



**AFS/01-10-01**

## **COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES PROCEDURE**

## ***Introduction***

The Australian Forest Certification Scheme (AFCS) provides for the independent third-party certification of forest management against the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS) and the identification and branding of products produced from AFS certified forests against the Chain of Custody Standard (CoC Standard).

Australian Forestry Standard Limited (AFS Limited) recognises that disagreements may arise in the application of the Scheme. AFS Limited is committed to effective and efficient complaints and grievance handling which contribute to continual improvement of the AFCS.

There are four categories within the Australian Forest Certification Scheme where differences of opinion or disagreements could become the subject of a complaint or a grievance. The four categories are:

1. The content of the standards (AFS and CoC<sup>1</sup>) and the standards development body – AFS Limited;
2. The accreditation of certification bodies – the Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ) for AS 4707 and AS 4708 or an international accreditation body, being an IAF member, for PEFC's Annex 4 CoC Standard;
3. The approach taken at the time of certification or review by accredited, independent, third-party certification body – the accredited certification body; and
4. Forest management organisations or organisations in the CoC supply chain.

## ***Resolving a Complaint or Grievance***

Within the AFCS, different entities have responsibility for the different categories. Complaints or grievances should in the first instance be directed to that entity which has responsibility for the particular issue.

The first step in resolving a complaint or grievance should be to communicate with the responsible entity – AFS Limited, JAS-ANZ/ IAF member, the certification body or the forest management organisation – related to your complaint, grievance, concerns or questions.

In order to help correspondents make contact with the responsible entity, Table 1 indicates the type of issue, who is responsible and how to make contact. Please see our Links page to assist in this matter.

Each of the identified entities has procedures and requirements for ensuring the resolution of complaints and grievances. In relation to AFCS, these are outlined within this procedure. In relation to accredited certification bodies, their appeals, complaints and disputes mechanisms are a requirement within the relevant accreditation requirements - JAS-ANZ Procedure 26 for forest management certification, and JAS-ANZ Procedure 15 for CoC certification. For forest management organisations, such requirements form part of the AFS's forest management criteria and requirements (Requirement 4.2.3).

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<sup>1</sup> AFS and CoC – Australian Forestry Standard (AS 4708) and Chain of Custody Standard (AS 4707)

**TABLE 1 Resolving a Complaint or Grievance**

Category	What is the issue	Who is responsible	How do I make contact
1	The standards used within the Australian Forest Certification Scheme i.e. technical content	AFS Limited's AFS Technical Reference Committee and AFS Technical Committee	The Executive Officer of AFS Limited <a href="mailto:afs@forestrystandard.org.au">afs@forestrystandard.org.au</a>
	Policies and procedures surrounding the development and management of the AFCS.	AFS Limited	The Executive Officer of AFS Limited <a href="mailto:afs@forestrystandard.org.au">afs@forestrystandard.org.au</a>
2	The accreditation of a certification body	JAS-ANZ  IAF member	The Manager Accreditation Services of JAS-ANZ <a href="mailto:admin@jas-anz.com.au">mailto:admin@jas-anz.com.au</a> "Contact us" on the accreditation bodies' web site
3	The certification of a particular forest, or chain-of-custody system.	Australian accredited certification body  International accredited certification body	A list of accredited certification bodies are provided in the JAS-ANZ register: <a href="http://www.jas-anz.com.au/CC/register/registry.htm">http://www.jas-anz.com.au/CC/register/registry.htm</a> "Contact us" on the certification bodies' web site
4	Management of a specific forest area, or forest product supply chain	The certified forest management organisation or chain of custody holder	A list of certified organisations is provided on the AFS Limited website.

***AFS Limited complaints handling procedure***

- All complaints or grievances will be dealt with fairly, transparently and in a timely manner;
- The complaint or grievance should provide sufficient objective information to substantiate the complaint or grievance so that assessment and investigation can be undertaken. Complaints or grievances based on hearsay will not be considered as a complaint or grievance;
- The complaint or grievance should identify the correspondent and the correspondent's address which will be placed on the Grievance and Complaints Register on the AFS web site;
- Correspondents' names will be published on the Grievance and Complaints Register unless they request anonymity;
- Complaints will be acknowledged within five (5) business days of it being lodged;
- After receipt of the complaint or grievance, it will be assessed in regards to the particulars of the complaint or grievance and investigated as appropriate in the context of Table 1. Advice will be provided to the complainant should the complaint or grievance need to be referred to another entity;
- Following the assessment, if it is a matter for AFS Limited, the complaint will be investigated;
- After the investigation any decision or action will be communicated within twenty (20) business days from the date of acknowledgement, where appropriate;

- If the proposed decision or action is not accepted, the complainant will be informed of any alternative forms of recourse available.

As indicated in Table 1, issues of concern, complaints or a grievance in relation to AFS Limited may be dealt with at the two levels of AFS Limited's operations i.e. technical content of the standards or management.

In terms of the technical content of the AFS or CoC Standard, AFS Limited will convene, on a temporary basis, a Complaints Committee which will be comprised of a member of the AFS Technical Reference Committee (TRC) or Technical Committee (TC), as appropriate, from each of the four main sectors represented on the AFS TRC or TC and will be chaired by the Chairperson of the relevant technical committee<sup>2</sup>. The Complaints Committee will be provided with the substance of the complaint or grievance, convene to consider and discuss whether the issue should be referred to the next full review of the standard, or requires the development of an interim interpretation of the Standard. The outcome will be forwarded to the Board of AFS Limited for a decision on any recommendation from the Complaints Committee. The Board will make a final decision on behalf of AFS Limited and a formal response will be forwarded to the complainant. All matters raised in this context will be registered and referred to the full technical committee at the next review of the standard.

In relation to management issues, AFS Limited will convene, on a temporary basis, a Complaints Panel. The Complaints Panel will comprise the Chairperson, or his/her nominee, and two (2) other Directors of the company, one of whom must come from the sector from which the complaint originated but who does not have a direct or proprietorial interest in the complaint. The Complaints Panel will be provided with the substance of the complaint or grievance, convene to consider and discuss the issue to provide a consensus outcome on resolving the complaint or grievance following necessary discussions with the complainant. The outcome will be forwarded to the Board of AFS Limited for a decision on any recommendation from the Complaints Panel. A formal response will be forwarded to the complainant following the Board's decision.

### ***Summary***

If you have a complaint or grievance with any aspect of the Australian Forest Certification Scheme, please contact the responsible entity as provided in Table 1.

It is suggested that informal discussion with the responsible entity in the first instance may assist in understanding the complaint or grievance.

If a consensus outcome cannot be reached in the first instance, approach the responsible entity formally to initiate appropriate complaint or grievance procedures.

A Grievance and Complaints Register on the AFS web site will provide current information on all complaints and grievances received by AFS Limited.

### **Changes to this Complaints and Grievance Procedure Policy**

This Complaints and Grievance Procedure Policy may change from time to time.  
This policy was approved on 22 July 2008 as Issue 3.

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<sup>2</sup> The AFS Technical Reference Committee for the AFS [AS 4708] or the AFS Technical Committee for the CoC Standard [AS 4707].