

# StarTree Action Research report: Survey of Scottish Working Woods label licensees

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## Overview

Of the 12 current licensees of the label, I spoke with 8. I also spoke with one ex-licensee who has now moved to Wales, thus can no longer be a licensee, and with one person who applied who had this to say: *"I was eager to join it when it started and filled in the application form and sent it off but never heard back from anybody. I assumed that since I was not a hardwood sawmiller I didn't qualify for membership or wasn't wanted as a member."*

The aim of the survey was to ascertain how licensees felt about different aspects of the label: the application process, the label identity, use and benefits of the label, public awareness and promotional methods.

All licensees interviewed had signed up to SWW at least three years ago with the majority having been a licensee since the beginning of the label.

## Application process

The feelings about the application form were mixed. Some felt the application form was straightforward and others found it overly complicated, time consuming and daunting as some of the questions were lengthy and it was tricky to work out all that was being asked: *"People often don't know what or why they are being asked something and think the process is more complicated than it actually is."* If the questions seem demanding or imposing people are put off. One interviewee felt he had to jump through hoops and it wasn't worth it and a couple whilst recognising the importance of the percentages of material source, found the percentages questions weren't clear and were tricky to work out. What seemed to make a positive difference was having someone from a membership organisation helping, Chris Holmes and Patrick Baxter were mentioned as having assisted a few through the process of applying: *"If this hadn't happened I would have been lost in the application process."*

The other issues mentioned were the length of the process and the lack of response and communication after having applied. The backwards and forwards of the paperwork lengthens the process and one licensee mentioned having to chase up the progress of his application on several occasions, whilst, as was mentioned earlier, one applicant applied and heard nothing back at all.

## Suggestions

Have an online application form, this can include help buttons for questions that may need clarification. An online application will be easier and more attractive to potential new licensees, it should speed up the whole process and facilitate a faster response time.

Tweak and "cleanup" the questions, try to simplify whilst still being thorough!

Have a representative from the member organisations who can talk people through the application if needs be, better if it is a "seasoned" member who can vouch for and verify the licensees' eligibility.



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## Use and benefits of the label

Whilst all the interviewees think the label is a great concept and reinforces the ethics and sustainability of the wood they are using, most interviewees have not been using the label recently. This is mainly due to the fact that they either physically don't have any of the labels or more commonly that they see no present benefits to using the label or they believed the label had ceased existing.

Almost all of the interviewees commented that it was a good talking point with customers. One mentioned that, "*When customers/contacts ask about FSC we can explain the use of SWW label - customers seem happy with this*", but all apart from one felt that it hadn't made any difference to them selling their products or getting orders.

One licensee thought the quality of the printed label was poor and didn't want to put it on their product. (They also mentioned the old label design not fitting well with their product but admitted that this was a subjective matter.)

A few licensees mentioned using the label when exhibiting in the past and found that people have been interested in knowing more about the label. People are pleased to know that wood is local provenance and the SWW label is a good method of guarantee for the customer.

Unfortunately there is little, if any, public awareness of the label at present which is the underlying reason why most of the licensees are not using the label currently.

## Ideas for better promotion / marketing/ raising awareness

Below are the ideas that interviewees gave to better promote the label. Some are already happening, some are straightforward and simple, others will need funding behind them:

- SWW to have a stand at events and could also showcase/highlight licensees' work and businesses.
- Have a good website that licensees can link to on their webpages.
- Have an accessible electronic logo that can be add to licensees' invoices, websites etc.

## Member organisations

- Write about SWW in any literature and on website. (ASHS have already done this with a webpage on their website and an article in their *Full Circle* magazine.)
- Drive to recruit new members. Ask all members of organisation to join the label - plug it. Remember about it.
- Produce new leaflets. (ASHS have already produced a new leaflet). Use on displays at events.
- Hold a seminar/info event inviting members of each organisation.
- Produce an information board about SWW that can be used at shows/exhibitions - e.g. at Aberdeen Art Fair (SFMA have a stand). Other suggested events were Peebles Wood Market, Ideal Home Show, Handmade in Britain.
- Offer incentives to licensees who use the label (not sure what these would be).
- Have a featured licensee on website / in magazine every month.



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## Licensees

- Put logo on literature, invoices and website.
- Use stickers on products.
- Have literature and labels available in workshops and when exhibiting.
- Bring up in conversation to customers. Talk about it. Mention it to larger customers.
- Have a link to SWW website from their homepage.

## Other comments

A few licensees are concerned that there is no support from SFMA for the label. SWW has not appeared on SFMA agenda at meetings – why?

One licensee already gives a booklet with his products about local provenance, outlining the story from standing tree to finished product. Customers increasingly like to know the story behind a product and SWW can provide them with part of this.

*“It’s important that we promote the use of local timber as widely as possible”*

*“SWW symbolises quality of wood and product. A label that shows a product is not mass produced.”*

*“Customers are looking for as few miles as possible – SWW should be a good way of guaranteeing that.”*

*“Anything run on a voluntary basis is hard to always find drive and motivation and gain momentum.”*

*“All going in the right direction – needs to step up and go a bit further.”*

*“Needs a push from member organisations – funding and enthusiasm.”*

*“Every member of ASHS should be a licensee.”*

*“Licensees are busy – needs a push from member organisations to make it as easy as possible for licensees.”*

## Challenges

The major challenge of raising awareness of the label is a “chicken and egg” scenario. Licensees don’t see the point of using the label because there is little customer awareness of the label, but the more that the label is used by licensees the higher profile it will gain. This in turn should raise benefits experienced by the licensees which will encourage the licensees to utilise the label more!

On a positive note, all the licensees who are currently not using the label said that with the “relaunch” of the label with the new logo, website, leaflets etc that they would use the label, put the logo and website link on their website and take leaflets for their workshops/displays.



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