

Wood certification to give information on source of forest products

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NEW DELHI: In order to encourage sustainable forest management and agroforestry practices in the country, the environment ministry has recently launched the Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme that will provide an environmental label informing both domestic and international consumers about the origin and source of the forest and tree-based products. Since the scheme will allay concerns of such green-conscious consumers over deforestation and illicit timber trade through certification, it will increase the export potential of India's wood-based products.

"Certified products would be sold on competitive domestic and global markets and thus encourage consumers towards green products," said environment secretary, Leena Nandan. She said, "Certification under the scheme is available to individual farmers, groups of farmers, institutions, or industries engaged in agroforestry, wood-based industries, or any entities involved in the wood value chain."

The scheme offers a certification logo, bearing the brand name PRAMAAN, which can be applied and used on the certified wood products or processed items. It includes forest management certification, tree outside forest management certification and chain of custody certification, right from origin to market, for both timber and non-timber forest produce.

Implementation of the scheme will be carried out by the Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal,

providing operational support and facilitating certification processes and procedures.

"The certification process will be conducted by impartial, competent, and independent certification bodies. These bodies will handle applications, conduct independent audits based on criteria and indicators outlined in the certification standards adopted by the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme," said the secretary.

The National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies under the Quality Council of India will accredit the certification bodies which will carry out independent audits and assess adherence on the Indian Forest Management Standard, consisting of eight sustainability criteria, 69 indicators and 254 verifiers, which is an integral part of the National Working Plan Code 2023.

The Code was released last year for scientific management of forests and evolving new approaches. It deals in detail the essentials of forest management planning, incorporating the principles of sustainable management of forests. This includes extent and condition of forest and tree cover; maintenance, conservation and enhancement of biodiversity including wildlife, forest health and vitality, conservation and management of soil and water resources, enhancement of forest resource productivity, maintenance and enhancement of social, economic, cultural and spiritual benefits.

It also provides for the appropriate policy, legal and institutional framework. For the first time, the National Working Plan Code-2023 has prescribed state forest departments to engage in continuous data collection and its updation in a centralized database.

The Indian Forest Management Standard which is a part of this code, takes into account the diverse forest ecosystem in the country, while trying to bring in uniformity in management. The Standards for Sustainable Forest Management have been codified in the Indian Forest Management Standard, based on long term experiences of scientific forest management in India and in sync with international criteria and indicators.