

Factsheet on

PEAT REQUIREMENTS FOR RSPO GROWERS

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 25 years, the development of new technologies for water management and agronomy for cultivating oil palm (OP) on peat, as well as government planning in some regions have led to the expansion of OP on peatlands. Cultivating OP on peatlands leads to significant drawbacks.

The RSPO Principles and Criteria (P&C) 2018 requires no new planting on peat (regardless of depth) after 15 November 2018 and all peatlands are managed responsibly. For existing OP planted on peatlands, RSPO developed Best Management Practices (BMP) for Existing Oil Palm Cultivation on Peat to address the impacts of development on peat.

How Does RSPO Define Peat?

The RSPO's definition of organic soil (peat) is as follows:

*"Histosols (organic soils) are soils with cumulative organic layer(s) comprising more than **half of the upper 80cm or 100cm** of the soil surface containing **35% or more of organic matter** (35% or more Loss on Ignition) or 18% or more organic carbon (FAO 1998, 2006/7; USDA 2014; IUSS 1930)."*

*Malaysia & Indonesia have separate definitions of peat. Countries may have their own definition of peat, which can be defined through their National Interpretation (NI) process.

Impacts of Development on Peat



Carbon & Greenhouse Gas Implications

- Higher risk of peat fires from drying of peat
- Increased CO₂ & N₂O emissions from drainage of peat



Social, Economic & Livelihood Implications

- Loss of ecosystem services
- Human health affected by haze resulting from peat fire



Other Ecological Implications

- Increased erosion
- Loss of biodiversity
- Increased flood risk and saltwater intrusion due to soil subsidence
- Agrochemical runoff affecting aquatic biodiversity
- Haze conditions following peat and forest fires

How the P&C 2018 Mitigates Issues Arising from Oil Palm Planted on Peat

Peat Inventory - 7.7.2

Indicator 7.7.2 of the P&C 2018 requires members to identify areas of peat within their managed areas, to ensure effective measures are taken to safeguard and minimise the impact of OP cultivation on peat for all unplanted and planted areas, respectively. RSPO has developed a Peat Inventory Template for members to document and report areas of peat (planted, unplanted and rehabilitated) within their managed areas.

Drainability Assessment - 7.7.5

Indicator 7.7.5 of the P&C 2018 requires a drainability assessment (DA) to be conducted 5 years prior to replanting on peat. This assessment is conducted to predict the potential lifespan of a plantation planted on peat by estimating Drainage Limit Time - i.e. the time when the drainage base of the plantation is reached. Members are expected to phase out OP, if the results of the assessment indicate it will take 40 years or less to reach the drainage base.

The DA is crucial as it acts as a safeguard threshold. Taking into consideration the future rise of sea levels, land that is currently just above the mean sea level is at high risk of becoming unproductive and flooded, thus necessitating the need for the 40-year threshold in which OP will be phased out.

Peat Audit Guidance and Manual on Best Management Practices (BMP) - 7.7.6 & 7.7.7

Indicators 7.7.6 & 7.7.7 require all existing planting on peatlands, unplanted and set aside peatlands to be managed and protected, in accordance with the RSPO Manual on BMPs Volume 1 & 2. The Peat Audit Guidance highlights the important requirements for grower members to comply with both indicator 7.7.6 & 7.7.7. The guidance shall be used by Certification Bodies (CBs) for assessments on peatlands and for growers to identify gaps within their respective Certification Units.

Both volumes provide a set of practical guidance on BMPs that are important for enhancing the management of existing OP cultivation and rehabilitation of forested or degraded planting on peat.

BMPs for Existing Oil Palm Cultivation on Peat (Volume 1)

- Nature and characteristics of tropical peat and constraints and impact of OP cultivation
- Water management
- Management of nutrients, pests and diseases
- Operational issues
- Environmental and social issues
- Research and development, monitoring and documentation.

BMPs for Management & Rehabilitation of Peatlands (Volume 2)

- Peatland ecosystems
- Management of existing peat swamp forest areas in or adjacent to OP plantations
- Rehabilitation of peat swamp forests in degraded sites
- Implementing peat swamp forest re-vegetation
- Partnerships between plantation companies, government, local communities and NGOs.

Find out more at rspo.org/resources/peat