



# SOUTHERN FORESTS LTD

Forest Managers | Logging Managers | Consultants

## Complaints and Dispute Procedure For FSC® Certified Forests (FSC-C208390)

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## Complaints and Dispute Procedure

### Introduction

It is SFL's intention to proactively manage relationships with stakeholders so as to avoid situations that progress into complaints or disputes. However, despite the best intentions such situations will inevitably arise from time to time. It is SFL's goal to manage all complaints and disputes ethically and proactively to achieve timely and mutually acceptable solutions wherever practical, and to avoid creating ill-will with SFL stakeholders and risk to the business of SFL or compromising the values or reputations of our clients.

The following procedure applies to all complaints and disputes with external parties or stakeholders, relating to SFL operations.

As a general guide a 'complaint' is any material expression of discontent from a third party, relating to SFL's forests or the performance of SFL's staff, operations, or issues arising from forests under management. Complaints may be received by a range of means (verbal, written, phone call, email etc.).

A 'dispute' is a disagreement or argument about something more substantial that cannot be resolved promptly or easily that could potentially result in further action such as negative media publicity, complaints to Forest Certification, claims for costs or legal action.

### Procedure

#### General

All external complaints to the company must be responded to and dealt with in a timely manner. The complaint will be referred to the appropriate SFL staff member depending on the nature of the complaint. That person will be responsible for ensuring the complaint is investigated and followed up in a timely manner.

As a guide complaints should be followed up:

- by phone within 48 hours
- acknowledged in writing within 10 working days

All complaints must be recorded in a Complaints and Calls Register, including details of response and close out where required. SFL use the SharePoint tool for this.

Any justified complaint relating to environmental issues must also be recorded as an Environmental Incident.

Any significant complaint must be reported to the Forest Manager and discussed in the Monthly Meeting.

It is the responsibility of the General Manager to oversee the management of complaints and disputes relating to operations in their region.

It is the responsibility of the General Manager to oversee the management of complaints or disputes.

**Note: Operations must cease in the following areas while disputes exist in the following situations;**

1. Of substantial magnitude
2. Of substantial duration
3. Involving a significant number of interests

### Disputes Management

It is important that disputes are managed proactively at the earliest opportunity to avoid unnecessary escalation.

In the event of a potential dispute developing with an external stakeholder the following steps should be followed.

Disputes must be reported to the appropriate Manager. All significant disputes must be reported to the Forest Manager and General Manager. Disputes must be investigated to determine the underlying causes of dispute. Confirm:

- The party in dispute (in the case of groups, who they represent).
- Any other parties involved, or potentially affected by the dispute
- Identify the issue(s) in dispute and the effect it potentially has both on the party and on SFL or our client.
- Enter the dispute into the SFL SharePoint tool.

Managing disputes can be challenging. Disputes need to be managed carefully and are best dealt with quickly to prevent problems compounding and escalating.

If possible, resolve the dispute. It is best to resolve it positively. This may mean negotiating an outcome or resolving the grievance through compromise.

When managing disputes, the following steps should be followed:

- Identify any relevant background or history contributing to the dispute.
- Confirm the appropriate staff member(s) to manage the dispute and the strategy for dealing with the dispute. For significant disputes, the strategy should be documented and including identification of staff responsible for managing the dispute, key actions and the processes for communicating with the party in dispute.
- Where necessary, obtain legal advice regarding the company position to guide the strategy development.
- Where possible arrange to meet with the party in dispute (ideally with two or more staff present), to discuss in good faith and attempt to reach resolution of the matter. If this is not achievable attempt to reach agreement on the process to be followed to manage and progress the dispute. This may involve senior management.

- If the dispute needs to be resolved and it cannot be resolved directly between the parties, consideration should be given to involving a mutually agreed third party or mediator.
- In some situations, it may not be possible to achieve a mutually acceptable outcome, and the parties must 'agree to disagree'. If this is the case, if possible, ensure that both parties are clear on the position reached, rather than withdrawing and leaving the situation unresolved.
- Monitor and periodically review the strategy until it is agreed the dispute has been closed out, or no further action is appropriate.

Where there is the potential for the dispute to become the subject of media comment, the Manager will contact the SFL General Manager and brief them of the situation.

## Records

In all dispute situations, all correspondence with the party in dispute must be documented on the appropriate file for the party in dispute (including phone conversations, meeting records, letters, and emails). Copies of all significant documents must be uploaded into the SharePoint tool.