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Press statement

30 April 2007

WWF Statement on Barama Company Ltd's FSC Certification

WWF staff visited the Barama Company Ltd (BCL) forest concession in Guyana during late February/early March 2007 to observe the company's on-the-ground response to the suspension of its Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certificate and the corresponding corrective action requests issued by SGS Qualifor in January 2007. The WWF visit was a follow-up to the meeting between BCL, FSC and WWF held in Bonn in February 2007 to review the findings of the SGS Qualifor and Accreditation Services International audits that led to this suspension and the actions necessary by BCL to secure the reinstatement of the FSC certificate. The visit was NOT a pre-audit inspection of BCL's operations by WWF.

The visit included a limited survey of compartment 5 of the BCL concession, the Buck Hill sawmill and management centre, main field camp (km 70 sub-camp), logging crew camps, as well as three non-BCL concessions where BCL is currently conducting harvesting operations.

The main findings were as follows:

1. Forest management activities in Compartment 5 of the BCL concession include a solid geographic information system (GIS), well-organized harvest planning, log-tracking and road network systems, and the general application of many principles of reduced impact logging (RIL).
2. Average harvest rates on the BCL concession have been lower than the volumes authorized by the Guyana Forest Commission, though BCL plans to increase harvest levels in line with the annual allowable cut as determined by the Commission. However, additional emphasis is needed on the silvicultural management of those species being harvested the heaviest. Analysis is being conducted of data from permanent plots to monitor forest dynamics, which should be used to adapt forest management systems to ensure viable commercial populations of these species in the future.
3. While the BCL management practices on third-party concession lands observed over a limited area during this short visit appear to be following basic BCL standards regarding GIS, planning, log-tracking and road construction, RIL is not being practised on these lands. BCL indicated that the investment required to implement RIL on these third-party concessions is difficult to justify given their lack of long-term tenure i.e. these concession owners could terminate the supply contracts with BCL at any given time.
4. While some aspects concerning workers' living conditions, health and sanitation were being improved, others remain wanting. BCL appears, however, to have taken this issue seriously and is making many improvements since the SGS Qualifor surveillance audit of November 2006. Whether these efforts are sufficient to meet the FSC standard needs to be further assessed.
5. Although numerous studies and plans for a range of responsible forestry practices, particularly on environmental impact assessment (EIA) and monitoring, have been prepared over the years, these have not been fully implemented. Particular emphasis is needed to ensure effective restoration of disturbed sites such as retired log landings, erosion control on retired road networks and minimal disturbance during road construction. BCL has acquired the necessary machinery to address the road maintenance and construction issues since the SGS Qualifor surveillance audit of November 2006.



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6. While BCL does have a detailed management plan for compartment 5, where current harvesting is focused, this is lacking for compartment 4. Since compartment 4 also falls under the scope of the suspended FSC certificate, it should be covered under the forest management plan. However, BCL indicated that there is no access currently to compartment 4 and harvesting operations are not scheduled there until 2009. Compartments 1, 2 and 3, which have been previously harvested, were not included in the scope of the original FSC certificate issued by SGS Qualifor.
7. BCL's multi-national and multi-cultural team has many strengths and potential. The staff's collective experience has been put to good use, especially in logistics and planning of such a large operation. However, the cultural differences, operating customs and language barriers also present a significant management challenge.
8. There is a lack of consistent decision-making and authority by BCL managers who truly understand the details of FSC certification and cutting-edge, modern sustainable forestry practices. High staff turnover in management, coupled with the cross-cultural challenges mentioned above, have inhibited consistent application of BCL policies. This situation has also exacerbated a breakdown in dialogue with many key stakeholders.
9. BCL needs to make a concerted and sustained effort to improve its internal and external communications, and to engage with Guyanese stakeholders to advance responsible forestry practices and independent certification. There was a general negative perception of BCL among many of those interviewed during this visit.

WWF has transmitted these findings to BCL. Continued WWF support to BCL towards the reinstatement of its FSC certificate will be considered in light of BCL's response to the above challenges. WWF has reiterated its call to both BCL and its parent company, Samling, to make a high-level commitment to responsible forestry according to the rigorous standards of FSC.

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