural issues (including gender equality), indigenous interests and values and indigenous treaties, where applicable, and industrial relations in the region of application of the TOF management requirements.</p> <p>c) General knowledge of legislation, regulation, or other relevant requirements pertaining to forest management and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use cover by TOF certification, labour issues, and data privacy and protection.</p> <p>d) The principles of forest management and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification.</p> <p>e) Management and control of online documents, data and records, confidential data, data privacy and protection; and</p> <p>f) Application of risk assessment techniques.</p>
<p>5.1.4.7.2 The CB shall ensure that the team of reviewers and certification decision makers consists of individuals who collectively have all the required competencies for the scope of the audit.</p>	<p>5.1.4.7.2 The CB shall ensure that the team of reviewers and certification decision makers consists of individuals who collectively have all the required competencies for the scope of the audit.</p>

<p>5.1.4.8 Maintenance of the qualification as a reviewer or certification decision maker</p> <p>5.1.4.8.1.1 PEFC endorsed NCCF FM training</p> <p>5.1.4.8.1.1 To maintain the reviewer or certification decision maker qualification, the CB shall ensure that the qualified reviewer or certification decision maker participates in a PEFC forest management refresher training whenever a new version of the PEFC forest management standard(s) they are qualified to conduct their corresponding certification activities against, or the standards with requirements for SFM certification bodies, is published.</p>	<p>5.1.4.8 Maintenance of the qualification as a reviewer or certification decision maker</p> <p>5.1.4.8.1 PEFC endorsed ToF training</p> <p>5.1.4.8.1.1 To maintain the reviewer or certification decision maker qualification, the CB shall ensure that the qualified reviewer or certification decision maker participates in a PEFC endorsed NCCF ToF refresher training that includes a TOF module whenever a new version of the PEFC forest management standard(s) and/or TOF requirements they are qualified to conduct their corresponding certification activities against, or the standards with requirements for SFM certification bodies, is published.</p>
<p>5.1.4.8.1.2 The CB shall ensure that such refresher training is successfully completed before the reviewer or certification decision maker conducts their certification activities against the revised standard.</p>	<p>5.1.4.8.1.2 The CB shall ensure that such refresher training is successfully completed before the reviewer or certification decision maker conducts their certification activities against the revised standard.</p>
<p>5.1.4.8.2 Audit experience</p> <p>To maintain the reviewer or certification decision maker qualification, the CB shall ensure that the qualified reviewer or certification decision maker has participated as an observer in forest management or equivalent audits (e.g. trees outside the forest, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry or related sector, biodiversity, natural resources management) covering at least 16 hours every two years, which includes part office assessment and part field assessment and a closing meeting.</p> <p>Note: The observation may take place remotely using ICT.</p>	<p>5.1.4.8.2 Audit experience</p> <p>To maintain the reviewer or certification decision maker qualification, the CB shall ensure that the qualified reviewer or certification decision maker has participated as an observer in audits against disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification or equivalent audits covering at least 16 hours every two years, which includes part office assessment and part field assessment and a closing meeting.</p> <p>Note: The observation may take place remotely using ICT.</p>

Bibliography

- a. *FSC-STD-20-001 V4-0 EN: General Requirement for FSC® Accredited Certification Bodies*
- b. *VRIKSH EPCH-VRSH-STD-02: General Requirements for Certification Bodies operating “VRIKSH” Scheme for Timber and Timber Products*
- c. *AWS Certification Requirements version 1.0*
- d. *CDM Accreditation Standard CDM-EB46-A02-STAN Version 06.0*
- e. *PEFC ITALY Annex 6 ITA 1003-1: SFM and SPM Accreditation Minimum Requirements*
- f. *ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental StandardsV1-0*
- g. *ISEAL, Managing conflict of interest in standards and assurance, 2013*
- h. *ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015 Conformity assessment - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems*