

Dispute Resolution Policy

If a complaint is raised about our certification services or clients, we treat this seriously. All complaints and conflicts are handled in accordance with our Policy.

The purpose of this policy is to describe and regulate the way that disputes are handled by WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance that are relating to WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance clients or activities. Disputes are divided into two broad categories – complaints and appeals. Appeals are raised by clients or applicants against WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance certification/verification decision. Complaints are any other disputes raised by any stakeholders, clients or applicants.

In the case of complaints against the actions of a WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance certified client, the complainant should first attempt to resolve the issue directly with the client prior to requesting that WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance become involved. The client's own dispute resolution process may be required prior to WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance involvement.

WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance keeps a record of all disputes and remedial actions related to WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance activities, takes appropriate action and documents the action taken and its effectiveness. In the event that internal nonconformities related to WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance policies or procedures are identified during the review process, corrective action will be implemented to address the nonconformity. Submission, investigation and decision on disputes do not result in any discriminatory actions against the disputing entity. The procedure below is followed upon receiving any dispute. Quality Manager is overall responsible for the implementation of this procedure.

1. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance commits to process any disputes submitted in written and recommends that any disputes are submitted in written. Received disputes will be distributed to a relevant Regional Office Manager and to the Quality Manager. In case the dispute is presented in relation to activities of WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance legal entities, the dispute will be forwarded directly to WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance's Managing Director.

Verbally submitted disputes or indirect evidence of non-conformance of WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance's clients with certification requirements presented in public reports, mass media, other public communications are forwarded to WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance's Quality Manager and Executive Director, who then evaluate if the evidence is of a substance and nature that it shall be handled according to this policy. Examples of such evidence can be reports on violation of the Policy for the Association with FSC.

2. Immediately (within 7 days after a dispute is received), Regional Office Manager or Quality Manager register the received dispute in the Dispute Log in the WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance database.
3. Quality Manager is responsible for coordination of the dispute resolution process including steps described below. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance staff is designated to communicate to a disputing party about the resolution process and decisions. Dispute resolution team, which can consist of WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance staff, Impartiality Committee members or external experts who are not involved in WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance

certification/verification activities related to the dispute and don't have conflict of interest in line with WoodCERT/Rainforest Alliance Impartiality Policy, <http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/forestry/certification/transparency/dispute-resolution> is designated to resolve the dispute. Relevant WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance internal experts are involved in the dispute resolution (e.g. if the legality issues are affected by the dispute, WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance legality team shall be consulted).

4. In case of a complaint against a WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance client, WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance designated staff will send documentation of the complaint to the contact person of the client in question. This must take place within 7 days of receipt of the complaint. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance will give the WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance client an initial opportunity to provide their perspective on the issue, e.g. through the operation's own version of the incident, historical background, etc. This may be done in either verbal or written fashion, preferably in written. Unless the disputing party requires remaining confidential, the original complaint may also be forwarded to the contact person of the WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance client. All WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance personnel will honour the confidentiality of the disputing party if requested or, in the judgment of WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance, in case where divulging his/her name may be politically or personally inappropriate.

In case of publicly available indirect allegations against WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance clients' compliance with certification requirements (e.g. the Policy for Association complaints in FSC certification scheme) an email is sent to a client including following:

- a) Reference to complainant's allegation,
- b) Ask, if the client is aware of the allegation.
- c) Mention that we have to review the allegation as it is potential violation of the certification requirement and certification scheme owner may decide to follow up according to it's own procedures.
- d) Ask, if the client can confirm the direct or indirect involvement in controversial activities specified in the allegation.
- e) Ask, if the client can prove that it is not involved in the unacceptable activities in the allegation (mention that documents alone are often not enough to prove legality from countries with unacceptable corruption level (e.g. if the Corruption Perception Index is lower than 50)).

The follow up call is given to confirm that the client is aware of the email, certification scheme owner policies and the case is discussed verbally. Based on the client's response the conclusion may be:

- a) Allegation is unfounded based on the irrefutable evidence. We inform certification scheme owner about WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance's conclusion and the basis of it. No further actions are needed.
- b) Further investigation is needed as per point 6 below.

- c) The client agree with the allegation and WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance takes relevant decision (it maybe issuance of a major NCR or suspension or termination of certification) depending on the scale of the violation.
5. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance designated staff will provide initial response to disputing party, including an outline of the proposed course of action to follow up on the dispute within 14 days of receiving the dispute. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance designated staff is also encouraged to discuss complaints directly with complainants by meeting in person or by phone and try to address them at this stage. In case of a verbal conversation, it shall followed up by a written summary.
 6. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance designated staff will keep the disputing party informed of progress in evaluating the dispute, investigate the allegations and specify all proposed actions in response to the dispute within 90 days of receiving the dispute. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance will provide written response to the disputing party within 5 days from the time that WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance has finalised the investigation. In case of complaint against the client, WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance may ask the client to assist in providing such written response. It is WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance's decision whether to seek comment from the client on the draft response or not. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance may also choose to contact relevant third parties to clarify the situation. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance may need assistance in this regard from the client. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance will deal with such situations expeditiously and professionally with a priority on fairness to the certified operation and the disputing party and protecting the credibility of WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance.
 7. If the disputing party is not satisfied with the WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance response, it may provide WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance with a written response in relation to this matter. In such case WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance will offer the disputing party to refer their dispute to the relevant standard setting body resolution process.
 8. The process of handling a dispute is recorded by WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance designated staff in the Dispute Log including investigation process and decision.
 9. WoodCERT/ Rainforest Alliance will determine together with the client and the disputing body, whether and to what extent, the subject of the dispute and its resolution should be made publicly available.

Approved by

Director, WoodCERT

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