



Program for Recognition and Accreditation of Sustainable Management Practices for  
Agroforestry and Natural Forestry Resources

# Frequently Asked Questions

IFWCS-FAQs-2023\_V0

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**Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme “PRAMAAN”**  
**Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal**  
(Scheme Operating Agency)



## **Purpose, economic and market aspects:**

### **1. What is IFWCS, and what is its purpose?**

The Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS), branded as “PRAMAAN” (Program for Recognition and Accreditation of Sustainable Management Practices for Agroforestry and Natural Forestry Resources), is a national initiative aimed at promoting and practicing sustainable forest management practices and the responsible production and harvesting of trees outside forests (TOF).

The IFWCS is a voluntary third-party assessment process. The scheme can provide market incentives to various entities adhering to sustainable forest management, management of TOFs, and agroforestry practices in their operations. These include state forest departments, individual farmers, or farmer producer organizations engaged in agroforestry and on-farm forestry, and other wood-based industries in the value chain.

### **2. What are the main economic & trade impacts of the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme? How does this scheme benefit various stakeholders dealing with the Indian timber and non-timber forest product (NTFP)?**

Certified products gain better access to international markets where sustainable sourcing is a key requirement. It enhances India’s competitiveness in the global timber trade, attracts responsible investors, and supports long-term economic viability. The scheme also offers:

- ✓ Seamless trade by redefining responsible sourcing for ethical businesses and users;
- ✓ Full traceability and transparency throughout the wood and non-wood-based products;
- ✓ Environmental label/ECOMARK - **PRAMAAN**
- ✓ An opportunity to earn credits for supplementary activities under Green Credit Programme (GCP);
- ✓ Linkages to domestic and international markets by enhancing the integrity, and credibility of Indian wood-based industries; and
- ✓ Support forestry and agroforestry to enhance social and ecosystem values.

### **3. In what ways does the IFWCS certification help businesses and forest owners to achieve sustainability in timber production?**

The IFWCS is not influenced by commercial interests like other globally available schemes. While there are initial certification costs, the long-term benefits include premium pricing for certified products, increased market access, and improved forest productivity. The government may also offer financial support for small-scale operators.

### **4. How does IFWCS compare with international forest certification schemes? In what ways does it support the maintenance of India's cultural benefits to forest-dwelling communities?**

IFWCS is tailored to India's unique forestry conditions, ensuring compliance with national regulations. Although other internationally available systems are globally recognised, but do not cover national interests at large. The IFWCS provides a cost-effective, nationally recognised alternative for Indian producers.



The scheme strongly focuses on cultural benefits of the indigenous people and other forest dwelling communities prevalent in India by safeguarding their rights and offering equal opportunities by promoting locally produced wood and non-wood-based products.

**5. How does this scheme support sustainable livelihoods for forest-dependent communities?**

IFWCS encourages sustainable harvesting, fair trade practices, and community participation in forest management. Certified operations often provide better wages, social benefits, and long-term employment opportunities.

**6. What market incentives does this scheme offer to small scale operators?**

The scheme offers significant benefits to the small-scale forest owners and operators, the opportunity to form cooperatives or groups and apply for group certification, thereby reducing certification costs and making certification more accessible. It also promotes Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for tribal communities, ensuring their traditional rights are respected, and provides them with access to sustainable markets and fair compensation. Adherence to international best practices of forest and forest-based products management is central to the IFWCS, and certified entities are required to adhere to sustainable harvesting practices, biodiversity conservation, legal compliance, fair labour standards, and community engagement guidelines. Certification bodies assess these factors during audits.

**Genesis and governing structure:**

**1. What is the basis for establishment of IFWCS?**

India has adopted the principles of sustainable forest management and developed the National Set of 8 Criteria and 37 Indicators on Sustainable Management of Forests from the Bhopal – India Process, one of the 9 internationally accepted frameworks for the Criteria and Indicators (C&I) approach to sustainable forest management. These C&I were incorporated into the NWPC 2023 and thus, the IFMS was developed.

This initiative has led to the establishment of the IFWCS, which was officially launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Government of India on 11th December 2023. Consequently, the certification of forest areas using this standard, which has been adopted by the IFWCS, is on par with the internationally recognised certification system while being relevant in the Indian context.

**2. Who governs IFWCS?**

The Indian Forest and Wood Certification Council (IFWCC) governs Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme “PRAMAAN”, while the Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) has been designated as the Scheme Operating Agency (SOA) for overall management of the scheme’s rollout and operations under the guidance of IFWCC.



### 3. What is the role of the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Council (IFWCC)?

IFWCC is a multi-stakeholder advisory body responsible for approving standards, processes, and certification procedures under IFWCS.

### 4. What is the function of the Scheme Operating Agency (SOA)?

The IIFM serves as the SOA, managing the IFWCS implementation and facilitating certification procedures.

### 5. What are the objectives of IFWCS?

The key objectives of the IFWCS are below including promoting sustainable forest and TOF management, enhancing credibility in wood-based industries, supporting international commitments, and increasing forest cover for carbon sequestration:

- ✓ Promote sustainable management of forests and trees outside forests.
- ✓ Incentivize forest managers and tree-growers who adopt sustainable practices.
- ✓ Enhance integrity, transparency, and credibility of Indian wood-based industries.
- ✓ Promote markets for certified forests and agroforestry products
- ✓ Open doors to domestic and international markets for certified forest resources.
- ✓ Align with national policies and international commitments to increase forest cover and sequester carbon.
- ✓ Support responsible forestry and agroforestry to enhance social and ecosystem values.

### 6. What are the salient features of IFWCS?

- ✓ Third-party certification system.
- ✓ Covers sustainable forest and agroforestry management.
- ✓ Based on National Working Plan Code (NWPC) 2023.
- ✓ Complies with international standards for forest certification.

### **Relevant products classification under the IFWCS:**

### 7. How are the relevant products classified under the IFWCS?

The standards under the IFWCS classifies applicable products under the scope of FM, TOF and CoC certification, into distinct categories based on the Harmonized System (HS) codes. These products are classified into chapters and sections that distinguish between wood-based products and non-wood-based products. Find below the sections with relevant examples.

NOTE: All value-added products fall under the scope of the CoC certification and accordingly, only products selected under the scope of the CoC certification will be permitted to be traded as per the applicable standard requirement under the IFWCS.

### 8. How are the wood-based products and non-wood/Timber-based products as per the applicable standards under the IFWCS?

**Wood-based products** are derived from forest timber and related materials. These products fall under Section IX (Wood and Articles of Wood, Cork and Articles of Cork,

Basketware and Wickerwork) and Section X (Pulp of Wood, Paper and Articles Thereof) of the classification system. Examples include:

- i) Fuel Wood & Charcoal (HS Code: 4401, 4402): Includes firewood, wood chips, and wood charcoal,
- ii) Logs & Sawn Timber (HS Code: 4403, 4407): Rough timber, saw logs, veneer logs, and various forms of cut wood,
- iii) Plywood & Veneer Sheets (HS Code: 4412, 4408): Sheets of veneer, laminated plywood, and oriented strand boards (OSB),
- iv) Wood-Based Furniture & Construction Materials (HS Code: 4418): doors, windows, beams, and flooring panels and v) Paper & Pulp Products (HS Code: 4701- 4823): newsprint, packaging paper, and cellulose pulp derived from wood.

**Non-Wood-Based Products** include derived items that do not require the felling of trees. These products fall under Section II (Vegetable Products) and Section VI (Products of Chemical or Allied Industries), among others. Examples include:

- i) Natural Honey (HS Code: 04090000): Harvested from wild beehives and sustainable beekeeping practices,
- ii) Medicinal & Aromatic Plants (HS Code: 1211, 1301, 3301): Includes neem leaves, ginseng roots, and essential oils like sandalwood and eucalyptus oil,
- iii) Bamboo & Rattan Products (HS Code: 1401, 4601, 4602): Includes raw bamboo, mats, baskets, and woven products,
- iv) Gums & Resins (HS Code: 1301, 1302): Includes gum Arabic, natural resins, and oleoresins used in pharmaceuticals and cosmetics,
- v) Edible & Non-Edible Forest Produce (HS Code: 0801, 0902, 17029010): Includes cashew nuts, green tea, palmyra sugar, and other naturally harvested forest-based edibles.

### **Compliance with the international regulations, worker's rights and FPIC:**

#### **9. How does IFWCS certification support export opportunities?**

Many global markets, including the European Union (EU) and the United States (US), have stringent sustainability regulations. The requirements in the relevant standards for the certified products under the IFWCS have been set out in order to comply with these internal regulations, for improving acceptance in international markets.

#### **10. How does IFWCS involve indigenous and tribal communities in forest certification?**

The scheme promotes Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for tribal communities, ensuring their traditional rights are respected. Certification also provides them with access to sustainable markets and fair compensation. Forests must adhere to sustainable harvesting practices, biodiversity conservation, legal compliance, fair labor standards, and community engagement guidelines. Certification bodies assess these factors during audits.

#### **11. How can small scale forest owners benefit from IFWCS certification?**

Small scale forest owners can form cooperatives or groups to apply for group certification, reducing costs, and making certification more accessible.

## 12. How does IFWCS ensure biodiversity conservation in certified forests? What safeguards are in place to prevent illegal logging and deforestation?

Certification standards require maintaining ecological balance, protecting endangered species, and implementing afforestation programs. Certified forests follow best practices for habitat conservation and soil protection. IFWCS includes robust traceability and tracking requirements for the verification of legal sourcing, and penalties for non-compliance. Remote sensing technology and field inspections help detect illegal activities.

## 13. How does forest certification contribute to climate change mitigation?

Certified forests help in carbon sequestration, reducing deforestation, and promoting reforestation initiatives. Sustainable forest management ensures long-term carbon storage, aligning with India's climate action targets. By promoting afforestation, sustainable land use, and responsible harvesting, IFWCS contributes to carbon neutrality efforts and enhances India's green economy.

### Types of Certifications under IFWCS:

## 14. How many types of certifications can be offered under IFWCS?

There are three types of certifications:

- ✓ **Forest Management Certification:** This certification assesses sustainable forest management practices in forest divisions and plantations in accordance with the Indian Forest Management Standard, as set out in the NWPC 2023.
- ✓ **Trees Outside Forest Management Certification:** It supports individual farmers and groups who adhere to Trees Outside Forests management standards in managing trees outside forests. These include trees growing outside recorded and notified forests, in farmlands of an individual farmers or group of small farmers or plantation area on private land of institutions and industries, etc. and include all trees on the hedges and bunds, trees in different models of agroforestry, silvo-pastoralism, urban and rural forestry systems and block plantations.
- ✓ **Chain of Custody Certification:** This certification assesses the process of tracking the journey of a finished product from the forest or farm to the end user in the forest products supply chain for ensuring traceability of forest-based products across the wood-based supply chain.

### Eligibility for IFWCS Certification:

## 15. Who is eligible to apply for IFWCS certifications?

The inclusive approach of the IFWCS ensures that all stakeholders in the forest and wood-based industries can participate in promoting sustainability.

- ✓ **Forest managers:** State Forest Departments and Forest Development Corporations that manage public forests.



- ✓ **Tree growers:** Individual farmers or groups growing trees outside recorded forests, including agroforestry systems.
- ✓ **Wood-based industries:** Producers of paper, furniture, panels, handicrafts who are committed to sustainable sourcing.
- ✓ **Non-wood product suppliers:** Entities involved in the supply of non-wood forest products and other biomaterials, such as traders, sawmills, and processors.
- ✓ **Exporters:** Entities involved in the production and export of wood and forest products.
- ✓ **End-user industries:** Companies that have provisions for use of certified products in their procurement policies and operations as a measure of sustainable initiatives.

### **Accreditation Procedure for Certification Bodies under the IFWCS:**

#### **16. What is the role of National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB) in IFWCS ?**

NABCB is responsible for accrediting certification bodies under IFWCS as per international standards i.e. ISO/IEC 17065 “Conformity assessment requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services”.

#### **17. Explain the accreditation procedure for certification bodies (CBs) under IFWCS.**

Accreditation demonstrates that a certification body meets internationally recognized standards for competence, impartiality, and performance, enhancing credibility and market acceptance. National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB) provide accreditation to certification bodies based on the following.

- ✓ CBs must meet ISO/IEC 17065 requirements.
- ✓ Apply for provisional approval before formal accreditation.
- ✓ Undergo assessment and approval by NABCB.

#### **18. What are the steps to get accredited under ISO/IEC 17065?**

The accreditation process typically includes:

- ✓ Application Submission
- ✓ Document Review
- ✓ On-site Assessment
- ✓ Corrective Actions (if required)
- ✓ Final Decision and Accreditation Granting
- ✓ Surveillance Audits and Re-accreditation

#### **19. What are the key documents required for accreditation?**

Following documents are required (indicative) for accreditation.

- ✓ Quality Manual and Procedures
- ✓ Impartiality Policy and Committee Records
- ✓ Organizational Structure and Responsibilities
- ✓ Records of Personnel Competence and Training

- ✓ Audit and Certification Procedures
- ✓ Complaint and Appeal Handling Procedures
- ✓ Risk Management Framework

### **Certification Process:**

#### **20. What are the steps involved in the certification process?**

- ✓ Application submission.
- ✓ Document review and pre-assessment.
- ✓ On-site verification.
- ✓ Certification decision.
- ✓ Periodic surveillance audits.

#### **21. What are the validity and renewal requirements for certification?**

Certifications are valid for five years subject to annual surveillance audits. Certification is renewed upon completion of the cycle of 5 years validity period of the certification.

#### **22. Can an applicant be rejected for IFWCS certification?**

Yes, if they fail to meet requirements as per the applicable standards under the IFWCS.

### **Chain of Custody Certification:**

#### **23. What is the Chain of Custody (CoC) certification and its benefits?**

CoC certification ensures that forest-based products maintain traceability from forests to finished products. Manufacturers, exporters, traders, and processors dealing with forest-based materials need the COC certification to ensure compliance as per national and international trade regulations. The benefits include ensuring responsible sourcing, enhancing, market access and strengthening environmental compliance.

### **Indian Forest Management Standard:**

#### **24. What are the criteria for sustainable forest management under IFWCS?**

The Indian Forest Management Standard (IFMS) consists of 8 criteria, 69 indicators, and 253 verifiers that cover economic, social, environmental, policy and cultural aspects under the IFWCS. These verifiers help in monitoring and evaluation of status of various forestry resources such as maintenance of biodiversity, forest health, soil conservation, productivity, and legal compliance etc.

#### **25. How does IFWCS contribute to carbon sequestration?**

By promoting sustainable forest and TOF management, IFWCS enhances carbon capture and storage. This also facilitates adherence to the Green Credit Program; it also complies with several requirements and provide necessary information/ data necessary for the assessment of forest carbon.





## **Regulatory and Compliance Aspects:**

### **26. Is certification under the IFWCS mandatory?**

No, it is a voluntary certification scheme but may be recognized by regulatory authorities.

### **27. What legal frameworks does IFWCS align with?**

The IFWCS aligns with the legal frameworks such as Indian Forest Act, Forest Conservation Act, and National Agroforestry Policy.

### **28. How is IFWCS aligned with international forest certification systems?**

It incorporates internationally accepted standards like ISO/IEC 17065 and aligns with global accreditation norms.

## **Implementation and Monitoring:**

### **29. How does IFWCS ensure the credibility of certified entities?**

Through periodic audits, compliance monitoring, and dispute resolution mechanisms.

### **30. What happens in case of non-compliance with IFWCS standards?**

The certification may be suspended or revoked if Major non-conformities are not corrected.

### **31. How does IFWCS handle complaints and disputes?**

A Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) addresses grievances related to certification processes.

### **32. What role does stakeholder engagement play in IFWCS?**

IFWCS follows a multi-stakeholder approach, ensuring participation from government, industries, and community organizations.

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