



Forest Strategy Group Scheme

Procedure Name	Complaints and Appeals Procedure
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Procedure Number	FS_GS_SOP_005	Date	14 November 2022
Issue Number	05	Authorised by	GM

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To set out the process which must be followed when a complaint is received, either against the group itself or an individual group member, to ensure that it is properly investigated and resolved. The mechanisms in this procedure seek to resolve conflicts through consultation aiming at achieving agreement or consent, avoiding damage to property, resources, rights and livelihoods.
- 1.2. This procedure is for any and all complaints relating to the Forest Strategy Group Scheme including but not limited to:
- Management of forest and plantations;
 - Harvesting operations;
 - Relationships with neighbours and stakeholders;
 - Relationships with workers;
 - Forest products procurement;
 - Use of logos, branding and certification claims;
 - Disputes involving land rights, tenure claims and use rights; and
 - Disputes involving local communities.

2. Complaint against a group member

- 2.1. When a complaint against a group member is received, either verbally or in writing, the Group Manager should be informed.
- 2.2. A copy of the Standard Letter to Complainants FS_GS_F_004 should be sent to the complainant.
- 2.3. Any prejudicial forest operations shall be halted when complaints or disputes are received that relate to land rights or any other dispute that is of a substantial magnitude or of substantial duration or involves a significant number of interests.
- 2.4. The Group Manager should identify a person to be responsible for investigating the complaint. This may be the Group Manager.
- 2.5. Details of the complaint should be entered on to the Complaint Register FS_GS_R_011 by the Group Manager. The information entered on to the register should include:
- the name and contact details of the person or organisation making the complaint (the complainant),
 - a description of the issue including the name of the member, the name of the forest and the issue raised. Any objective evidence provided should be noted.

- the date the complaint was received,
 - the person to whom investigation of the complaint is allocated.
- 2.6. The member against whom the complaint has been made should be informed in writing with details of the issue raised and the name of the person allocated to investigate. The member should also normally be told who made the complaint unless the complainant has asked to remain anonymous.
- 2.7. The person identified to investigate the complaint should immediately begin the investigation which should be in two phases:
- firstly, establishing that the issue raised is covered by the Group Requirements (*ie* that the issue is relevant to the group), and if it is,
 - secondly, collecting objective evidence to either support or refute the complaint.
- 2.8. This process must be initiated within one week of receiving the complaint and concluded within one month of receiving the complaint unless the Group Manager makes an exception, in which case the complainant must be informed in writing.
- 2.9. The outcome of the investigation should be documented and discussed with the Group Manager.
- 2.10. If the investigation refutes the complaint, either because the issue is outside the scope of the group requirements, or because there is no objective evidence to support the complaint, then a letter should be written to the complainant clearly explaining this and the complaint closed out.
- 2.11. If the investigation supports the complaint, then the member must be informed and, in discussion with the Group Manager and investigator, decide on what action should be taken to resolve the issue.
- 2.12. If appropriate the complainant can also be involved in the process of identifying actions to resolve the issue. If they are not involved then they should be contacted in writing to explain what is being done and to invite feedback.
- 2.13. The actions taken by the member should be monitored to ensure that they are implemented fully, and that they are adequate to resolve the issue. If feedback is received from the complainant this should be fed into the monitoring process.
- 2.14. The Complaints Register should be filled in with details of the actions taken and the date the complaint was closed out.
- 2.15. If the complainant is not happy with the actions taken then they can appeal as set out below.

3. *Complaints against the group management*

- 3.1. When a complaint against the group management is received, either verbally or in writing, the Group Manager should be informed immediately.
- 3.2. A copy of the Standard Letter to Complainants FS_GS_F_004 should be sent to the complainant.
- 3.3. If the complaint is against a specific member of staff other than the Group Manager, then the Group Manager may allocate investigation to him/herself and follow the same procedure as set out in section 1 above.
- 3.4. If the complaint is against the group management in general or the Group Manager themselves then the complaint must be dealt with by the Complaints and Appeals Committee.

- 3.5. The chairperson of the Complaints and Appeals Committee should be informed of the complaint and inform the Group Manager who will carry out the investigation.
- 3.6. Details of the complaint should be entered on to the Complaint Register FS_GS_R_011 by the Group Manager or the group administrator. The information entered on to the register should include:
- the name and contact details of the person or organisation making the complaint (the complainant),
 - a description of the issue. Any objective evidence provided should be noted.
 - the date the complaint was received,
 - the name of the person to whom investigation of the complaint is allocated by the chairperson of the Complaints and Appeals Committee.
- 3.7. The person identified to investigate the complaint should immediately begin the investigation which should be in two phases:
- firstly, establishing that the issue raised is covered by the certification requirements for the group, and if it is,
 - secondly, collecting objective evidence to either support or refute the complaint.
- 3.8. This process must be initiated within one week of receiving the complaint and concluded within one month of receiving the complaint unless the chairperson of the Complaints and Appeals Committee makes an exception, in which case the complainant must be informed in writing.
- 3.9. The outcome of the investigation should be documented and discussed with the group manager.
- 3.10. If the investigation refutes the complaint, either because the issue is outside the scope of the certification requirements, or because there is no objective evidence to support the complaint, then a letter should be written to the complainant clearly explaining this and the complaint closed out.
- 3.11. If the investigation supports the complaint, then the Group Manager must be informed and, in discussion with the investigator, decide on what action should be taken to resolve the issue.
- 3.12. If appropriate the complainant can also be involved in the process of identifying actions to resolve the issue. If they are not involved then they should be contacted in writing to explain what is being done and to invite feedback.
- 3.13. The actions taken by the Group Manager should be monitored by the chairperson of the Complaints and Appeals Committee to ensure that they are implemented fully, and that they are adequate to resolve the issue. If feedback is received from the complainant this should be fed into the monitoring process.
- 3.14. The Complaints Register should be filled in with details of the actions taken and the date the complaint was closed out.
- 3.15. If the complainant is not happy with the actions taken then they can appeal as set out below.

4. Appeals

- 4.1. Appeals may be lodged by
- either a complainant or the person against whom a complaint was made who is unhappy with the outcome of the complaint investigation.
 - a member who has been informed that they are being expelled from the group.

- 4.2. The appeal must be made in writing within 30 days of receiving formal notification of the outcome of the complaint or the standard letter of expulsion and sent directly to the chairperson of the Complaints and Appeals Committee.
- 4.3. The chairperson must inform the Group Manager immediately that an appeal has been lodged to allow preparation for an appeal meeting.
- 4.4. The appeal must be dealt with at a meeting of the Complaints and Appeals Committee at which at least 3 members are present. The meeting must be chaired by the chairperson or the deputy chairperson.
- 4.5. The appeal meeting must be held within 30 days of the chairperson receiving a written appeal.
- 4.6. If the appeal relates to a complaint, the complainant and the person against whom the complaint is made can be asked to submit information in writing or to attend the meeting to answer questions. The Committee can also request copies of documents or correspondence from the group management.
- 4.7. If the appeal relates to an expulsion, the member being expelled and the inspector or anyone else from the group management involved in the monitoring visit can be asked to submit information in writing or to attend the meeting to answer questions. The Committee can also request copies of documents or correspondence from the group management.
- 4.8. The decision of the appeal committee must be documented in full as part of the meeting and signed by all Committee Members present.
- 4.9. A copy of the decision must be provided to the Group Manager, the person lodging the appeal and, in the case of an appeal relating to a complaint, the other party in the original complaint.
- 4.10. The decision will be final, and any further appeal must be made directly to the certification body.

5. Other Documents Referenced

Document Name	Document Number
Standard Letter to Complainants	FS_GS_F_004
Complaints Register	FS_GS_R_011

6. Complaints and Appeals Committee

Committee Member	Contact Number
Michael Spencer, former CEO FSC Australia (Chairman)	03 9417 1110
David Fiskin, Retired Central Victorian Farm Plantations	03 5341 7759
Tim Anderson, Wombat Forest Society	03 5321 6811