

**Assurance Standing Committee
22nd Meeting (online)
Minutes of Meeting**

Zoom link: Zoom Meeting (<https://zoom.us/j/96707077034>)
Date and time: 26 February 2025 at 2.00 pm – 4:57 pm (GMT+8)

Members Attendance:

Growers		
Name	Organisation	Group Representation
Anita Neville (Co-chair) (AN) <i>(absent)</i>	Golden Agri-Resources (GAR)	Indonesian Growers (IGC)
Thien Jing Wen (TJW)	KLK	Malaysian Growers (MPOA)
Lee Swee Yin (LSY) <i>(alternate member)</i>	SD Guthrie	Malaysian Growers (MPOA)
Florent Robert (FR)	SIAT SA	Other Growers (RoW)
Lawrence Quarshie (LQ)	Golden Star Oil Palm Farmers Association (GSOPFA)	Smallholders Group
NGOs		
Name	Organisation	Group Representation
Kamal Prakash Seth (<i>*Interim chair, previous Co-chair</i>) (KS)	WWF International	E-NGO
Ruth Silva (RS) (Co-chair elect)	HCV Network	E-NGO
Ahmad Furqon (AF)	WWF Singapore	E-NGO
Paul Wolvekamp (PW)	Both ENDS	S-NGO
Angus MacInnes (AM)	Forest Peoples Programme	S-NGO
Marcus Colchester (MC) <i>(alternate member)</i>	Forest Peoples Programme	S-NGO
Supply Chain Sector / Downstream / Others		
Name	Organisation	Group Representation
Lee Kuan-Chun (KC)	P&G	CGM
Joseph Chauke (JC)	Woolworths (Proprietary) Limited	Retailers
Olivier Tichit (OT)	Musim Mas Holdings	P&T

Vivi Anita (VA) (alternate member) (absent)	Musim Mas Holdings	P&T
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**Due to AN's absence (medical leave), KS served as interim Co-Chair only for this meeting*

RSPO Secretariat Attendance:

Name	Position
Aryo Gustomo (AG)	Director, Assurance
Yen Hun Sung (HS)	Director, Standards & Sustainability
Mohd Zaidee Mohd Tahir (ZT)	Head, Integrity
Jasmine Ho Abdullah (JHA)	Manager, Standard Design & Innovation
Freda Manan (FM)	Assistant Manager, Integrity
Haziq Ikram Rahmat (HI)	Executive, Integrity

Description	Action Points
<p>1.0 Introduction</p> <p>1.1 Welcome Remarks ZT welcomed the members, noting AN's absence due to medical leave, and announced KS as interim co-chair. ZT briefly shared the agenda.</p> <p>1.2 RSPO Antitrust Guidelines, Consensus-Based Decision-Making, Declaration of Conflict of Interest (Col) ZT reminded members of the RSPO Antitrust Guidelines, the parameters of Consensus-Based Decision-Making, ASC objectives, and the need to declare any Conflict of Interest (Col). None were declared.</p> <p>1.3 Acceptance of MoM from the 10 November 2024 Meeting ZT invited comments on the Q1 ASC meeting minutes (10 November 2024). The minutes were approved.</p> <p>1.4 Introduction to New ASC Members and Co-Chair (NGO) Nomination & Selection KS announced that he has stepped down from the ASC and joined the MDSC. The Financial Institution seat is now vacant following Michael Zrust's retirement, and the Secretariat will follow up on his replacement. New ASC members were introduced: Thien Jing Wen replaced William Siow as the Malaysian Grower representative, Joseph Chauke as the Retailer representative, Ruth Silva as the E-NGO representative, and Ahmad Furqon (WWF) replaced KS. In the chatbox,</p>	

Marcus Colchester notified the group that he and Angus MacInnes have swapped roles, with Angus now serving as the principal ASC member and Marcus as the alternate for the S-NGO constituency. RS was nominated for the position of co-chair. KS reminded that the ASC's ToR states this seat can be filled by any non-grower constituency. A concern about a conflict of interest with HCVN co-chairing the ASC was raised, but it was clarified that HCVN as an RSPO member is eligible, and its role has been decoupled from P&C governance, ensuring no direct conflict. Members supported RS's nomination as the new co-chair.

2.0 For Discussion

2.1 Accreditation Body (AB) Performance Appraisal: Final Draft

Note: Please refer to the full draft of the performance appraisal, shared as part of the Q1 meeting pack.

FM shared that this appraisal aims to ensure credible certification and provide ASI with the necessary support to enhance its effectiveness. This appraisal process applies exclusively to ASI as it is currently the only AB for RSPO.



Revised Framework

Originally, the proposal included using ISO 17011 for Tier 1. However, concerns were found due to redundancy, as ASI already undergoes independent evaluations, capability limitations, as only other ABs can conduct assessments, and lack of relevance, as other voluntary sustainability standards do not use this method. As such, a two-step process will be used for Tier 1: first, reviewing ASI's annual summary report on RSPO accreditation; and second, conducting a 360° review to discuss findings, obligations, and areas for improvement.

The results will then be presented to the ASC for review and feedback, with Tier 1 evaluations conducted annually, contributing 50% of the entire appraisal cycle.

Tier 2 remains unchanged and evaluates ASI against RSPO Certification Systems. This includes a self-evaluation, a document review by the Head of Certification and Integrity, and a final review by RSPO directors. Tier 3 is also unchanged, involving a survey of CBs, contributing 5% to the overall score. The responses will be analysed and factored into the final evaluation.

The final appraisal score is calculated by averaging Tier 1 scores over multiple years, combined with Tier 2 and Tier 3 results. For reporting and monitoring, ASI will first receive their appraisal results and develop an improvement plan, which will be reviewed by the Secretariat before being presented to the ASC. If ASI performs below expectations for two consecutive cycles (10 years), the ASC may recommend termination of their services, with the BoG making the final decision. Their progress will be monitored throughout the next appraisal cycle.

The Secretariat proposed launching a **Tier 1 pilot this quarter**, with results presented at the Q2 2025 meeting. This process will continue in 2026 and 2027, leading to the first **full appraisal in 2028**, which will include Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 evaluations. The goal is to complete the appraisal before ASI's contract renewal in 2028, ensuring informed decision-making.

The full appraisal process will take nine months. In the first three months, all three tiers of evaluation will begin. By months four to six, scores will be compiled, and internal reviews will be conducted by RSPO leadership. In months seven to nine, ASI will develop an improvement plan, which will be reviewed and adjusted based on ASC feedback. Once finalised, this plan will be used to monitor ASI's progress in the next cycle, ensuring continuous improvement and alignment with RSPO standards.

Discussion points

A member raised concerns that ASI's assessment findings (25% of Tier 1 score) might encourage issuing more NCs to appear effective. AG clarified that the Tier 1 Annual Review analyses trends and thoroughness of findings rather than individual NCs, to identify key issues. The member stressed the need to prioritise quality over quantity.

A member asked about the difference between the Tier 3 survey and the CB feedback in Tier 1. FM clarified that the feedback from CBs in Tier 1 comes from a survey that ASI conducts independently for its annual report. ASI is required to gather input from CBs and include the findings in its report, which is then used as one of the evaluation criteria. In contrast, the Tier 3 survey is conducted separately by RSPO, providing an independent assessment of CB perspectives.

A member asked how NCs and opportunities for improvement (OFIs) are identified if the appraisal is no longer based on ISO 17011. AG responded that ASI will be assessed based on predefined parameters in the appraisal checklist.

A question was raised regarding an action item from the previous meeting concerning the AB's capacity. It was noted that this issue was included in the action item tracker for the RSPO CEO to address at the ISEAL Alliance. FM responded that this has been highlighted to the CEO, concluding with the matter being tabled on his agenda, to be raised in the next ISEAL governance meeting.

A member suggested the Secretariat consider the financial viability of ASI, given its mixed funding sources from CB commissions and RSPO Secretariat support.

To maintain quality standards, it was suggested that the RSPO Secretariat engage with ASI to assess its business model, cost recovery, and potential need for additional funding. Discussions at RT2024 offered some insights into ASI's financial and operational challenges, but further assessment is needed. A member suggested proceeding with the trial for Tier 1, to evaluate ASI's performance beyond just compliance with the RSPO service agreement. This is particularly relevant due to previously overlooked red flags. A real-life trial would help determine ASI's commitment to improvements and clarify its capacity and effectiveness.

In the chatbox, a member requested further details on PT. Mutuagung's voluntary withdrawal, which followed an office assessment uncovering severe deficiencies and deliberate misinformation. FM shared ASI has responded: RSPO is a VSS, and as such CBs cannot be forced to maintain accreditation. While voluntary withdrawal minimises disruption, it still carries serious consequences, including loss of accreditation, public disclosure, and reputational damage.

2.2 ASI-RSPO Long-Term Work Plan

Note: Please refer to the full work plan, shared as part of the Q1 meeting pack.

AG presented a summary of the multi-year work plan (2025-2029) which is a strategic framework designed to enhance oversight and collaboration between RSPO and ASI. Developed through discussions from October 2024 to January 2025, it outlines key objectives, action plans, funding requirements, and timelines for improving certification processes.

Key Focus Areas:-

1. Enhancing Trust in RSPO Certification

- **Improve the quality of audit process** [Deploy the CAB Performance Appraisal (2025 - 2026), Establish universal audit report and conduct regular analysis (2025 - 2026), Adapt Labour Auditing Guidance (LAG) into the audit system (2025 - 2026), Explore technological innovations to improve audit quality (2026)]
- **Enhance new and existing capacity** [Develop a mechanism to measure and improve auditors performance (2025 - 2028), Collaborate on a competence management programme - existing capacity (2026 onwards), Increase pool of auditors, CBs, ASI assessors, technical experts - new capacity (2025 onwards)]
- **Develop mechanism for assessing effectiveness of compliance measures by all system users** [Develop mechanism to measure and improve CHs' compliance (2026 - 2028), Implement the AB Performance Appraisal (2025 onwards), Ensure smooth transition for the new P&C standard & SCC standard (2025 - 2027)]
- **Ensure prompt & transparent process for addressing allegations** [Develop a mechanism to effectively respond to allegations (2025 - 2027)]
- **Establish systematic approach for continuous improvement and accountability** [Conduct regular & effective incident reviews and publish success stories (ongoing), Keep track of relevant standards/ schemes changes (2025 onwards)]

2. Upholding Impartiality

The Secretariat to work on Tier 1 pilot of the AB Performance Appraisal and present findings in Q2 2025.

- **Improve impartiality mechanisms** [Monitoring AB's implementation of the Code of Conduct for RSPO Auditors (2025 onwards), Conduct a study on CB rotation (2028-2029)]

3. Strengthening Risk-Based Auditing

- **Establish risk-based auditing mechanism**, including conducting pilot test (2025 - 2026)
- **Enhance risk management for high-risk areas** [Implement safety procedures for auditors & assessors in high-risk areas (2025 - 2026)]

The work plan will be implemented from 2025, with annual progress updates shared with the ASC at the beginning of each year. Funding requirements for some initiatives are under discussion, with both RSPO and ASI expected to allocate resources accordingly.

Discussion points

A question was raised about opportunities for external stakeholders to review, comment, or contribute to the development of the risk-based audit framework. AG stated that RSPO will first work with ASI to develop a preliminary framework, followed by consultations with stakeholders to refine it. A follow-up question was raised about whether ASI was involved in discussions regarding the de-linking study. AG responded that the work plan does not explicitly detail the de-linking study, though some activities may be indirectly related. In a previous ASC meeting (ASC 2024Q2 pages 7-9 for relevant discussion: link [here](#)), discussions explored the central fund concept, but no immediate steps were planned due to the significant effort and cost required. Further updates on this will be provided through the action tracker.

A member suggested that with the structured long-term plan now in place, ASI should be positioned as a key source of insights, ensuring continuous improvement in RSPO standards. AG explained that the current focus is on having ASI support the new standards implementation, addressing interpretation gaps, and developing guidance documents. ZT added that the work plan will be updated where required, while maintaining its key focus areas. ASI's role in standards development will continue, and its involvement in the next standards revision can be adjusted in future updates.

2.3 Labour Auditing Guidance Independent Review by Proforest: Integration in the Certification Systems Document (CSD)

Note: Please refer to the pre-read, shared as part of the Q1 meeting pack.

JH presented an update on the integration exercise. The Proforest's Independent Review of the Labour Auditing Guidance (2024) identified elements better suited for the Certification Systems. Following that, relevant parts have been integrated into the latest CSD draft. Proforest's threefold recommendation included: (1) incorporating mandatory requirements into the Certification System document, (2) placing guidance elements in the auditor checklist, and (3) developing an auditor's handbook for remaining LAG components. This ensures that while not all elements are included as mandatory, their integrity is maintained in informative guidance documents.

Key integrated elements include:

- Pre-audit requirements clarified to include research and record-keeping.
- Measures to protect workers and maintain interview integrity.
- Worker sampling guidelines, specifying how to assess vulnerable groups.
- Use of interpreters when auditors do not speak the language.
- Record-keeping enhancements - explicit documentation of decisions.

Certain recommendations were excluded as mandatory requirements due to their prescriptive nature, such as site tours, meeting protocols, and interview durations. These will instead be maintained as guidance in the auditor's handbook. The integration process is ongoing, with RSPO working alongside CBs and ABs to finalise the framework.

Discussion points

A question was raised about the rationale for excluding field visits to observe employee-employer interactions, as direct on-site observations could provide a more accurate understanding of working conditions. JH clarified that site visits are already a requirement in the CSD. However, the prescriptive recommendations were found to be better suited as guidance.

A member raised concerns about low LAG adoption by CBs and asked how uptake would be improved. JH acknowledged that while some CBs fully embrace the LAG, others do not, and training is key to improving adoption. HS added that normative elements are integrated into the Certification Systems to ensure compliance, while informative guidance remains in resources like the audit checklist or an employee handbook. The member expressed their concern that informative elements are often disregarded. ASI has also discussed how CBs are evaluated, emphasising the importance of addressing informative but critical issues in their assessments.

A member highlighted the importance of stakeholder feedback in certification, leading to RSPO's IMO programme to enhance local engagement. The Secretariat is developing the next step to better inform and equip stakeholders. A question was raised about ASC's actions to ensure effective stakeholder input. HS explained that stakeholder consultations are a Certification Systems requirement, reinforced by LAG elements, though on-site audit time constraints remain challenging. The SSC is exploring a revised audit checklist to allow pre-audit desktop reviews, optimising on-site assessments. While the IMO programme has been successful, its continuation depends on the BoG, and improving stakeholder awareness and communication remains key. A suggestion was made to revisit stakeholder consultation in a future ASC meeting, as it is a crucial element benefiting growers and other stakeholders.

2.4 Assurance Action Plans: Q1 2025 Progress Update

Note: Please refer to the pre-read, shared as part of the Q1 meeting pack.

AG shared that implementation of the Assurance Action Plans began this year, with actions focusing on operational enhancement, prisma, and the 2024 standards and certification systems review.

Operational Enhancement: The Assurance Division is strengthening capacity with nine temporary hires for prisma migration. Key SOPs, including GIS, NPP, and RaCP, are being updated. Regular coordination with ASI, CB performance

appraisals, and a peer reviewer database are being enhanced. RaCP implementation improvements are underway, with better submission and review processes. A risk-based audit framework is being developed based on land rights and dispute risk mapping.

prisma Development: Phase 1b (Q2 2025) focuses on Trade & Traceability, Certification & License Management, and a Learning Management System. Phase 2 (Q4 2025) expands to certification modules, remote sensing, deforestation monitoring, and a risk matrix for improved compliance tracking.

2024 Standards & Certification Systems Review & Development: A central fund model for certification assessments was explored but remains on hold. Wider CB involvement continues, with improvements to the RSPO Interpretation Forum. Training initiatives include Learning Management System development and university collaborations. Labour Auditing Guidance integration is ongoing following an independent review. Guidance documents for grower compliance are under assessment, and NPP compliance enforcement is being strengthened, with a revised guidance document expected by Q2 2025.

Additionally, the Secretariat has mapped recent stakeholder concerns against current action plans to ensure effective resolution.

Concern	Actions taken/planned
Insufficient & Irregular Communication	Emphasis was placed on due process, with communication maintained through meetings and stakeholder engagements.
Postponed/Delayed Audits	Delays were due to the CB losing accreditation and coordination challenges. Enhanced oversight is being developed through a CB performance appraisal and a long-term work plan with ASI.
Certification Extension Amid Investigations	The principle of presumption of innocence was followed; no punitive action was taken before confirmed breaches. This will be considered in the CB performance appraisal process.
Lack of Unannounced Audits/Spot Checks: No procedure exists for surprise audits.	The standard audit process led to certification suspension. An unannounced audit mechanism is being considered in the new draft Certification Systems.
Need for RSPO to Conduct a Proper Investigation: RSPO should have launched an independent inquiry.	Investigations are reserved for exceptional cases ; independent probes may undermine the system and require dedicated resources. Currently, RSPO's complaint procedure provides a channel for launching independent investigations.
RSPO's Complaint Mechanism: Uncertainty about how grievances are handled.	Formal complaints are processed according to RSPO rules and can be tracked via the Complaint Case Tracker.
RSPO's Role in Due Diligence Regulations (e.g. EUDR): Need clarity on RSPO's role in legal compliance.	RSPO certification is not a legal guarantee but supports due diligence. Additional mechanisms, such as <i>prisma</i> , have been initiated to assist members.

Discussion points

A member raised concerns that relying on the complaints system risks escalating violations and excludes local actors. They argued that independent investigations should not be limited to **"exceptional cases"**. AG explained that the Secretariat is optimising the Certification System to handle allegations, relying on ASI and CBs for verification. The risk unit monitors cases and recommends potential actions, with independent investigations requiring governance approval. While the

<p>complaints procedure allows investigations, the Secretariat will review feedback for future improvements.</p> <p>A member stressed the need to strengthen RSPO's investigative capacity without undermining the complaints system. The BoG and CP (Complaints Panel) co-chairs raised concerns about missed P&C violations, leading to discussions on enhancing investigations. The CAP review, now open for public consultation (link here), proposes a pool of experts for rapid field assessments. It was recommended to clarify RSPO's investigative role, ensuring the Secretariat can act when needed, not just in "exceptional cases," with a rewording of this term suggested.</p> <p>A member asked the Secretariat to confirm that limiting investigations to exceptional cases is not due to financial constraints but to maintain a high-quality system. AG responded that the Secretariat has conducted several independent investigations which were resource-intensive. There is no dedicated personnel for investigations, making it both a capacity and a financial challenge. If the Secretariat were to take on some of this role in place of the complaints mechanism, further discussion and resource planning would be needed.</p> <p>Another member added that fortunately, the CAP review document provides a clear roadmap, emphasising assessment of serious cases before formal complaints. This is crucial when stakeholders fear retaliation and cannot speak out. The approach helps with preventing conflicts from escalating and reducing the burden on stakeholders. AG confirmed that the Assurance Division collaborates with the Grievance Unit and CP, with the CAP review underway. Any independent investigation depends on RSPO governance directives and requires higher-level discussion on the best mechanism and resource allocation before proceeding.</p> <p>It was suggested that ASC co-chairs lead discussions on exceptional cases requiring investigation. If recognised as necessary, they could escalate the matter to the BoG, with AN raising it further, as she is a member. Decisions would be made case by case, consulting ASC members if needed. The co-chairs could also assess whether financial or human resources should be allocated. AG confirmed that the Secretariat will consider this.</p> <p>A member noted that the necessary guidance documents are set for development, with a milestone in Q4 2025 and suggested the documents be completed sooner. AG mentioned that the milestone marks the start, not the completion of work. Some may be developed to align with the new standard, beginning in Q4 2025. HS added that there are 18 guidance documents or procedures to be developed or updated for the P&C and six for the ISH, all listed on the RSPO website under the Standards Rollout 2024 page (link here). The focus is on completing critical documents essential for P&C implementation before the 13 November 2025 deadline, while minor updates and relevant 2018 guidance will be adjusted accordingly. Some documents may take longer, requiring interim measures to ensure compliance and clarity for growers and auditors.</p>	
<p>3.0 For Update</p>	

<p>3.1 ASC Action Tracker and ASI Q1 2025 Updates <i>Note: Please refer to the full ASC action tracker, pre-read and the ASI-RSPO 2024 Annual Report shared as part of the Q1 meeting pack.</i> FM invited comments or questions on this section.</p> <p>Discussion points A member noted that the ASI report shows only two active CBs in Central and Southern America, posing a high certification risk if a CB is suspended or withdrawn. Additionally, several CBs have withdrawn from RSPO, but the report does not specify why. The member requested clarification on this. FM will convey this to ASI and get back to the member on their response to both questions. ZT added that the ASI-RSPO long-term work plan includes efforts to expand CB capacity and capability, highlighting that this issue is being addressed as part of the plan. Another member added that CB withdrawals from RSPO may have multiple reasons, but a key factor for mid-sized CBs is the high cost of maintaining accreditation. Training requirements, system upkeep, and lengthy audits were seen as burdensome, especially with limited clients. While RSPO enforces strict standards and provides training resources, this also makes participation costly for CBs and auditors.</p>	<p>The Secretariat to seek clarification from ASI about plans to mitigate certification risks due to CB shortage and reasons for past CBs withdrawal</p>
<p>4.0 Any Other Business</p> <p>4.1 Other Matters Next ASC-CP Joint Meeting The next ASC-CP Joint Meeting was tentatively set for 10 or 11 April. CP will be represented by Co-Chairs Dato' Henry Barlow and Lim Sian Choo, and a member, Marieke Leegwater. The Secretariat suggested that the ASC co-chairs should be in attendance, and sought one more participant. OT volunteered to join. <i>(Update: The meeting is confirmed on 15 April 2025, from 4:00 PM to 5:30 PM)</i></p> <p>KS Co-chair Resignation Speech KS reflected on his two-year journey as ASC co-chair. He acknowledged the steep learning curve in assurance and certification but hoped his focus on governance added value. KS highlighted the ongoing review of Shared Responsibility (SR) rules and the supply chain Certification System, as well as the implementation of the revised P&C, where WWF will be actively involved. He expressed gratitude for the support received and confirmed he will continue contributing through the MDSC, BoG, and finance committee.</p>	
<p>End of meeting ZT thanked KS and all ASC members. The meeting ended at 4:57 PM, KL time.</p>	