

VIETNAM FOREST CERTIFICATION SCHEME - DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHEME AND OPERATION



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I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable forest management and forest certification (SFM&FC) has been implemented in Vietnam since the 2000s on the basis of the implementation of the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy for the period 2006-2020 and most recently in the period of 2021-2030, with a vision to 2050. Besides, SFM&FC has been codified in Articles 27 and 27 of the Law on Forests.

The Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme (VFCS) was established on the basis of Decision No. 1288/QĐ-TTg dated October 1, 2018, in which VFCS was operated under the Vietnam Administration of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

In the period of 2019-2021, the Vietnam Administration of Forestry acted as the National Governing Body (NGB) and the Vietnam Forest Certification Office (VFCO) was under the Vietnam Administration of Forestry. During this period, Vietnam became the 51st member of the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) on May 30, 2019 and VFCS was officially certified by PEFC on October 29, 2020. In October 2021, the role of NGB was assigned to the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences (VAFS) and VFCO was transferred to VAFS under the decisions No. 3924/QĐ-BNN-TCCB and Decision No. 3925/QĐ- BNN-TCCB dated October 4, 2021 of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry.

VFCS is a Vietnamese member endorsed by PEFC. The system is built on the basis of the principle of operation and independent decision-making among the participants, ensuring compliance with the requirements of the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme. VFCS aims to increase the added value of forests through the application of high-quality, productive forest tree varieties, appropriate forest management techniques, and processes for implementing sustainable forest management and improving and enhance ecosystem services and protect biodiversity; ensure the legal source of wood materials to meet the certification requirements of the market.

This document describes the system and organizational model of the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme, replacing the document VFCS/PEFC GD 1001:2019, Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme: System Description and Model implementation organization. This document is updated according to PEFC regulations regarding changes to NGB and VFCO in VFCS.

II. NORMATIVE REFERENCES

Decision No. 1288/QD-TTg dated October 1, 2018 of the Prime Minister approving the project on sustainable forest management and forest certification .

Decision No. 190/QD-BNN-TCLN dated November 1, 2019, of Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry on assigning the task of sustainable forest management and forest certification under the tasks of the Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry specified in Decision No. 1288/QD-TTg of the Prime Minister.

Decision No. 191/QD-BNN-TCLN dated November 1, 2019, of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) on the establishment of the Vietnam Forest Certification Office.

Decision No. 3924/QD-BNN-TCCB dated October 4, 2021, of MARD amending and supplementing Decision No. 190/QD-BNN-TCLN dated January 11, 2019, of MARD on the assigning the task of sustainable forest management and forest certification.

Decision No. 3925/QD-BNN-TCCB dated October 4, 2021, amending and supplementing Decision No. 191/BNN-TCCB dated January 11, 2019 of MARD to establish a Vietnam Forest Certification Office.

Decision No. 4227/QD-BNN-TCCB, dated October 29, 2021, of MARD on consolidating the Steering Committee for the Implementation of Sustainable Forest Management and Forest Certification in period from 2021 to 2030 .

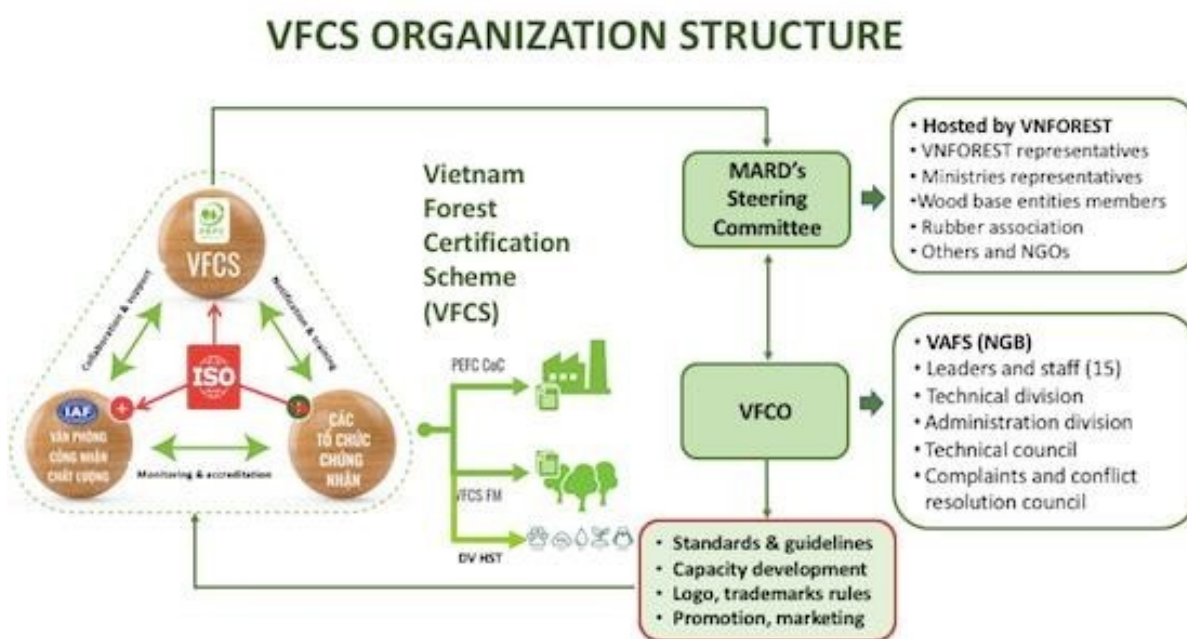
Decision No. 368/QD-KHLN-TCHC, dated November 1, 2021, of the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences, on stipulating the functions, tasks, rights and organizational structure of the Vietnam Forest Certification Office.

PEFC ST 1001:2017 standard and PEFC GD 1003:2009 guideline of the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE VIETNAM FOREST CERTIFICATION SCHEME

3.1. Chart of the Scheme

The Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme (VFCS) is a system consisting of agencies, organizations, and related documents to ensure the implementation of sustainable forest management and certification to meet the requirements of sustainable forest management in compliance with international practices. The Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme consists of three independent agencies: (i) The National Governing Body (NGB) is the Vietnam Academy of Forest Sciences; (ii) Accreditation body; (iii) Certification bodies (CB).



3.1.1. National Governing Body (NGB)

The National Governing Body (NGB) of VFCS is the Vietnam Academy of Forest Sciences (VAFS) according to Decision No. 3924/QD-BNN-TCCB dated October 4, 2021, of MARD revising and supplementing Decision No. 190/QD-BNN-TCLN dated January 11, 2019, of MARD on assigning tasks for sustainable forest management and forest certification. Accordingly, MARD assigned VAFS to operate the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme. In order to support the operation of VFCS, MARD established a Steering Committee for the implementation of sustainable forest management and forest certification for the period 2021-2030 and the Vietnam Forest Certification Office, specifically as follows:

- a) Steering Committee for the implementation of sustainable forest management and forest certification for the period of 2021-2030

The Steering Committee was established under Decision 4061/QD-BNN-TCCB dated October 5, 2016, of MARD on the establishment of the Steering Committee for the implementation of sustainable forest management and forest certification period 2016-2020 and is consolidated according to Decision 4227/QD-BNN-TCCB dated October 29, 2021, of MARD. The Steering Committee includes: The Head of the Steering

Committee is the Deputy Minister of MARD, the Deputy Head of the Steering Committee is the Director of the General Department of Forestry, the Director of the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences and the leaders of a number of Departments and Departments under the Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry, several associations participating as steering committee members. The Steering Committee assists the Minister of MARD in directing, administering, guiding and inspecting the implementation of the sustainable forest management plan in Decision No. 1288/QD-TTg dated October 1, 2018, of the Prime Minister and provisions of the law.

The Steering Committee has the function of directing and supervising the activities of the Vietnam Forest Certification Office, approving the standards, norms and related issues recommended by the Vietnam Forest Certification Office.

b) Vietnam Forest Certification Office (VFCO)

Vietnam Forest Certification Office, abbreviated as VFCO, is the organization implementing the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme, established under Decision 191/QD-BNN-TCCB dated January 11, 2019, by the Minister of MARD. According to Decision 3925 / QD-BNN-TCCB dated October 4, 2021, by the Minister of MARD on the adjustment and supplement of Decision 191/QD-BNN-TCCB dated January 11, 2019, the Vietnam Forest Certification Office has been transferred from the General Department of Forestry to the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences for management and is an organization with legal status. VFCO is a national forest certification organization, operating under the direction and supervision of the Steering Committee for sustainable forest management and forest certification in accordance with the law. The organizational structure of VFCO includes the Board of Directors, General Department and Technical Department.

3.1.2. Accreditation organizations

Accreditation organizations participating in VFCS have the task of independent assessment of certification bodies (auditing bodies that issue forest management and CoC certificates) against accredited standard and regulations under VFCS and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) to ensure impartiality and capacity of certification bodies. Accreditation organizations participating in the VFCS include: Bureau of Accreditation (BoA) and organizations that are members of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), specifically as follows:

a) Bureau of Accreditation (BoA)

Bureau of Accreditation, abbreviated as BoA, is a public science and technology organization under the Ministry of Science and Technology, which has the function of organizing and implementing accreditation activities, including organizations of assessing and certifying to accredit the certification bodies in accordance with Vietnam's regulations and international practices. The BoA has established a Multilateral Recognition Arrangements (MRA) with the International Accreditation Forum (IAF). Therefore, BoA accreditation activities in Vietnam are also recognized by the IAF. This helps businesses and customers needing recognition to be provided quality services recognized around the world.

In the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme, the BoA is the organization responsible for assessing, accrediting and monitoring the activities of :

- Organizations certifying sustainable forest management according to the provisions

of the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme and under the cooperation agreement with the Vietnam Forest Certification Office.

- Organization certifying Chain of custody (CoC) according to regulations and agreements with the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

b) International Accreditation Forum (IAF)

The International Accreditation Forum, abbreviated as IAF, is an international association of organizations that have agreed to work together worldwide to develop conformity assessment principles and practices. The members of the IAF sign a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) and recognize the accreditations of others as equivalent to their own. The IAF has two main missions :

- Ensure that organizations recognized as members of the forum operate in accordance with the forum regulations.
- Establish Multilateral Recognition Arrangements (MRA) between membership accreditation organizations, helping businesses and customers with recognition needs provide quality services on a world-wide scale.

IAF members notified by PEFC will assess the conformity of PEFC chain of custody (CoC) certification bodies operating in Vietnam. .

3.1.3. Certification Body (CB)

Certification Body, abbreviated as CB, is an organization that assesses and issues sustainable forest management certificates and chain of custody certificates to forest owners, organizations and individuals who are producing and processing wood and forestry products when these objects have a forest management plan and manufacturing operation plan in processing timber and forest products to ensure compliance with VFCS forest management standards (for certificates of sustainable forest management) and with PEFC chain of custody standards (for certificates of PEFC CoC).

3.1.4. Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)

Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification – PEFC is a non-government organization established by membership countries to implement sustainable forest management and forest certification on the basis of independent third-party certification. PEFC forest certification areas include:

- Sustainable forest management (FM) certification for forest owners, based on VFCS endorsed by PEFC .
- Certificate of chain of custody (PEFC-CoC) for organizations and individuals engaged in wood and forest products manufacturing and processing, in compliance with international standards issued by PEFC or national standards of member country endorsed by PEFC.

Vietnam is the 51st member of PEFC and was recognized on May 30, 2019. VFCS was established and operated according to PEFC regulation and was officially certified by PEFC on October 29, 2020.

3.2. Relationship between organizations in the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme

3.2.1. The relationship between VFCO and the NGB and the Steering Committee of MARD

VFCO is a legal entity under the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences. As the National Governing Body (NGB), the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences authorizes VFCO to operate the VFCS in accordance with the laws and regulations of PEFC.

VFCO operates under the direction and supervision of the Steering Committee for Sustainable Forest Management and Forest Certification of MARD and in accordance with the law.

3.2.2. Relationship between VFCS and PEFC

NGB has signed a trademarks usage contract and administration contract with PEFC (contract for administration of PEFC scheme) to manage VFCS in Vietnam. Accordingly, VFCO is the contact point with PEFC and carries out activities authorized by PEFC, including: (i) Manage and use PEFC trademarks in Vietnam; (ii) Designate organizations to evaluate and settle disputes and complaints related to PEFC in Vietnam; (iii) Collect and pay forest certification fees according to regulations; and (iv) manage other matters in accordance with PEFC GD 1004:2009 guidelines.

3.2.3. Relationship between VFCO and BoA and IAF

BoA is an organization in collaboration with VFCO, responsible for: (i) Assessing and certifying the operational capacity of certification bodies for certification of sustainable forest management under VFCS; (ii) Monitoring the assessment and certification of sustainable forest management by the certification bodies; and (iii) Training for stakeholders to participate in forest certification under VFCS.

BoA and accrediting organizations as members of IAF, through an agreement with PEFC, conduct performance appraisal, monitor, and evaluate the performance of PEFC CoC certification bodies in Vietnam according to the PEFC regulations. BoA and these accrediting organizations will coordinate with VFCO and provide necessary documents for VFCO to consider and assign a certification body to grant PEFC CoC certification in Vietnam.

3.2.4. Relationship between VFCO and certification body (CB)

CBs providing sustainable forest management certification services to forest owners under VFCS: To implement forest certification services under VFCS, CBs must be accredited by the BoA to be competent as required by VFCS and regulations on activities of conformity certification in accordance with Vietnamese law. On the basis of BoA certification, VFCO will consider and assign CBs to perform sustainable forest management certification services through the assignment contract.

CBs providing PEFC CoC certification services, which is on the basis of capacity assessment and recognition from BoA and accreditation organizations that are members of the IAF forum designated by PEFC, VFCO, will sign a contract notifying CBs to provide PEFC CoC chain of custody certification service in Vietnam.

The CB is responsible for: (i) Quality certification assurance; (ii) VFCS and PEFC

trademark usage in accordance with the contract signed with VFCS; (iii) Guiding and supervising the VFCS and PEFC trademarks usage for certified individuals and organizations on sustainable forest management and chain of custody; and (iv) collecting and making payment of certification fees as prescribed by VFCS.

Requirements for CBs are specified in VFCS/PEFC ST 1006:2022 and alternative documents (if any).

The procedure for appointing CBs is specified in the VFCS/PEFC GD guide 1007:2022, The procedure for appointing a certification body operating in the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme and alternative documents (if any).

3.2.5. Relationship between BoA and CB

BoA is an organization who accredits CB providing certification services for sustainable forest management in accordance with VFCS regulations and Vietnamese laws.

BoA and accreditation bodies as members of IAF are designated by PEFC accredit CBs to provide PEFC COC certification services in accordance with PEFC regulations and legal regulations when operating in Vietnam.

3.2.6. Relationship between CBs and forest owners, organizations and individuals manufacturing and processing wood and forest products as follows:

CB is an organization providing forest management and CoC certification services through the agreement and contract between the CB and the forest owners; organizations and individuals manufacturing and processing wood and forest products. During the service certification process, the CB is responsible for directing and monitoring the compliance of individuals and organizations certified with standards and regulations on forest management, chain of custody, and VFCS and PEFC trademark usage .

IV. VFCS OPERATION

VFCS develops and promulgates regulations, requirements and work processes between agencies and units in the system to serve the operation of the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme. These regulations clearly define the roles and operating conditions of organizations and agencies in the system; regulations on roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the system; regulations, procedures, and related documents of the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme.

4.1. National governing body

The Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences (VAFS) is the governing body for the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme with the task of being the national forest certification agency assigned by MARD under Decision No. 3924/QD-BNN-TCCB dated 04 October, 2021. VAFS is registered and recognized by the PEFC council as the national forest certification body (NGB) of the VFCS.

VFCS is the agency operating VFCS according to Decision No. 3925/QD-BNN-TCCB dated October 4, 2021, of MARD. Accordingly, VFCS is the organization operating the VFCS to perform the tasks at Point d, Clause 2, Article 1 of the Prime Minister's Decision No. 1288/QD-TTg dated October 1, 2018: “d. Establishing a Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme including agencies and units, the national governing body (NGB); consulting organizations on forest management certificate auditing (CBs) and a number

of related agencies to ensure the implementation of Vietnam's sustainable forest management certification activities in accordance with practices and regulations of the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme". VFCS is an independent unit with its own legal status, seal and account. The Vietnam Forest Certification Office is located at the Vietnam Academy of Forestry Science, 46 Duc Thang Street, Duc Thang Ward, Bac Tu Liem District, Hanoi City.

The Director of the Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences (VAFS) issued Decision No. 368/QD-KHLN-TCHC, dated November 1, 2021, on regulations on functions, tasks, rights and organizational structure of VFCS. Some of the main tasks of VFCS are to:

- Develop and issue standards and guidelines on certification of sustainable forest management, chain of custody and ecosystem products and services.
- Coordinate with BoA, international certification organizations and related organizations in implementing sustainable forest management and forest certification .
- Organize training, joint training for certification bodies, auditors and stakeholders in forest certification activities; propaganda and promote VFCS .
- Manage and license VFCS and PEFC trademarks usage on certification of sustainable forest management and chain of custody of wood and forest products to certified parties .
- Monitor and supervise forest certification activities; resolve disputes and complaints related to certification of sustainable forest management and chain of custody of wood and forest products.

4.2. Sustainable Forest Management Standard (FM) and Chain of Custody Standard (CoC)

4.2.1. Standards for sustainable forest management

Forest Management Standard (VFCS/PEFC ST 1003:2019) of VFCS using Vietnam's criterias for sustainable forest management promulgated by MARD in Appendix I, Circular No. 28/2018/TT-BNN dated November 16, 2018. The standard includes 7 principles, 34 criterias and 122 indicators. The standard development process is carried out according to the standard development process specified in VFCS/PEFC ST 1002:2019, including consultations and suggestions from relevant agencies and subjects, ensuring the harmonization of economic, social and environmental goals in implementing sustainable forest management.

Standard for group sustainable forest management (VFCS/PEFS ST 1004:2019) prescribe the requirements for the establishment and formation of a household group or association group in accordance with the provisions of Vietnamese law and PEFC regulations to ensure the implementation of sustainable forest management in compliance with standards VFCS/PEFC ST 1003:2019.

The Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme applies VFCS/PEFC ST 1003: 2019 and VFCS/PEFS ST 1004: 2019 or alternative standards for these two standards issued by VFCS .

4.2.2. Chain of custody standards (CoC)

VFCS uses the chain of custody standard issued by PEFC, including PEFC ST

2002:2013, Chain of Custody of Forest Based Products – Requirements and the updated PEFC ST 2002:2020, Chain of Custody of Forest and Tree Based Products – Requirements. Validity and replacement standards for these standards (if any) are implemented in accordance with PEFC.

4.3. Forest certification

4.3.1. Certification Bodies

The sustainable forest management certification organization operating in the VFCS must be a domestic, international or joint venture organization with sufficient capacity and operate independently, not depending on financial and human resources from any state agency or specialized agency for sustainable forest management and forest certification.

Requirements for a certification body are specified in Standard VFCS/PEFC ST 1006:2022 and alternative documents (if any). To be assessed and certified for sustainable forest management in the VFCS system, the certification body must meet the requirements for the conformity assessment business, the requirements for an assessment organization according to ISO/IEC 17021: 2015, TCVN ISO/IEC 17021:2015 or alternative documents (if any), assessed by an accreditation organization for capacity and designated by the Vietnam Forest Certification Office through signing contract notifying a certification body. The procedure for notifying a Certification Body is detailed in VFCS/PEFC ST 1007:2022 and its replacement documents (if any).

The PEFC COC certification organization must be a domestic, international or joint venture organization with sufficient capacity and operate independently, not depending on financial and human resources from any state agency or relevant professional agency in Vietnam. Certification bodies must meet the requirements of PEFC, being assessed for competence by an accreditation organization recognized as a member of the IAF designated by the PEFC, signing with VFCS the contract of designation to be a PEFC CoC certification body.

4.3.2. Auditor of the certification body

Auditors working for the certification body must have a labor contract as required by law or a cooperation agreement in the case of a part-time expert working for the certification body. The certification body is responsible for ensuring the competence of auditors, in particular:

For auditors of sustainable forest management (VFCS/PEFC FM): according to the provisions of the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme, the document VFCS/PEFC GD 1006: 2022 and its replacement documents (if any).

For the chain of custody auditor (PEFC COC): According to the PEFC regulations, the PEFC ST standard 2003:2020, Requirements for Certification Bodies operating Certification against the PEFC International Chain of Custody Standard and its alternative documents (if any) and according to the provisions of the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme, the document VFCS/PEFC GD 1006: 2022 and its replacement documents (if any).

4.3.3. Applying for forest certification

Forest owners would like to apply for certification of sustainable forest management or group forest management shall develop a sustainable forest management plan and relevant documents according to regulations before contacting published certification bodies on the website of the Vietnam Forest Certification Office to be assessed and granted a certificate if it meets the requirements as prescribed.

Forest owners, individuals and businesses wishing to certify chain of custody must develop a profile according to the chain of custody standards and contact the certification body published on the website of the Vietnam Forest Certification Office to be assessed and certified if it meets the requirements as prescribed.

4.3.4. The process of issuing forest certifications

The process and procedures for assessment and certification will be carried out according to the guidance of the certification bodies .

4.3.5. Forest certification validity

Certifications of sustainable forest management, group forest management and chain of custody are valid for 05 years from the date of issue. Annually, the certification body is responsible for evaluating to maintain the certificate.

4.4. Accreditation and notification for certification bodies

The BoA assesses and recognizes the capacity of the CBs operating under VFCS/PEFC sustainable forest management system. BoA and accreditation bodies as members of the IAF designated by PEFC assess and recognize the competence of CBs auditing PEFC chain of custody.

Based on the CB's proposal and the results of capacity assessment from accreditation organizations, VFCO will consider and appoint a certification body for sustainable forest management according to the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme and for PEFC CoC certification through designating contract.

The process of appointing a certification body operating in the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme is specified in the document VFCS/PEFC GD 1007:2022 and alternative documents (if any).

4.5. Forest certificate fee

VFCO collects fees for developing sustainable forest management certificates and CoC certificates. Regulations on collection rates are publicly announced on VFCO website. CBs are responsible for paying forest certification fees to VFCO according to regulations.

4.6. VFCS and PEFC Logo and trademarks usage rules

VFCO licenses and manages VFCS and PEFC trademarks usage throughout Vietnam. VFCO licenses the right of VFCS and PEFC trademarks usage to individuals and organizations certified for sustainable forest management and chain of custody in accordance with VFCS and PEFC regulations.

Individuals and organizations licensed to use VFCS logo must comply with the provisions of VFCS/PEFC ST 1008:2022 and VFCS/PEFC GD 1009:2022 and alternative documents (if any).

Individuals and organizations licensed to use PEFC logo must comply with the provisions of PEFC ST Standard 2001:2008, PEFC Logo Usage Rules – Requirements; PEFC GD 1005:2012, Issuance of PEFC Logo use licenses by the PEFC Council; PEFC ST Standard 2001:2020, PEFC Trademarks Rules – Requirements; PEFC GD 1005:2020, Issuance of PEFC trademarks usage licenses by the PEFC Council.

4.7. Complaints and Dispute Resolution Procedures

Forest owners, enterprises, certification organizations and related agencies and units in the course of implementation, if any difficulties or problems arise or detect acts and activities that are not in accordance with regulations, petitions can be submitted to the Vietnam Forest Certification Office. Dispute resolution procedures and complaints comply with VFCS/PEFC GD 1010: 2022 and its replacement documents (if any).