

**Assurance Forum  
1st Meeting (via Zoom)  
Minutes of Meeting**

Venue: Zoom Meeting (<https://zoom.us/j/97628255778>)

Date and time: 26 June 2020 at 4.00 pm – 6.00 pm KL time

**ASC Members Attendance:**

<b>Growers</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Group Representation</b>
Agus Purnomo (AP) (Co-chair)	Golden Agri Resources (GAR)	Indonesian Growers (IGC)
Lee Kuan Yee (LKY)	Kuala Lumpur Kepong (KLK) Berhad	Malaysian Growers (MPOA)
Vacant	n/a	Smallholders Group
<b>NGOs</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Group Representation</b>
Elizabeth Clarke (EC) (Co-chair)	WWF Singapore	E-NGO
Paula den Hartog (PH)	Rainforest Alliance	E-NGO
Marcus Colchester (MC)	Forest Peoples Programme	S-NGO
<b>Supply Chain Sector / Downstream / Others</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Group Representation</b>
Michael Zrust (MZ)	Lestari Capital	Financial Institution

**RSPO Secretariat Attendance:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Bakhtiar Talhah (BT)	Interim CEO
Aminah Ang (AA)	Interim Assurance Director
Wan Muqtadir Wan Abdul Fatah (WM)	Sr. Manager, Assurance Integrity Unit
Aizat Affendi (AMA)	Sr. Executive, Assurance Integrity Unit

Luqman Mohamed (LM)	GIS Manager
Inke van der Sluijs (IS)	Head of European Operations
Sara Cowling (SC)	Outreach & Engagement

**Assurance Forum Participants' Attendance:**

Name	Organisation
Neil Judd (NJ)	Proforest - Lead Facilitator
Shinta Puspitasari (SPH)	Proforest - Facilitation support
Adam Harrison (AH)	Independent Consultant
Arie Soetjadi (AS)	HCVRN
Ruth Silva (RS)	HCVRN
Audrey Lee (AL)	Olam
Siobhan Pearce (SP)	EIA
Jonathan Horrell (JH)	Mondelez
Grant Rosoman (GR)	Greenpeace

Item	Description	Action Points
	<p><b>Opening</b></p> <p>NJ welcomed everyone joining the call and asked for each participant to introduce themselves.                      NJ informed that the meeting will be recorded to generate MoM. No objection raised from the attendees.                      NJ also reminded the Q&amp;A process during the meeting.                      NJ shared that the principal objectives of Assurance Forum is for the RSPO and RSPO ASC to reach out and interact with broader group of stakeholders and a tangible way to inform the priorities and the workplan of ASC and seek feedback.</p> <p>NJ highlighted that going forward the future meeting should be shaped by the forum. In the last session of the agenda, the forum can also discuss what this meeting should be covering and how this can be driving the ASC works as well. NJ then briefly shared the agenda of the meeting.</p>	

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<p><b>1.0</b></p>	<p><b>Introduction to ASC</b></p> <p>EC shared when and how the ASC is established to replace the previous ATF. The Assurance Forum is being established to replace the previous ATF Advisory Group, seeking participation from a wider group of stakeholders.</p> <p>EC continued with the objectives and mandates of ASC and informed that the ToR and workplan of ASC are currently being finalised. EC further explained that the finalisation process is partly to receive recommendations from the independent review of ATF that will be shared during this meeting.</p> <p>EC explained who the ASC members are, including growers (Indonesia, Malaysia and the rest of the world), NGOs (2 env NGOs, and 2 social NGOs), and representatives from downstream companies and others (CGM, retailers, P&amp;T, and financial institution). EC and AP are both ASC Co-Chairs and serving as members of RSPO BoG. This is part of the governance review that there should be clear links between the action of both.</p> <p>On ASC structure, EC mentioned that this is something for further discussion. Workstreams contain tasks that the ASC needs to do and will need feedback from the Forum on priorities and resources needed.</p> <p>MC raised a point based on previous discussion whether Complaint Panel should be included in the ASC but decided it might be more appropriate to be part in the Assurance Forum. So this is also a forum to engage with the CP as well.</p>	
<p><b>2.0</b></p>	<p><b>ATF Review Findings</b></p> <p>AH shared the summary of the report of the independent review of ATF. Final report will be shared publicly.</p> <p>The main items reviewed included: Management by the RSPO Secretariat; set-up and achievement of the ATF; and tasks remaining; and other tasks that need to be addressed.</p> <p>SP interested on the view on historic assessments. For example, if there are historic poor quality assessments in the system and those are still being used as the basis for certification.</p> <p>AH responded that the idea is those issues would be better dealt through complaint process and how assurance has been done. If suspect assessment is the basic of on-going certification then the annual surveillance is the point to go forward. The member should repeat to a more robust and better quality.</p> <p>SP recommended for ASC to look at the above issue.</p> <p>AL responded on transparency, especially on NPP HCV monitoring, is related to coordination issue. HCV WG within RSPO has already been</p>	

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	<p>looking at this from previous meetings. The ASC can keep an eye but this is more about coordination within RSPO to deliver the outcomes.</p> <p>AH responded that the questions on the level of transparency desired is very much a question for the Board and each SC should review on their particular areas. The debate around the maps and the disclosure of the maps might need a robust position from the Board to say that this needs to happen.</p> <p>MC highlighted that the independent review identified weak links between ATF and the Advisory Group, which is an important lesson to be carried through by ASC and Assurance Forum. There's a need to have an open and good communication so the Assurance Forum can have a real role and can be relevant. This was agreed by AH.</p>	
<p><b>3.0</b></p>	<p><b>Deforestation + Fire Monitoring Issues</b></p> <p>LKY updated on No Deforestation Task Force (NDTF). These documents have been endorsed by the Board in June 2019.</p> <p>LKY continued that the remaining tasks are the HCS Implementation Guidance to assist members on how to integrate HCV/HCSA assessment into the NPP. So it can align with the revised NPP document. This is still on-going and will be completed by end of July 2020.</p> <p>The next task is on HCSA reviewer template revision. This guidance is targeted to be completed by end of August 2020.</p> <p>LM updated on monitoring deforestation in RSPO and that IMU proactively monitors land clearing activities within RSPO HCV area and members' concessions.</p> <p>The monitoring mechanism is based on deforestation dataset (GLAD Alert), concession maps submitted by grower members and HCV layers submitted with NPP application. RSPO members will be notified if questionable land clearing incidents are detected within their concessions or HCV area.</p> <p>LM further update on deforestation in HCV areas that from January 2020 – 24 June 2020, IMU detected 3 land clearings within HCV area. The affected members were notified and had responded to IMU with reports and causes of the clearing except for Permata Putra (PT ANJ) which will revert by 8th of July 2020.</p> <p>Whenever alert received, desktop analysis is conducted to verify the alert. When it's confirmed then the affected members will be notified.</p> <p>LM also shared on deforestation in RSPO concessions, which follow similar steps as above; whenever alerts received, desktop analysis will be run to verify these alerts.</p> <p>On fire monitoring in RSPO, LM explained that by identifying the gaps in the previous mechanism, the RSPO's has updated its fire and hotspot monitoring SoP. The updates include: shorter reporting window in the new SoP (5 working days); monitor &amp; take action whenever persistent fire detected within RSPO concession; include definition of persistent fire</p>	

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	<p>(detected for up to 8 days &amp; affected areas more than 50ha); mapped out areas within RSPO with persistent fire in 2018 &amp; 2019 to ensure no recurrent fire issues in these areas moving forward; and sanctions to those detected with persistent fire issue &amp; unresponsive to RSPO fire notification.</p> <p>LM continued that the updated fire monitoring SoP will instill urgency for members to attend to RSPO hotspot notification because of shorter notice period, persistent fire monitoring to ensure RSPO members attending to RSPO notification and assess effectiveness of RSPO members fire mitigating procedure, database of historical persistent fire within RSPO concession will provide a baseline to ensure that there will be no more persistent fire within this concession in the future, and as indicator to measure members' improvement and commitment on fire mitigation measures.</p> <p>LKY asked whether the updated Fire Monitoring SoP was communicated to the members and whether it will go through public consultation.</p> <p>LM responded that this is an internal SoP but it has been socialised to members. He also shared that a session with grower members was aimed to highlight the updates on the SoP.</p> <p>BT responded that fire alerts and monitoring should be taken up by the ASC. On level of transparency on fire data, the Secretariat is developing a Fire Hub that will be available on the website. Discussion will be needed with the membership in the ASC on the level of transparency of fire data. This discussion should be within the ASC.</p> <p>NJ reminded that the topic raised by BT was scheduled in the previous ASC meeting but was omitted because of time limitation. This will need to be followed up.</p> <p>MZ commented that what we are looking now (deforestation monitoring in HCV area and RSPO concessions) are the end results without really understanding what the root causes are. Whether it's actually linked to poor assessment that might have done in the past where perhaps not enough social HCV areas are allocated, for example. We need to be looking at the root causes of deforestation. RSPO has the opportunity to gather systematically good data and takes lead to overcome these problems.</p> <p>NJ added that the independent review report by AH also highlighted crosscutting recommendation that ASC and RSPO should look more closely on the root causes.</p> <p>SP asked how far back (in term of time) the HCV monitoring conducted and whether it's based only on the concession areas submitted by growers and how to verify the data?</p>	

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	<p>LM responded that HCV monitoring only covers HCV areas that was submitted to the Secretariat as part of NPP from 2014-2015 until present. At the moment, there's no data and no mechanism to monitor HCV areas that wasn't submitted.</p> <p>LM continued on RSPO concessions monitoring, the Secretariat has 90-99% of concessions data. It takes time to verify whether all the submissions are complete or not.</p> <p>JH raised a question on fire and deforestation monitoring: what conversation RSPO had with other providers on monitoring and conducting these activities across the sector as a whole beyond certified estates and RSPO members? There are others doing similar services and whether there are discussions on collaboration.</p> <p>LM responded that at the moment the monitoring is conducted for RSPO concession areas. There's an initial discussion started with HCSA and will see how this can progress.</p> <p>EC thanked everyone for valuable input and comments and wanted to make sure that they can be followed up. EC also revisited MZ's comments and shared a general reflection on how RSPO will have more say to, for example the EU on its effort to protect and restore forests. Responding to MZ's comment on how to demonstrate that we are halting deforestation and what example that we can draw on in RSPO about restoration. EC also flagged on remediation and compensation procedure that ASC should have something to say about.</p> <p>SP echoed and it would be valuable if RSPO can be more transparent on what it's doing with ASC and projects under it. SP further explored on the case of PT. ANJ on detected deforestation in HCV areas within its concession area in January 2020 and still waiting for its response in June, which is a long time. There are also cases of poor HCV assessments in the past. There's no transparency on these cases on RSPO website to see what are the root causes, how they have been addressed, what the compensations, or remediations undertaken.</p> <p>LM clarified that ANJ case was detected in late May 2020. The presentation showed the total cases that were detected from Jan-June 2020.</p>	
4.0	<p><b>Short Break</b></p> <p>The meeting had a 5 minutes break</p>	
5.0	<p><b>Social and Human Rights Issues</b></p> <p>MC shared a set of issues on social impacts and human rights. On the Remediation and Compensation Procedure (RaCP) under the Biodiversity and HCV WG, there is an implementation review going on. The review should be shared next month in July 2020. There has been concern in the</p>	



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	<p>WG that there has been under reporting of social remediation. There is where there are needs to make remedy for social HCV that have been affected by clearing without HCV assessment. The independent consultant due to report very soon and will be discussed in July 2020.</p> <p>MC continued with the review of the performance of the implementation of the newly implemented Human Rights Defenders (HRD) policy, after some delays that is now happening and expecting the report on that by the 1<sup>st</sup> week of July. There will be discussion sessions with the IMU in 3<sup>rd</sup> week of July. There have been concerns there wasn't capacity in the Secretariat and there was a failure to trigger the procedure. The review will give independent view of what can be done to improve the procedure.</p> <p>WM updated on Ulula technology that has been used for social audits. This technology can be part of risk-based audits. It is a mobile-based tool that can capture workers' or community's voices on the ground. It composes a set of surveys and feedbacks from the workers and local community. It has its own grievance line that can be contacted The Secretariat is exploring the use of this tool and hoping in the future that can be leveraged on to improve the current assurance system.</p> <p>NJ asked for confirmation whether Ulula is still on pilot test and not fully build in yet, which is confirmed by WM.</p> <p>WM continued that Ulula has been trialed in few places and hoping there will be good results to explore and expand the methods.</p> <p>WM was replacing PW to share on progress with the Independent Pool of Experts. Started in March 2020 when discussed in ASC meeting the need to have these experts firewalled from the Secretariat and assisting the CP and IMU in resolving complaints. The experts will be categorised by profiles and by regions. Also leveraging the use of academics as they have good contact on the ground as well. The latest update is that in June 2020 there was some discussion between PW and the Secretariat. The building of the pool of experts will be led by IMU.</p> <p>MC continued with decoupling or delinking auditors and clients. MC started by mentioned that credible certification is critical to RSPO's Theory of Change and auditors, overseen by ASI, are required to carry out 'independent third-party audits' of producers' performance and supply chain integrity. If the public and the market lose confidence in the reliability of audits, RSPO certificates will not ease market access and investor confidence. Yet, numerous complaints against certified operations for violations. MC cited that ASI reports CBs frequently omitting checks of FPIC, customary tenures and labour conditions, weak social expertise on assessor teams, and ongoing concern that auditors develop too 'cosy' a relationship with their clients and overlook violations.</p>	



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	<p>MC further raised the option of whether we can decouple by getting audits funded through an ESCROW account/ Trust Fund, to which the whole supply chain could contribute, managed by an RSPO oversight body. ASC NGOs have trying to encourage RSPO to undertake review of this option and how it would work.</p> <p>There isn't consensus in the ASC on these matters and it has been referred to the Board.</p> <p>MC continued with the objective of improving the Complaints System, discussed already at a joint meeting between ASC with the Complaints Panel. Concerns on the system shared by MC were: that the Complaints Procedure is too slow; information sharing with complainants and respondents seems to have lessened in the recent years and submissions from respondents not being posted in Case Tracker; NPP omissions not being passed to CP; IMU information of clearance of HCVMA's after NPP not being passed to CP; CP slow to act when respondents do not act on CP requirements.</p> <p>Therefore, NGOs suggest a review of CP procedures and practice using the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights recommendations for non-judicial remedy procedures as a yardstick.</p> <p>WM responded that when the Secretariat from time to time have such information, it's always been cross-referenced between units in RSPO to ensure the validity of the information.</p> <p>WM also noted the points given by MC and will try to improve Secretariat coordination.</p> <p>PH updated on living wage issues. During the last review of P&amp;C, criteria were taken into P&amp;C to offer worker a decent living wage. But what a decent living wage is and each context was still to be determined. The Secretariat had a strategy to carry out the benchmark calculation on the decent living wage for different contexts and regions. However, due to recent development (COVID-19), some of these activities can't take place. So the Secretariat sent the revised proposal to the SSC to carry out the benchmark calculation. The SSC then shared to S-NGOs to get feedback. In general the revised strategy is not too much different than the previous one. The fundamental different is that a recommendation to set up a Decent Living Wage Task Force (DLWTF) in the Secretariat and data will be collected my members of RSPO on what they're paying their workers and processed by the Secretariat. The National Interpretation Group will also help to validate the data. DLWTF will oversee the data collection and the process and create a template to standardise data collection.</p> <p>PH continued that at the moment, she has reached out to some S-NGOs and will set up meetings for getting feedback and where improvement can be made.</p> <p>NJ added that some major growers are involved in other decent rural living initiatives that might cross over.</p> <p>JH commented on the issue on auditor independence and reflected on the</p>	





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	<p>process that the ATF went through on this issue. There was a study commissioned that looked at these issues and relevant stakeholders did not change their position as a result of that. ASC will need to find its way through this topic. It also needs a process that leads to a resolution rather re-stating of existing positions.</p> <p>GR supported the fact that auditor independence and conflict of interest are being explored and that MC's proposal is being considered. It's been a long interest of Greenpeace to address these issues. GR noted that FSC has just carried out a review on this issue, and that the report has been submitted to the FSC Board in June 2020. There's an opportunity to collaborate with FSC to explore these aspects as it represents a common problem across schemes.</p> <p>NJ mentioned that these might be the level of issue that ISEAL should be looking at.</p> <p>MC responded that he raised with ISEAL and seemed open mind about it. MC further suggested to make a link. So it's not only RSPO matter but making certification credible.</p> <p>SP reiterated on the decoupling issue. There are still issues to address which need clear resolutions. Most NGOs will also agree that the original consultant's study about these topics was not thorough enough. Would be good to get resolution on these issues but also recognising the related role of and the linkage to the complaint mechanism, which is perceived as becoming worse and not following its own guidelines.</p> <p>JH responded that decoupling is not a solution on its own. On complaints, we need clear data as the basis for informing the discussion, for example to track how long it takes to deal with the complaints. The previous overall point about credibility is well made, such that audit quality and effectiveness of the complaints system are among the highest priorities.</p> <p>PH continued with decoupling, that it is one solution but also to understand the root cause and understand that decoupling might be one of the solutions. Additionally, Rainforest Alliance (RA) also has issues on assurance for example with cocoa assurance issue in West Africa. RA is trying to pilot different solutions to allocation of certification bodies, as well as other issues. So this is a shared challenge in assurance.</p> <p>NJ added that it's also related to a broader issue of competence and we will need to evaluate how much of that concerns a collusion issue and delinking solution.</p>	
6.0	<p><b>ASC and You</b></p> <p>SP asked for more clarity on the role of the Assurance Forum. She viewed that ASC now has overlaps with Secretariat functions. However, it's great</p>	

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	<p>to share and update with the Forum and how the feedbacks will be put forward by the ASC. Another question for the ASC is whether the Forum will open for wider stakeholders and RSPO members.</p> <p>EC responded that it would be good to hear back from others on how best ASC can engage and communicate with the Forum. Another suggestion is to have a dedicated plenary session or open session at annual conference. Additionally, a mailing list can be maintained that includes non-RSPO members, together with regular calls.</p> <p>JH highlighted the importance of familiarity with the detail of these issues. ASC has a challenge to create a more robust assurance mechanism. To build confidence in that mechanism with broader stakeholders, it might need simpler KPI-type measures on the effectiveness of the system and the impact that has been made. Qualitative updates can be shown, for example on a dashboard to show progress.</p> <p>GR seconded JP recommendation on showing impacts of the system and any results that come through. GR also raised questions on how active the interaction between ASC and the Forum will be. GR appreciated that the Forum is a space to hear progress and the thinking of the ASC and the opportunity from the outside to get involved more technically and to collaborate. GR proposed to meet more regularly, every 3 months.</p> <p>NJ responded that the existing schedule is to have ASC meeting quarterly and the next Assurance Forum will be in November 2020 or every 6 months.</p> <p>RS shared that the previous participation in the ATF linked to contributing to some of the outcomes. So it's interesting to know what role is expected from the Forum. For example, some who are participating in the Deforestation Task Force have clear roles in technical support and active participation. This helps the planning and ability to set aside capacity, resources and dedication needed for this work.</p> <p>RS added that working with the ASC is important as it involves the quality of assessment, reporting, capacity, and monitoring. So it would be great to have clear expectation for the Forum.</p> <p>Following up on GR and RS comments, MC asked for clarification on joint HCV/HCS assessment that will be reviewed through the ALS system, specifically how do we assess the quality of ICLUP and make sure of the transparency?</p> <p>GR responded that for ICLUP there will be indicators developed to determine whether the process has been proper. But no full proposal at the moment on how to conduct assurance for it. That would be part of ICLUP Working Group which is still an on-going process. Hopefully will be finalised by end of year. RSPO is involved in that group as well.</p> <p>NJ reminded the Forum if there are other stakeholders recommended to</p>	<p>The</p>



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	<p>be part of the Forum to inform the ASC or the Secretariat.</p> <p>On which SP responded that HCVRN and ASI should be included. The ASC/Secretariat should share the list of the existing Assurance Forum participants and re-confirm their involvement. A clear expectation and role of the Forum should be identified and shared including the meeting schedule and contributions towards key processes and ASC documents.</p> <p>NJ summarised that the next steps would be to share the MoM, share the ASC updates, and to define the proposed roles and contribution from the Forum in order to have more clarity before the next meeting in November 2020.</p>	<p>ASC/Secretariat to share the list of the Assurance Forum invitees and re-confirm their involvement.</p> <p>The ASC/Secretariat should include ASI and HCVRN in the Assurance Forum.</p> <p>The ASC/Secretariat will send out MoM, and proposed roles for the Assurance Forum.</p>
<p><b>7.0</b></p>	<p><b>End of meeting</b></p> <p>NJ thanked all the ASC members and the Assurance Forum who attended the meeting.</p> <p>The meeting adjourned at 6.00 pm.</p>	