
Terms of Reference: Independent Review of the RSPO Standards Review and Revision Process

1. Background

The RSPO Principles and Criteria (P&C) and the Independent Smallholder (ISH) Standards are key documents that ensure production of sustainable palm oil. The RSPO is committed to maintaining and improving the quality and relevance of our standards. As part of our ongoing efforts to ensure that our standards reflect excellent sustainability practices and improve market and regulatory relevance, an independent review of the RSPO Standards Review (2022-2023) and Revision Process (2022-2024), hereinafter jointly referred to as the “Standards Revision Process”, will be undertaken as directed by the RSPO Board of Governors (BoG). The purpose of this review is to evaluate the effectiveness, process efficiency, appropriateness, and inclusivity of the Standards Revision Process, and to provide recommendations for improvements for future RSPO Standards Revision processes.

2. Key Objectives of the Review

The key overall objectives of this review are to:

- Assess the current Standards Revision Process to identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Evaluate the efficiency of the process in terms of time, resources, and stakeholder engagement.
- Ensure that the process is aligned with the organisation’s mandate, goals, strategic objectives and complies with relevant regulatory relevance, and industry requirements.
- Provide recommendations for enhancing the process, ensuring that future revisions are more effective, timely, and inclusive.

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3. Scope

The comprehensive, 360 degree review must cover the following areas:

- **Insights:** Lessons learned review of the RSPO Standards Revision Process, including a holistic assessment of the roles and performance of all parties to the process, taking into account their mandated responsibilities and capacities.
- **Process Overview:** Detailed review of the stages and supporting documents involved in the standards revision process, from initiation to final approval and publication.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Evaluation of the various consultation mechanisms, focusing on how stakeholders –including but not limited to growers, NGOs, supply chain actors and others. Stakeholders mentioned here include non-RSPO Members, Certification Bodies, accreditation bodies and the public –that have been involved in the Standards Revision Process.
- **Resource Allocation:** Analysis of the resources (time, personnel, budget) allocated to the Standards Revision Process and whether they are adequate.
- **Quality Assurance:** Review of the mechanisms in place for ensuring the quality, accuracy, and relevance of the revised standards as encapsulated in the 2024 P&C and ISH Standards.
- **Compliance and Governance:** Evaluation of the processes in place to ensure compliance with ISEAL and governance standards, in particular on how the Steering Group and the Standard Standing Committee guided the process.
- **Communication:** Assessment of how the revised standards are communicated to stakeholders and the broader public, including transparency of the Standards Revision Process.
- **Synchronicity with Certification:** Assessment on how the standards interact with the broader assurance system such as certification system documentation, audit checklist, and audit process. This must include feedback from Certification Bodies and Assurance Services International (ASI).
- **Proposed New Process:** Provide recommendations for the development of an effective process/procedure for future RSPO Standards Revision processes.

4. The Review Process

The general steps of the review process include:

- **Document Review:** Analyse existing documentation, including policies, procedures, guidelines, and records of past standards revisions.
- **Stakeholder Interviews:** Conduct interviews with key stakeholders involved in the revision process, including internal staff, industry experts, and external stakeholders. This must include interviews or focus group discussions with the various bodies established and involved in the Standards Revision Process such as the Technical Committees, Task Force, Multi-stakeholder Consultation Task Force, Steering Group, Standards Standing Committee, and Board of Governors. Stakeholder Interviews must include discussions with the seven (7) sectors that comprise the RSPO Membership, representing the palm oil value chain, as well as Certification Bodies, Accreditation Bodies and non-RSPO members.

- **Surveys/Questionnaires:** Distribute surveys or questionnaires to a broader group of stakeholders to gather feedback on their experience and satisfaction with the process.
- **Benchmarking:** Assessing and benchmarking processes and best practices of other comparable sustainability schemes especially those in the ISEAL Alliance.
- **Data Analysis:** Review quantitative data (e.g., timelines, costs, resource allocation) and qualitative data (e.g., stakeholder feedback, process assessments).

5. Deliverables

The following deliverables will be produced as part of the review:

- **Interim Report:** A progress update on the findings, including preliminary recommendations.
- **Final Report:** A comprehensive review report containing findings, conclusions, and detailed recommendations for improvements to the Standards Revision Process.
- **Action Plan:** A prioritised action plan for implementing the recommendations from the review, including timelines and responsible parties.
- **Presentation pack:** A presentation pack for purposes of socialising the report, its recommendations, and the way forward.

All the deliverables above must be presented to the Standard Standing Committee (SSC) and be approved. There will be monthly presentations of updates to the SSC, and appropriate time allocated during scheduled or ad hoc SSC meetings to allow for review of progress and deliverables. The SSC shall ensure that the objectives of the review are fully met.

6. Timeline

The review process will be conducted over a period of 12 months. Key milestones include:

- **Selection of consultant/ contracting:** 1-3 months
- **Completion of document review:** 1-2 months
- **Stakeholder consultations:** 1-2 months
- **Interim report presentation:** 4-6 months
- **Final report submission:** 6-8 months
- **Presentation to the RSPO Board of Governors (BoG):** Upon SSC's endorsement

7. Stakeholder Involvement

Stakeholders, as mentioned above, are critical to the success of the review process. The following groups will be consulted:

- **Internal Stakeholders:** Key staff members responsible for standards development, quality assurance, and regulatory compliance.
- **External Stakeholders:** Industry professionals, regulatory bodies, member organisations, and other relevant parties impacted by the standards.

Stakeholder engagement will be conducted through interviews, surveys, focus group discussions and review of feedback received during the Standards Revision Process.

8. Budget

The budget for the review will cover the following:

- Personnel costs (review team, consultants)
- Data collection and analysis tools
- Travel and stakeholder engagement expenses
- Miscellaneous administrative costs

The estimated budget is 50,000 USD.

9. Approval and Authority

This Terms of Reference is approved by the RSPO Standard Standing Committee, and all activities will be carried out under its authority. Any amendments to the scope, process, or timeline must be authorised by the SSC.