

Statement of the High Carbon Stock Approach Steering Group on High Forest Cover Landscapes

14 June 2018

Highlights:

- *The High Carbon Stock Approach Toolkit and Decision Tree will not be altered for application in High Forest Cover Landscapes (HFCLs).*
- *However, the HCSA Steering Group will work with stakeholders to identify alternatives to the industrial plantations model in HFCLs, meeting community aspirations and allowing development as well as conserving HCS forests in the long-term.*
- *For a strictly limited number of existing “legacy cases” of concessions in HFCLs that meet eligibility criteria and agree to enter into a due diligence process, this may include limited conversion subject to specific thresholds and procedures, via an agreed legacy case review process.*
- *Additional information on the Legacy Case review process will be available in the next 30 days on the HCSA website.*

Members of the High Carbon Stock Approach (HCSA) Steering Group have long recognised that many agricultural development projects are slated for development in High Forest Cover Landscapes (HFCLs), defined as landscapes¹ with over eighty percent forest cover. In these landscapes there may be insufficient area or optimal arrangement of degraded land to support development of large-scale plantations, while governments and local communities are anticipating the implementation of projects, including those where the Free, Prior and Informed Consent has been obtained from rights holders.

Following deliberation by the HFCL Working Group in 2017, it has been decided that the HCSA methodology and Decision Tree will not be altered for application in HFCLs. Sanctioned deforestation in these landscapes is not compatible with a No Deforestation commitment, and this decision will maintain the credibility and rigour of the HCSA as a tool for putting No Deforestation into practice. This decision provides needed clarity over the scope of the HCSA for its stakeholders, further strengthening ongoing efforts to incorporate HCSA into certification schemes and improve support and adoption by governments.

In recognition of the development aspirations of communities and governments in HFCLs, as well as the importance of these forests for keeping climate change below 1.5 degrees and biodiversity, the HCSA Steering Group will instead shift its focus to researching, identifying, and developing new strategies, financing, and stakeholder engagement tools for these contexts. These will assist actors in HFCL areas to identify alternatives to the industrial plantations model that will allow development as well as the conservation of HCS forests. Such assistance will be based on cooperation with local

¹ See HCSA Toolkit Module 5: “Landscape is defined as a geographical mosaic composed of interacting ecosystems resulting from the influence of geological, topographical, soil, climatic, biotic and human interactions in a given area”, based on the definition used by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). See: http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/en_iucn__glossary_definitions.pdf (accessed 1 June 2018)

communities as primary rights holders, as well as NGOs, governments, and the private sector. It is anticipated that this will include pilot projects and demonstration case studies to test different models and generate replicable and scalable proofs of concept.

In parallel, for a strictly limited number of “Legacy Cases” that meet specific eligibility criteria and agree to undergo a due diligence process, the HFCL Working Group will focus on assisting communities, companies, and their partners working in these existing concessions within HFCLs to prioritise conservation outcomes. In certain instances, following application of the Toolkit and Decision Tree, the Integrated Conservation and Land Use Plan (ICLUP) process may include limited conversion of identified HCS forest that does not exceed the Young Regenerating Forest (YRF)² vegetation class and maximum area thresholds defined by the HCSA Steering Group. A key focus will remain on building alternative livelihood and development options to the large-scale plantation model, and decisions on limited conversion exceptions for YRF areas will be determined via a mutually agreed decision-making process with affected communities. These options will include assurances for long-term protection of High Conservation Value (HCV) areas and HCS forest.

Shortly, the HCSA Steering Group will disseminate additional information about eligibility criteria and the due diligence process for those existing projects in HFCLs that wish to apply for consideration as valid Legacy Cases. Interested parties should note that in order to be considered a valid Legacy Case, a moratorium on forest clearance must have been enacted and any active clearance during the application process will serve as a disqualification from further consideration.

The HCSA Steering Group recognises that this strategy restricts options for concession-holders in High Forest Cover Landscapes, and that some direct or indirect future development may occur. The Steering Group will monitor potential ‘leakage’ and may at a future date decide to re-evaluate the approach to ensure that our strategy continues to address our goal of stopping broader deforestation associated with commodity production.

² Young Regenerating Forest (YRF) is defined as a highly disturbed forest or forest areas regenerating to their original structure. Diameter distribution dominated by trees 10-30 cm and with higher frequency of pioneer species compared to Low Density Forest. This land cover class may contain small areas of smallholder agriculture. Note: abandoned plantations with less than 50% of basal area consisting of planted trees could fall in this category or above. Concentrations >50% of basal area would not be considered HCS forest but rather plantations and should be classified separately. [THE HCS APPROACH TOOLKIT MODULE 4 Version 2.0 May 2017](#)