

**[http://www.fsc-watch.org/archives/2006/11/05/Cameroon\\_\\_Wijma\\_still\\_certified\\_\\_as\\_official\\_observer\\_finds\\_new\\_illegalities](http://www.fsc-watch.org/archives/2006/11/05/Cameroon__Wijma_still_certified__as_official_observer_finds_new_illegalities)**

**[Cameroon: Wijma still certified, as official observer finds new illegalities](#)** Tags: **[Cameroon](#)**, **[Corrective Action Requests](#)**, **[Wijma](#)**, **[Legality](#)**, **[Eurocertifor](#)**

The following article by Philippe Chibani-Jacquot first appeared on [novethic.fr](http://novethic.fr), in October, 2006 (\*)

The decision to maintain the FSC label awarded to the first certified concession in Central Africa continues to make waves among environmentalists. The certification gained by the Wijma-Douala company is encouraging other companies to commence the same process.

Since December 2005, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), a sustainable forest management label, has been facing criticism from the Cameroon NGO, the Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement (CED/Centre for the Environment and Development), Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth-France. The issue: the FSC certificate awarded to a Cameroon concession run by Wijma-Douala, a Dutch company (see related article). Ten months on and criticism is still just as fierce. At the request and in the presence of an FSC team, Eurocertifor - a French certification body - carried out a monitoring audit which concluded that the certificate should be conditionally maintained. The FSC report notes, however, that at the date of the audit, Wijma « was not complying with all the requirements of the reference framework » and that Eurocertifor did not demand all the corrective actions necessary. Eurocertifor's certification committee explains in its press release that, « Requests for major corrective actions could have led to the certification being questioned. However, in the light (...) of responses already given by the company, the Committee voted unanimously to conditionally maintain the certificate. » A new audit is thus taking place this month. In summary, the two bodies note the failings of Wijma-Douala but judge the company to be on the right track.

And yet on 24 May, four weeks prior to the monitoring audit, forest controllers, accompanied by the [Independent Observer](#) for forest offence monitoring, noted two offences in the certified concession. Wijma had under-estimated the volumes of wood logged in its declarations to the administration and had left unrecorded wood abandoned in the forest.

According to Caroline Duhesme, head of audits at Eurocertifor, « The noted offences are not the result of a deliberate desire to circumvent the law [but] are due to the company's organisational set-up, which is ill-adapted to some of the regulations' provisions; these are difficult to apply in some cases on the ground ». The last report from the Independent Observer notes, however, that these two offences are an illegal practice that is on the increase and could « cause revenue shortfalls of several hundred million francs CFA for the Cameroon State every year ». The first offence is punishable with a fine of between three and ten million francs CFA (4,500 to 15,200 euros) and between one to three years in prison. Wijma-Douala

has, moreover, paid a fine in the context of a transaction with the Cameroon Ministry of Forests.

This affair has led Friends of the Earth-France to support the formal complaint sent to the certification body. There is thus a crisis of credibility in the FSC label among environmental NGOs. This debate is not restraining the spread of the label in Central Africa. During the summer of 2006, four operators had pre-audits carried out in Cameroon, including the French company Pallisco, along with Rougier, a larger operator working in Congo-Brazzaville. It should be noted that Pallisco was recently taken to task by the Cameroon authorities for the same offences as Wijma. Eurocertifor pre-audited two of the operators in Cameroon, including Pallisco.

The FSC must therefore demonstrate that it has the capacity to encourage the sustainable management of forest resources in the Congo Basin massif, whilst avoiding competition from other certification systems such as the Pan African Forest Certification (PAFC). For Samuel Nguiffo, Secretary General of the Cameroon NGO CED: « Wijma has been selling wood under the FSC label for almost a year now although it doesn't deserve to be doing so ».

Philippe Chibani-Jacquot

(\*) This is an unauthorised translation from the original French language version. See also an earlier posting on Cameroon's FSC-certified 'Chainsaw Criminal'.