

TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESEARCH ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF RSPO CERTIFICATION TO THE PROTECTION OF BIODIVERSITY ON OIL PALM PLANTATIONS

1. Introduction

The protection of biodiversity is a key outcome that RSPO intends to achieve via the RSPO Principles & Criteria (P&C). This involves the preservation of rare, threatened and endangered (RTE) species¹, as well as preservation of High Conservation Value (HCV) areas, which are clearly detailed in Principle 5 and 7 of the RSPO P&C 2013, and Principle 7 of RSPO P&C 2018.

As such, the effectiveness of RSPO certification on the conservation and protection of biodiversity has always been a key topic of interest to both RSPO and our stakeholders, as well as the wider public. It is a topic that has been frequently debated but to date, there are only few analyses that have been conducted on it. Therefore, RSPO recognises the need to conduct a more comprehensive study to understand the impact of RSPO certification on protection of biodiversity.

2. Objective of Research

The main objective of the research is to determine *'To what extent and in what context does the adoption of RSPO P&C contribute to the protection (maintenance and improvement) of biodiversity, especially RTE species¹ in landscapes with oil palm?'*

Using a specific species indicator(s), explore how the specific management and monitoring strategies or prescriptions employed by the plantation companies have contributed towards the mitigation of threats and protection of the indicator(s) species through a quantitative or evidence-based approach. Identify any gaps and provide ways on how these gaps can be addressed. In addition, determine the indicators that have been employed by plantation companies to measure the status of the indicator species and their habitats within the oil palm concession. Are the indicators sufficient or are there additional or other indicators that will need to be tracked?

As communities form an integral part of conservation and protection effort, it will be important for the scope of the research to look beyond protecting particular species or delimited area and to incorporate aspects of community livelihood in the surrounding landscape. Therefore, the study should also explore cases of local community involvement in co-management and monitoring of RTE species¹ and habitat set asides. Have such practices been beneficial and what are some of the best ways to engage the local community members and drive their participation?

¹ Rare, threatened, and endangered (RTE) species as defined by the High Conservation Value Resource Network (HCVRN). Source:HCVRN Common Guidance for the Identification of HCVs.

Note: Should there be elements of deforestation to be incorporated the study, it will be important for the researcher to consider the following information:

- *In the use of historic tree cover loss data such as in Hansen et al. (2013) as reference, careful consideration has to be made regarding the threshold used to distinguish forest cover. For example, the Hansen et al. (2013) data does not distinguish between planted (clearing of old plantations for replating) and natural forest cover. The use of a higher threshold for forest cover can help to eliminate these problems. For example, 90% threshold forest cover as utilised in Carlson et al. (2017).*
- *It will be important to differentiate between oil palm-driven deforestation and non oil-palm driven deforestation. This can be done by determining and setting a fixed period of time between forest clearing and conversion to oil palm as conducted by Benami et al. (2018) and Gaveau et al. (2018).*
- *To better contextualise the historic deforestation that occurred in certified concessions, consideration should also be given to the management scenario of the area at that the time when deforestation occurred. For example, who owned/managed the land at the time, whether the organisation was a RSPO member, and whether deforestation occurred before RSPO and NPP*

3. Scope of Research

As the main oil palm producing areas are located in Indonesia and Malaysia, which are also global biodiversity hotspots, this study will need to focus on both or either of the countries. The study should include a minimum of 5 different plantation company sites.

RSPO is open to have interested parties develop and provide proposals to further refine the scope and to determine the specific location and focus species of study as per the objective above.

4. Budget

MYR 200,000

5. Tender specifications and requirements

RSPO requires the services of a highly specialised, consistent and independent individual to conduct the research as per the objective above. The applicant is required to meet the following eligibility and requirements as detailed below.

Eligibility

- Applicant must hold either a Doctorate or Master's degree or equivalent in relevant academic discipline or demonstrate more than 3 years experience in relevant fields.

- Applicant must be able to demonstrate evidence of the following technical and professional knowledge and skills:
 - o Familiarity with conducting impact assessments
 - o Experience in evaluation analysis and data collection methodologies relevant to this project (knowledge and understanding of HCV and HCS, familiarity with sustainability of biodiversity in palm oil etc.)
 - o Proficiency in English with good writing and oral skills, and preferably able to communicate in Bahasa Malaysia and/or Bahasa Indonesia.
- Applicant must be affiliated with a college, university, non-profit research facility or consultancy services organisation.
- Applicant is preferably residing in Malaysia or Indonesia, as it facilitates ease of field work. If the applicant is not residing in either country, he or she must involve or work in collaboration with a researcher from a local university or research institute as a local counterpart.
- Applicants must not have received any other grant support for the same topic of study during the time of application and if the applicant is successful, he or she must not hold any other research grant for the same research topic.
- Applicants must be willing and have the means to travel for field work.
- Applicants must avoid and disclose to RSPO of any real, perceived or potential conflict of interest that they may have with RSPO or any entities in the research project. An apparent or actual conflict of interest may exist where an individual or entity has different, and potentially conflict, duties or relationships with respect to other individuals or entities within the research project and RSPO.

Deliverables and Timeframe

- The research is expected to run for a period of 12 months.
- Successful applicants are expected to deliver a progress report every 3 months and a final report at the end of the research period.
- Applicants will also be required to write and publish a journal article on the research
- Successful applicants must also work with RSPO on communication plans to disseminate the research findings. A clear communication plan must be developed with detailed information of the plan along with respective timelines within the research period.

Additional Requirement

- All research commissioned by RSPO must also involve the establishment of a Research Steering Group, which will consist of both internal RSPO and external experts in the particular topic. The participation of the Research Steering Group will be open to the institutional facilitators or supervisors of the successful applicant.
- Successful applicants will receive a copy of the RSPO Research Ethics Standards and must ensure that they abide by the standards throughout the research period.

Documents Required:

- A research proposal detailing the approach or methodology to be used for the evaluation process, scope/focus of research, schedule of work and proposed budget for research.

- CV of applicant involved in the project, detailing qualifications, training and relevant experience.
- Background details of respective institutional facilitator or supervisor of researcher.

6. References

Benami et al. (2018) Oil palm land conversion in Pará, Brazil, from 2006-2014: evaluating the 2010 Brazilian Sustainable Palm Oil Production Program. *Environmental Research Letters*, 13(3): 1-8.

Carlson et al. (2017) Effect of oil palm sustainability certification on deforestation and fire in Indonesia. *PNAS*, 115 (1):121-126.

Gaveau et al. (2018) Rise and fall of forest loss and industrial plantations in Borneo (2000-2017). *Conservation Letters*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12622>

Hansen et al. (2013) High-resolution global maps of 21st-century forest cover change. *SCIENCE*, 342: 850-853.

7. General terms

All documents submitted in response to this ToR must be written in English.

Any enquiries in connection with this ToR shall be submitted to Cheryl Ong, RSPO Research & Advisory Manager at the following e-mail address cheryl.ong@rspo.org.

Research proposals are to be submitted to tender@rspo.org.