World Forestry Certification Model Closer

A global framework for mutual recognition of environmental certification of forest practices came a step closer at a major meeting of international private sector paper and wood products interests in Rotorua.

The International Forum of Forest and Paper Associations (IFFPA) and the FAO Advisory Committee on Paper and Wood Products have endorsed efforts by an international industry working group, led by New Zealand, to develop a framework for credible sustainable forest management standards and certification systems.

The IFFPA collectively represents 90 per cent of the world's commercial forestry and wood processing interests and 55 participants from 27 countries have met in Rotorua in early May.

"It's the biggest meeting of global private sector forestry and wood processing interests ever held in New Zealand," said IFFPA chairman, James Griffiths. "And to reach consensus on such an important subject as certification for sustainable forest management is of enormous potential significance."

The major US and European industrial users of wood fibre and retailers of wood products have given the industry until the end of next year to come up with a cost-effective and credible solution to the proliferation of certification schemes.

"At the moment there are at least 40 certification products of varying type and credibility available around the world," says Griffiths, "and that represents potential chaos."

"However, the FAO committee and the IFFPA have today supported the working group's efforts to develop an over-arching framework which will identify credible standards and deliver sustainably sourced forest products to the marketplace."

The New Zealand-led working group will now develop the tools for bilateral and regional recognition of the certification framework and test it with international customers before a potential launch early next year.

Mr Griffiths, who was appointed vice-chairman of the FAO Advisory Committee, will represent Southern Hemisphere plantation forestry interests through to 2003.

"Having these two prestigious groups meet here is part of our strategy to promote the New Zealand plantation industry and our concepts of sustainable forest management," said Griffiths who is also chief executive of the NZ Forest Industries Council.

"We have been telling delegates, including representatives of major international agencies such as the World Bank, the UN Environmental Programme, the International Tropical Timber Organisation and the European Community, to watch out, the New Zealanders are coming."

Delegates from around the world in session at the Rotorua conference