

## Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme

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Amidst growing global concerns about deforestation and the illicit trade in

timber, the Indian government has introduced its own national forest certification scheme. This initiative, known as the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS), aims to validate entities committed to sustainable practices in forest management.

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### Addressing Integrity Concerns in Certification

Previously, private foreign certification agencies operated in India for two decades. However, a report by The Indian Express, as part of a global investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), raised doubts about the integrity of these certifications. This raised concerns about the acceptance of Indian products in international markets and led to high dropout rates among certified entities. To counter this, the government decided to launch its own certification scheme for better market regulation.

### Mandatory Standards for Forest Management

The launch of IFWCS coincides with the introduction of new standards for forest management, applicable to all forest divisions in the country. These standards consist of eight criteria, 69 indicators, and 254 verifiers, and will be mandatory for all forest divisions.

### **Certification Voluntary but Encouraged**

While forest divisions are not mandated to obtain certification, adherence to the newly developed standards makes them eligible. It is a positive step towards bringing trust, transparency, and acceptability to Indian forest-based products in international markets.

### **Scope of Certification under IFWCS**

The IFWCS offers certification for sustainable forest management, sustainable management of trees outside forests (e.g., plantations), and chain of custody—a guarantee of traceability throughout the supply chain. The guidelines specify potential beneficiaries, including forest management units, corporations, wood-based industries, tree growers, timber traders, and more.

### **Meeting International Market Requirements**

Considering that Europe and the United States are major export markets for India's forest-based products, compliance with international standards is crucial. IFWCS aligns with the tightening import rules in these markets due to increased sensitivity regarding deforestation and climate change concerns. At the 2021 Glasgow climate change conference, over 100 countries pledged to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030. The IFWCS serves as a strategic move to meet these global commitments and enhance the credibility of India's forest products in international trade.