Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental Standards

ISEAL Code of Good Practice

Version 2.0 – January 2018

iseal alliance

Contents

Foreword

ISEAL Alliance is the global membership association for sustainability standards. ISEAL is a non-governmental organisation whose mission is to strengthen sustainability standards systems for the benefit of people and the environment.

ISEAL is the global leader in defining and communicating what good practice looks like for sustainability standards through guidance and credibility tools such as the Codes of Good Practice. ISEAL has four strategic priorities in its work with sustainability standards:

> Deliver credibility expertise

> Measure and share impacts

> Catalyse improvements and scalable solutions

> Build support for credible standards

ISEAL's membership is open to all multi-stakeholder sustainability standards and accreditation bodies that demonstrate their ability to meet the ISEAL Codes of Good Practice and accompanying requirements, and that commit to learning and improving. ISEAL also has a non-member, subscriber category to engage with standards systems in development and other stakeholders with a demonstrable commitment to the ISEAL objectives. Further information about the ISEAL Alliance and its membership is available at **www.iseal.org**

ISEAL Codes of Good Practice build credibility
The goal of all ISEAL Codes of Good Practice is to support standards systems to deliver positive social and environmental impact. ISEAL Codes of Good Practice complement each other to achieve this:

> The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards (Standard-Setting Code) supports the development of standards that are relevant and transparent and that reflect a balance of stakeholder interests;

> The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental Standards (Assurance Code) helps to ensure accurate results from assessments of compliance and to encourage the use of assurance to support learning; and

> The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards Systems (Impacts Code) supports standards systems to measure and improve the results of their work and to ensure that standards are delivering the desired impact.

Individually, each Code is useful in strengthening a component of a standards system. However, users of standards and other stakeholders will have a higher level of confidence in the effectiveness of a standards system when the Codes are implemented together.

Implementation
This version of the Assurance Code (v2) was approved by the ISEAL Board of Directors in January 2018. It becomes effective for all evaluations from 1 January 2019. Organisations who wish to apply for ISEAL Associate Membership can apply using either v1 or v2 of the Assurance Code up to 31 December 2018. Applications received after this date must relate to v2 only.

For more information on implementation timelines for v2.0 of the Code, please visit the ISEAL Alliance website: **www.isealalliance.org/our-work/defining-credibility/codes-of-good-practice**

Code Review Process

The public review and revision process for the Assurance Code takes place at least every five years. The next review is scheduled for 2023.

Where a revision is warranted, the ISEAL Secretariat prepares the draft revisions and coordinates the revision process. The ISEAL Technical Committee, a permanent multi-stakeholder governance body, is responsible for monitoring the Code revision process, signing off on drafts, and recommending approval of the revised Code to the ISEAL Board of Directors, based on both the content of the Code and on the quality of the revision process.

The ISEAL Alliance welcomes comments on the Assurance Code at any time. Comments will be incorporated into the next review process. Please submit comments by mail or email to the address below.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Assurance Code is to provide a framework for credible assurance that is delivered consistently by sustainability standards systems, so as to improve the effectiveness of their assurance models in contributing to their intended sustainability impacts.

The Assurance Code sets out minimum criteria for implementation of the assurance management system and process, while also recognising that different assurance models can be effective for different purposes. The Assurance Code builds on a set of desired outcomes for effective assurance and describes how they can be achieved in practice.

Version two of the Assurance Code focuses more strongly on the accountability of the scheme owner to ensure that the chosen assurance model is fit for purpose and that its effectiveness is monitored over time. This enables the scheme owner to improve the rigour, effectiveness, and value to stakeholders of its assurance system and to be more responsive to operating risks.

The ISEAL Assurance Code normative *Requirements* are structured around *Desired Outcomes* in sections 4, 5 and 6 below. The *Desired Outcomes* are the results that a sustainability standards system should seek to achieve with its assurance programme. Complying with the *Requirements* that are linked to each *Desired Outcome* should lead an organisation to achieve those outcomes.

The Assurance Code also includes *Guidance* that provides supplementary information to the *Requirements*, as well as interpretation of key phrases in the *Requirements*. The *Guidance* is an important non-binding supplement to the Assurance Code and should be taken into account when applying the Code requirements. The *Guidance* can be found in a separate column adjacent to the *Requirements*.

1. Scope

The ISEAL Assurance Code specifies normative requirements for implementing an assurance system. Requirements in the Code aim to support credible and effective systems for managing risks to the integrity of the assurance process and maximising the value of assurance. While the Assurance Code can apply generically to assurance systems for assessing conformity with all types of standards, it is intended to apply primarily to assurance of sustainability standards and related chain of custody standards. The Code does not cover licensing or control of scheme labels.

The Assurance Code applies to schemes that include assurance and oversight within their assurance systems. It is the responsibility of the scheme owner to ensure that the Code requirements are complied with throughout their assurance system.

2. Referenced Publications

ISEAL Impacts Code: 2014. Code of Good Practice for Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards

ISO/IEC 2382:2015 Information Technology – Vocabulary

ISO 9000:2015 Quality Management Systems – Vocabulary

ISO 14001:2015 Environmental Management Systems – Requirements with guidance for use

ISO 17000:2004 Conformity assessment – Vocabulary and general principles

ISO 26000:2010 Guidance on Social Responsibility

ISEAL Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide (2015)

3. Assurance System Desired Outcomes

Sustainability assurance should be seen as a tool that supports the achievement of sustainability impacts. The foundations of assurance remain focused on accurate assessments of compliance. However, it is also critical for the scheme owner to have a good understanding of the effectiveness of its assurance strategies, through good information management systems, and to find additional ways to create value for stakeholders from the assurance process.
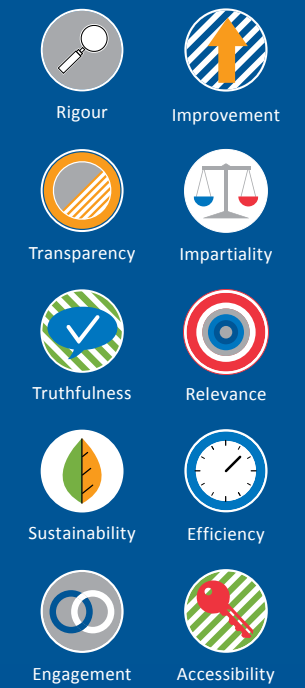
On the next page is a graphical representation of the desired outcomes that frame the requirements in the Assurance Code. The dual intent of these desired outcomes is to connect assurance activities with the ultimate goal of achieving sustainability impacts and to align assurance activities with the ISEAL Credibility Principles. The desired outcomes can be used as a guide to evaluate the effectiveness of different assurance strategies, while providing flexibility to apply a broad range of credible approaches to deliver assurance.

3. Assurance System Desired Outcomes

Assurance system supports achievement of defined sustainability impacts

The assurance system results in accurate assessments of compliance

4.5 Effectiveness and efficiency of the assurance system are improved over time

The assurance system is accessible and adds value to clients

The assurance system is implemented consistently

5.5 The assurance system is implemented competently

5.6 The assurance system is implemented impartially

4.2 Risks to the integrity of the assurance system are managed

4.1 The scheme owner is responsible for and makes improvements to the assurance system

4.3 Assurance model is fit for purpose

6.1 Clients derive additional value from assurance

6.2 Barriers to access are minimised

6.3 Information about how the system operates is easily available

5.1 Operating procedures are clear and sufficient

5.2 Assessment follows operating procedures

5.4 Oversight is independent and effective

Assurance personnel are competent

Risks are assessed regularly

4.4 Assurance data is relevant and accurate

Data about performance is shared with clients

Client has access to advice and resources

Eligibility requirements are clear

Assessment takes a risk-based approach

5.3 Outputs of recognised schemes are equivalent

Skills and knowledge are defined

Assurance personnel are trained

Assurance personnel are assessed

Data is collected from various sources

Good information management system in place

Stakeholders provide input

Risks are identified

ISEAL Credibility Principles

Rigour

Improvement

Transparency

Impartiality

Truthfulness

Relevance

Sustainability

Efficiency

Engagement

Accessibility

Icons in the diagram indicate coverage by Assurance Code

4. Efficiency and Improvement

Clause 4.1 Scheme owner is responsible for and makes improvements to the assurance system

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
4.1.1	Accountability	The scheme owner shall delineate responsibilities and lines of accountability within the assurance system and define terms of reference for relevant committees. The scheme owner's senior management shall be responsible for the overall functioning and improvement of the assurance system, including information management and risk management systems.	

Clause 4.2 Risks to the integrity of the assurance system are managed

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
4.2.1	Risk Management Plan	The scheme owner's senior assurance staff shall maintain a risk management plan that includes a list of the most significant risks to the integrity of the assurance system, a quantification of those risks, and a description of the strategies being employed to mitigate each of these risks. The plan shall include a revision schedule and be revised as risks arise or change.	In most cases, risks will arise or change frequently which can trigger regular reviews of the risk management plan, e.g. at least every 6 months.
4.2.2	Liability and Financing	The scheme owner shall have adequate arrangements to cover liabilities arising from its operations and shall have the financial stability and resources required to carry out those operations.	Arrangements that are adequate to cover liabilities can include insurance, reserves, contract language, etc. Arrangements can match the scale of operation of the scheme.

Clause 4.3 Assurance model is fit for purpose

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
4.3.1	Assurance model	The scheme owner shall prescribe an assurance structure and activities commensurate with the scope of the scheme, risks inherent in the sector, type of data collected, and end uses of the scheme, including the types of claims being made by assurance system actors, and shall be able to provide a rationale for its choice of structure and activities.	The choice of structure and activities includes definition of the types of assessment to be employed (see clause 5.1.2 and accompanying guidance for more information).

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
4.3.1 Cont.		**NOTE:** For further guidance on acceptable claims, please refer to the ISEAL Claims Good Practice Guide **www.isealalliance.org/claims**[1] For further guidance on data collection in the context of monitoring and evaluation, please refer to the ISEAL Impacts Code of Good Practice **www.isealalliance.org/impacts**[2]	

Clause 4.4 Assurance data is relevant and accurate

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
4.4.1	Data sources	The scheme owner shall maintain a list of the data sources it uses to monitor risks to the integrity of the assurance system.	
4.4.2	Information management system	The scheme owner shall maintain an information management system that supports gathering, management and analysis of relevant data from internal and external sources, including compliance data from assurance providers and oversight bodies.	The information management system can be used to inform risk management, assurance system learning, and monitoring and evaluation.
4.4.3	Data integrity	The scheme owner shall have adequate data control protocols and sufficient capacity to ensure data consistency and integrity for the data it manages.	The protocol can include criteria to assess data completeness and consistency, and can outline how the data is maintained and updated at regular intervals.
4.4.4	Data governance	The scheme owner shall define who owns different types of assurance system data and what data is available to whom and under what conditions.	This information can include who is responsible for making changes to each type of data. It can also include a publicly available data policy that summarizes the use, distribution and format by which each type of data owned by the organization is made available. A data registry can support the development of a data governance policy. When developing a data governance policy, the scheme owner may want to consider how to comply with national privacy laws related to data security and holding of personal data.

1. https://www.isealalliance.org/credible-sustainability-standards/what-are-credible-sustainability-standards
2. https://www.isealalliance.org/credible-sustainability-standards/iseal-codes-good-practice

Clause 4.5 Effectiveness and efficiency of the assurance system are maintained and improved over time

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
4.5.1	Management reviews	The scheme owner's senior management shall conduct management reviews at least once a year to assess performance of its assurance system, update classification of risks, and inform improvements. The scheme owner shall use analysis of assurance system data to inform those assessments and risk classification.	The scheme owner can choose to make use of the following resources to inform its management review: › Any internal or external system audits that have been conducted; › Risk assessments of the assurance system and mitigation measures taken; › Any recommendations from assurance providers and the oversight body to support system improvements; › Systematic review of client assessments (audits); › External audits of assurance providers; › Analysis of the types and nature of complaints received; › Chain-of-custody checks; › Customer (and public) surveys; › Client surveys; › Monitoring labelled products in the market; › Stakeholder input regarding the quality of the assurance system; › Monitoring and evaluation data; › Analysis of market and scientific trends; and › Criteria and data to assess strengths and weaknesses of the assurance system.
4.5.2	Improvement feedback loop	The scheme owner's senior management shall take preventive measures to manage risks to the integrity of the assurance system and shall oversee effective implementation of improvements identified in data analysis and management reviews.	

5. Rigour and Impartiality

Clause 5.1 Operating procedures support consistent implementation of the assurance system

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.1.1	Documented management system	The scheme owner shall have a documented management system that specifies requirements for implementation of its assurance system and includes at least: › Normative standard or standards; › Criteria for accepting assurance providers to the scheme (6.2.1); › Criteria for accepting clients to the scheme (6.2.1); › Types of client assessment used in the scheme and a methodology for each (5.1.2); › Procedure for regulating exceptions to the standard or assessment process (5.1.5); › Requirements for the certificate and/or claims related to assurance status (5.1.11); › Methodology for oversight of assurance providers (5.4.1); and › Document and record control procedures (5.1.14).	
5.1.2	Assessment methodology	The scheme owner shall require assurance providers to follow a consistent, documented methodology that specifies requirements for each type of assessment of clients, is sufficient to determine client conformance with the requirements, and is commensurate with the claims being made by assurance system actors. The assessment methodology shall include procedures for at least the following activities: › Assessment of conformance with the standard; › Review and decision; › Issuance of a certificate, where this is part of the scheme; › Periodic re-assessment. For each type of assessment used, the scheme owner shall specify requirements for conducting the assessment that includes at least the following: › frequency and intensity of assessment; **Requirements continue on the next page...**	Different types of assessment carried out by assurance providers can include pre-assessments, full audits, surveillance audits, on-site audits, document reviews, external group or multi-site audits, unannounced audits, witness audits, parallel audits, remote audits, etc. Independent assessment is a necessary component of schemes that allow public claims of compliance. Third party, independent, accredited certification is the most credible form of assessment.

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.1.2 Cont.		> sampling protocol for assessment; > knowledge and skills required in an auditor or assessment team (if assessment team is used); > minimum set of issues that need to be checked in every assessment; > a means of calculating the time needed for an assessment; > sources of evidence to be assessed; > minimum content of assessment reports; and > timelines for submission of completed reports, following assessments.	
5.1.3	Sampling within the assessment	The scheme owner shall define a sampling procedure for assurance providers to use during the assessment that includes, at minimum, a description of when sampling is to be employed in the assessment, the depth and intensity of sampling, and guidelines for the type of sampling to be employed in each instance.	Sampling within the assessment means defining the basis on which auditors will determine what to look at during the assessment, e.g. the most common problematic issues, the issues with the highest risk, the easiest issues to check, etc. This can include determining the selection of a sample within a group or multi-site.
5.1.4	Use of technical experts	The scheme owner shall require that interpreters or technical experts employed by assurance providers or oversight bodies are independent of the client, unless this is not feasible due to logistical constraints. In all cases, the names and affiliations of these experts shall be included in audit reports.	
5.1.5	Exceptions	The scheme owner shall have a procedure for regulating exceptions to the standard or assessment process.	An exceptions procedure is useful even in cases of anticipating future exceptions Exceptions can include exemptions, which provide for situations where a requirement is not applicable; Elements of an exceptions procedure can include that: > assurance providers receive approval from the standards system owner or oversight body for each exception; > the scheme owner or oversight body makes a list of existing exceptions available to all assurance providers and clients working within the standards system so that these are applied consistently; and > exceptions are only valid until the next standard review exercise, at which time they are considered as input to the review.

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.1.6	Group assessment	Where assurance includes assessment of groups, the scheme owner shall specify requirements for assurance providers to consistently evaluate the effectiveness of a group's internal management system in identifying and resolving non-conformities within the group.	Internal management systems can include the following elements: > Description of the roles, responsibilities and competencies of individuals responsible for different aspects of the internal management system; > Procedures for obtaining agreements with all group members to ensure group members understand what is required of them and to allow for assessments, both internal and external; > Procedures for approval and removal of members; > Procedures for annual decision-making on the assurance status of each member in the group; > Chain of custody / product flow; > Group and group member record keeping requirements; > Procedure for internal assessment; and > Procedure for sanctions and appeals External assessments can include: > A review of the documentation of the internal management system to ensure internal assessments have been carried out, records are complete and non-conformities are resolved; > An audit of a sample of group members to assess the accuracy of the results of the internal management system; > Procedures to address non-conformities including sanctions in the case of systemic failure of the internal management system.
5.1.7	Group non-conformities	Where assurance includes assessment of groups, the scheme owner shall define consequences for non-conformities in individual group members. Where the number of non-conformities identified in sampling individual group members signifies a systemic problem with the group's internal management system, the scheme owner shall ensure that this results in non-conformities being issued against the group as a whole.	

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.1.8	Decision-making mechanism	The scheme owner shall define a decision-making protocol for compliance assessment that enables consistent determination of levels of non-conformity, and shall require assurance providers to implement it.	Examples of decision-making protocols can include scorecards, traffic light systems, critical criteria, etc.
5.1.9	Appeals	The scheme owner shall require assurance providers and oversight bodies to implement a publicly available appeals procedure whereby clients and assurance providers respectively can appeal assessment decisions.	
5.1.10	Remediation and consequences	The scheme owner shall require assurance providers and oversight bodies to follow consistent procedures on remediating non-conformities, which shall include defined time limits for implementing corrective actions, steps for verifying corrective actions, and repercussions of continued non-conformity.	
5.1.11	Integrity of assurance status	The scheme owner shall have procedures in place that define the rules governing use and communication of assurance status, claims of compliance, and references to assurance, and shall require that clients comply with these rules. **NOTE:** For further guidance on acceptable claims, please refer to the ISEAL Claims Good Practice Guide **www.iseal.org/claims**[3]	The rules governing use and communication of assurance status, claims and references to assurance can include that the client: > conforms to the requirements of the assurance provider when making public reference to its assurance status; > does not make or permit any misleading statement regarding its assurance status; > upon withdrawal of its assurance status, discontinues its use of all advertising matter that contains a reference to assurance; > amends all advertising matter when the scope of assurance has been reduced; > does not imply that assurance applies to activities and sites outside the scope of assurance; and > does not use its assurance status in such a manner that would bring the assurance system into disrepute and lose public trust.

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.1.12	Complaints procedure	The scheme owner shall have in place a publicly available and accessible complaints resolution procedure and shall require this also of its assurance providers and oversight bodies. Each procedure shall require the respective body to: > investigate and take appropriate action regarding relevant complaints, within defined timelines; > review and take any necessary corrective actions; and > keep a record of all complaints and resulting actions to be made available for internal audits and management reviews.	
5.1.13	Misrepresentation and corruption	The scheme owner shall ensure monitoring activities are in place that include actions to identify and mitigate misrepresentation or corruption. These actions shall include at least: > follow-up of suspended clients to monitor cessation of claims; and > a publicly available mechanism for stakeholders to report instances of potential misrepresentation or corruption.	Actions can also include market surveillance to detect fraudulent claim use. The mechanism for stakeholders could be the scheme's complaints process but this should then specifically accommodate informal and confidential allegations of corruption. Monitoring activities can be implemented by assurance providers, or by oversight bodies in the case of monitoring assurance providers' performance.
5.1.14	Records and document control	The scheme owner shall implement document control procedures that guide the management and storage of system documents and records.	

Clause 5.2 Assessment is implemented according to operating procedures

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.2.1	Legality	The scheme owner shall ensure that oversight bodies and assurance providers are legally incorporated entities.	
5.2.2	Legal contracts	The scheme owner shall have legally enforceable contracts with oversight bodies and assurance providers (either directly or through the oversight body) that delineate responsibilities and obligations, including data use and confidentiality. The scheme owner shall also require this of assurance providers with their clients. Where the scheme owner is the assurance provider, it shall have legally enforceable contracts with the clients.	Getting agreement from clients on use of their data, confidentiality of that data, and related obligations is critical. These agreements with clients can be made either by the assurance provider or by the scheme owner.
5.2.3	Internal audits	The scheme owner shall require that assurance providers conduct annual internal audits on scheme-related performance and share the results with the scheme owner.	
5.2.4	Responsibility for outsourcing	The scheme owner shall require that oversight bodies and assurance providers take responsibility for ensuring the quality and integrity of all assurance activities outsourced to another body.	
5.2.5	Authority for assurance decisions	The scheme owner shall ensure that oversight bodies and assurance providers retain authority for decisions related to their assessments (i.e. the decision-making is not outsourced).	

Clause 5.3 Outputs of recognised schemes are equivalent

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.3.1	Equivalence arrangements	Where the scheme owner accepts as equivalent or partially equivalent the assurance results of another scheme or body, it shall define the steps taken or additional assurance activities required to have confidence in the results of the other scheme.	Equivalence arrangements differ from proxy accreditation in that the former is about equivalence of assessment results in different schemes while the latter is about the competence of assurance bodies to carry out assessments in the same scheme.

Clause 5.4 There is independent oversight of implementation

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.4.1	Oversight mechanism	The scheme owner shall specify the approach to oversight and its implementation appropriate to the scope and operations of the scheme. This shall include the frequency of oversight, responsibilities for different functions, procedures to be followed, and reporting requirements back to the scheme owner. The scheme owner can devolve responsibility for defining the details of implementation to the oversight body but shall retain authority for defining the overall approach and shall be clear on exactly who has responsibility for defining which parts of the oversight system. The oversight process shall include a review of the performance of assurance providers and auditors in conducting the assessment.	
5.4.2	Independence of oversight	The scheme owner shall ensure that the oversight body is independent of the assurance provider(s) being assessed.	This means that the oversight body is usually a separate organisation from the assurance provider but it is possible that independence can be shown in other ways.
5.4.3	Competence of oversight personnel	The scheme owner shall ensure that assessment staff within the oversight body have in-depth knowledge of the standard and its intent, and of the scheme's assurance requirements.	
5.4.4	Authority of oversight bodies	The scheme owner shall ensure that the oversight body has the authority to take action regarding the compliance status of assurance provider(s). Where the scheme owner is the assurance provider, it shall ensure that issues raised by the oversight body are addressed and remediated.	
5.4.5	Accreditation	Where the scheme incorporates accreditation as an oversight mechanism, the scheme owner shall ensure that accreditation bodies comply with the current version of ISO/IEC 17011 in addition to the Assurance Code requirements that apply to oversight bodies.	Where other forms of oversight are implemented, the scheme owner may also want to consider regular evaluation against ISO/IEC 17011 to improve the quality of its oversight system.

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.4.6	Proxy accreditation	Where the scheme owner accepts assurance providers that have been accredited against other scopes, they shall require that those assurance providers carry out regular internal audits against the scheme-specific scope and share the results and any remediation with the scheme owner. The scheme owner shall also require those assurance providers to meet personnel competence requirements set by the scheme owner. Additionally, the scheme owner shall employ supplementary measures to assess the scheme-specific competence of assurance providers.	Such measures can include one or more of the following strategies: › In-depth monitoring of a specific issue across all assurance providers in the standards system, to compare, and therefore determine the level of competence and consistency of assurance across the standards system; › Review audits: onsite visit to a client without the auditor but with the last inspection report. This is not a full inspection but more a spot check to see if the inspection report of the assurance provider correlates with what is seen at the time. This also includes a client interview to get their impression of their assurance provider. Review audits generally do not last more than a few hours but can yield valuable insight into the competence of assurance providers; › Review of information obtainable from the databases of assurance providers in order to reduce onsite visits to offices of assurance providers. Time and money can be saved if data review is performed remotely, rather than onsite; › Review of the effort (usually measured as time) spent on audits. If this information is entered in a database the oversight body could have a good idea of the effort expended for different types of audits and could compare this with the performance of assurance providers; and › Review of client assessment reports (audit reports) and subsequent follow-up of discrepancies discovered.

Clause 5.5 The assurance system is implemented competently

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.5.1	Personnel competencies	The scheme owner shall define the qualifications and competency requirements for its assurance staff and for auditors and other assurance personnel, as well as the verification mechanisms to assess whether the requirements are fulfilled. Competencies shall include at least in-depth knowledge of the standard and its intent, the sector(s) in which the standard applies, an understanding of the goals of the standards system, and, in particular, the critical sustainability issues in the standard.	
5.5.2	Building competence	The scheme owner shall require that assurance provider and oversight body auditors and other assurance personnel, including the scheme owner's assurance staff, receive initial training and ongoing professional development according to the requirements of their respective positions.	
5.5.3	Auditor calibration	The scheme owner shall require assurance providers to implement an ongoing programme for auditor and assurance personnel calibration. Where the scheme employs multiple oversight bodies, it shall require a similar programme of calibration for the auditors of these bodies.	
5.5.4	Evaluation of competency	The scheme owner shall require that auditor competence is demonstrated on a recurring basis through evaluation by assurance providers, oversight bodies, or other entities, using defined verification mechanisms that include witnessing auditor performance.	

Clause 5.6 The assurance system is implemented impartially

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
5.6.1	Impartiality and Conflicts of interest	As part of its risk management plan, the scheme owner shall define and document potential risks to impartiality and conflicts of interest within its assurance system and how these potential risks and conflicts should be avoided or mitigated. The scheme owner shall have a mechanism for monitoring efforts to manage these risks and conflicts.	Transparency is one potential contributing factor to maintaining impartiality and avoiding conflict of interest.
5.6.2	Auditor impartiality	As part of the assessment of risks to impartiality, the scheme owner shall assess the potential risks to auditor impartiality and, where warranted, shall require assurance providers and oversight bodies to implement practices to mitigate these risks.	Some of the practices that can mitigate the risks to impartiality include: > rotation of auditors and other technical experts in assessments; > assurance body rotation; > occasionally having second set of eyes - have a second auditor join; and > witness audit / inspection every x time period.
5.6.3	Impartiality in the assessment	Where the scheme owner allows auditors or other assurance personnel to provide information to clients during the assessment, the scheme owner shall document the types of information that can be provided and the steps taken to avoid conflicts of interest.	Some steps that could reduce the potential for conflict of interest include: > providing information in accordance with guidance notes issued by the scheme owner; > having a consistent approach for how information is offered to clients; and > recording in the audit report the type of information provided.
5.6.4	Impartial decision-making	The scheme owner shall require that assurance providers and oversight bodies use competent personnel other than the auditor or audit team to make impartial decisions on compliance.	

6. Value and Accessibility

Clause 6.1 Assurance system delivers additional value to clients

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
6.1.1	Information on performance	The scheme owner shall ensure that performance insights are provided to clients.	Performance insights can be as simple as providing the client with audit reports and noting changes since the previous report. However, additional value for the client can be derived from communicating improvements over time, performance in relation to peers, or in assisting clients to understand where and how they can improve.

Clause 6.2 Barriers to access are minimised

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
6.2.1	Accessibility	The scheme owner shall have publicly available information that describes eligibility requirements for assurance providers and clients, and the rationale behind any restrictions on access.	Eligibility requirements can also be made publicly available by the oversight body. Examples of acceptable restrictions on access include: > Requiring membership in the scheme as a prerequisite for application, so long as membership fee levels do not prevent stakeholders from applying for membership; > Denying participation to stakeholders who do not meet a scheme-specific, publicly available Codes of Ethics or a Policies of Association; > Limiting geographic or sectoral scope based on the competence or capacity of the scheme; > New schemes or pilot initiatives that limit focus or number of clients; and > Variations in intensity of assessments based on risk profiles.
6.2.2	Risk-based assessment	Where a risk-based approach is used to determine assessment frequency and intensity in assurance or oversight, the scheme owner shall have a documented risk management protocol to assess the risk level of clients or assurance providers and the resulting assessment frequency and intensity, and shall require its use by assurance providers and oversight bodies respectively.	

Clause 6.3 Information about how the system operates is easily available

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
6.3.1	Publicly available information	The scheme owner shall ensure the following information about their assurance system and its implementation is current and publicly available: › Description of the structure of the assurance system including decision-making (4.3.1); › Information on data ownership and availability (4.4.4); › Criteria for accepting assurance providers and clients to the scheme (6.2.1); › Application procedures for clients; › Current list of oversight bodies and assurance providers that are approved to work in the assurance scheme; › General information on fees charged to clients and applicants; › Description of the assessment methodology: type(s) of assessment employed, how clients are assessed, how often, and by whom, and the basis for decisions (evaluation framework) (5.1.2); › Policy on information provision (knowledge sharing) to clients by assurance providers (5.6.3); › Description of how stakeholders can provide input to the assurance process (6.3.2); › Description of consequences for different levels of non-conformity (5.1.10); › Summary of resolved complaints (5.1.12) › Steps taken to have confidence in the results of other schemes deemed equivalent or partially equivalent (5.3.1); › Current list of certified clients, their scope of assurance, and expiry date of their certificate (where expiry dates are used) (the list can be made available at the assurance provider level); and › Basic information about the results of assessments of both clients and assurance providers.	› In some cases, oversight bodies can make this information publicly available on behalf of the scheme owner. › Data ownership and availability refers to what data is made available to whom and for what purposes. › Scheme owners can decide what basic assessment information should be shared. Basic information can include: dates, locations and scope of auditing, team composition, number and type of non-conformities, certification status. Good practice is to make summary reports of assessment findings for every client publicly available. › Making basic assessment information available applies to existing clients who have failed a reassessment but not to new applicants.

Clause	Topic	Requirement	Guidance
6.3.2	Stakeholder input	The scheme owner shall define the points in the assurance and oversight processes at which stakeholders may provide input to about client and assurance provider performance respectively and shall ensure stakeholders are informed of these opportunities to engage.	Gathering additional stakeholder input about the assurance system beyond input from ongoing operations (e.g. complaints mechanism) is not required, but can strengthen the credibility of the assessment and be useful information to support assurance system improvements. Stakeholders can potentially provide input to assessments, on the quality of auditors or the assurance process, and on risks to the integrity of assurance.
6.3.3	Changes to the assurance system	The scheme owner shall have defined protocols for implementation of changes in requirements, including timelines by which changes come into effect and mechanisms to communicate those changes to affected stakeholders.	

Appendix A: Definitions

Appeal

Request by the client to the assurance provider or by the assurance provider to the oversight body for reconsideration of their assessment decision. (adapted from ISO 17000)

Assessment

The combined processes of audit, review and decision on a client's conformance with the requirements of a standard or of the assurance provider's conformance with requirements for assurance.

Assessment methodology

The steps that comprise an assessment in order to provide assurance.

Assurance

Demonstrable evidence that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person or body are fulfilled. (adapted from ISO 17000)

Assurance provider

Body responsible for performing the assessment of clients. NOTE: In the context of this Code, an accreditation body is considered an oversight body rather than an assurance provider.

Audit

A component of an assessment. A systematic, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact or other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are fulfilled. (adapted from ISO 17000)

Auditor

Person who performs the audit.

Calibration

The process by which different auditors and other personnel involved in assurance exchange knowledge and learn from each other to achieve more consistent interpretation and application of the standard.

Certificate

Generic expression used to include all means of communicating that fulfilment of specified requirements has been demonstrated. (adapted from ISO 17000)

Certification

The issuance of a third-party statement that fulfilment of specified conformance requirements have been demonstrated. (adapted from ISO 17000)

Claim

A message used to set apart and promote a product, process, business or service with reference to one or more of the pillars of sustainability: social, economic and/or environmental. NOTE: The ISEAL Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide (2015) provides further guidance on developing and managing environmental, social and/or economic claims.

Client

The person or enterprise that is seeking assurance of their conformance with the requirements in a standard.

Complaint

Expression of dissatisfaction, other than appeal, by any person or organisation to a scheme owner, assurance provider or oversight body relating to their respective activities, where a response is expected. (adapted from ISO 17000)

Conformity

Demonstration that requirements of a standard are fulfilled.

Corruption

The abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Examples of corruption include bribery, conflict of interest, fraud, money laundering, embezzlement, concealment and obstruction of justice, and trading in influence. (adapted from ISO 26000)

Data

Reinterpretable representation of information in a formalized manner suitable for communication, interpretation or processing. (adapted from ISO/IEC 2382)

Data governance

The overall management of the availability, usability, integrity, and security of the data employed in an organisation. A data governance programme includes a governing mechanism, a defined set of procedures, and a plan to execute those procedures.

Equivalence

An assessment that different assurance processes achieve functionally equivalent results.

Exception

An instance when a specified requirement in a standard or policy is excluded from conformity evaluation or is adapted for a particular circumstance.

External Assessment

In group assurance, the systematic inspection and review of the internal management system performed by the assurance provider.

Group

An organized body of people or enterprises that share similar characteristics, are part of a shared internal management system and, for assessment purposes, are considered as a single client (eg: groups of farmers, of retail stores, of distributors).

Group Member

The individual enterprise (eg: farmer, retail store owner, distributor) that is enrolled in a group assurance scheme.

Information

Knowledge concerning objects such as facts, events, things, processes, ideas or concepts that, within a certain context, has a particular meaning. (adapted from ISO/IEC 2382)

Information Management System

A documented set of procedures and processes for information management, including functions of controlling the acquisition, analysis, retention, retrieval and distribution of information.

Internal audit

An internal, systematic, documented process for obtaining records, statements of fact or other relevant information and assessing them objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements are fulfilled to support the objectives of an assurance system. (adapted from ISO 17000)

Internal Management System

In group assurance, the documented set of procedures and processes that a group will implement to ensure it can achieve its specified requirements. The existence of an Internal Management System allows the assurance provider to delegate inspection of individual group members to an identified body within the group.

Licensing

The issuance of an official permission to make, use or own a claim.

Management review

Evaluation of fulfilment and effectiveness of the collective services and processes that comprise an assurance management system, including the performance of the scheme owner, assurance providers, and oversight body.

Multi-site Operation

An enterprise with multiple production sites that are centrally managed and are assessed as one client.

Non-compliance

An identified occurrence of non-conformance with one requirement of a standard, identified as part of an assessment. Synonym: non-conformity.

On-site assessment

An assessment occurring on the physical site of a client's operations.

Outsourcing

The contractual obtaining of goods or services from a third party.

Oversight

Assessment of an assurance provider's demonstration of competence to carry out specific assurance tasks. (adapted from ISO 17000)

Oversight body

Body responsible for performing the assessment of assurance providers.

Peer review

Assessment of a client against specified requirements by other clients in, or candidates for, an organised group. (adapted from ISO 17000)

Proxy accreditation

A type of oversight employed by a scheme, whereby recognition of another scheme's oversight mechanism is deemed sufficient to demonstrate assurance.

Publicly available

Easily accessible online or otherwise to the public.

Reassessment

An assessment conducted for the purpose of renewing a certificate.

Risk

The chance of something happening that will have an impact on objectives. It is measured in terms of a combination of the probability of an event and the severity of its consequences.

Risk mitigation (Risk reduction)

Actions taken to lessen the probability, negative consequences, or both, associated with a risk.

Risk register

Document containing the results of risk analyses and risk response planning. The risk register details significant risks, potentially including description, category, cause, probability of occurring, impact(s) on objectives, proposed responses, owners, and current status.

Sanction

Repercussion of non-conformity with one or more requirements in a standard.

Self-declaration

A statement issued by a client, on behalf of itself, and based on its own determination, that states its status against specified conformance requirements of a standard. (adapted from ISO 14001)

Stakeholder

Individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organization. (ISO 26000)

Standards system

The collective of organisations responsible for the activities involved in the implementation of a standard, including standard setting, capacity building, assurance, labelling and monitoring.

Scheme owner

The organisation that is responsible for the standards system and accountable for the performance of its assurance system. The scheme owner determines the objectives and scope of the standards system, as well as the rules for how the scheme will operate and the standards against which conformance will be assessed. NOTE: The scheme owner can be the standards owner, assurance provider, a governmental authority, trade association, group of assurance providers or other body.

Surveillance

Assurance activities used to monitor misrepresentation and misuse of claims and labels in order, to support assurance.

Third-party assurance

Assurance activity that is performed by a person or body that is independent of the person or organization that provides the object of assurance and of user interests in that object. (adapted from ISO 17000)

Verification

Confirmation, through the provision of objective evidence, that specified requirements have been fulfilled. (adapted from ISO 9000)

Common Synonyms	
Term	**Synonyms**
Assessment	Audit
Assessment methodology	Audit procedure
Assurance	Certification, verification
Assurance Provider	Certification body, verification body, conformity assessment body (CAB)
Audit	Inspection, evaluation, verification
Auditor	Inspector, verifier, assessor
Certificate	Statement of conformity, Assurance Statement
Client	Operator, enterprise, entity, participant, producer, member
Internal Assessment	Internal audit
Oversight	Accreditation
Oversight provider	Accreditation body
Scheme owner	Standards system owner