



BRIEFING NOTE: INFORMATION FOR COMPANIES



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Background

The High Conservation Value (HCV) approach is widely used for identifying and conserving the most important environmental and social values in production landscapes (e.g. forestry and agriculture). As a result, more and more practitioners are undertaking HCV assessments in a wide variety of countries and contexts. However, until now there has been very little assurance of the competence of HCV assessors, which has resulted in considerable variability in the quality of the HCV assessments undertaken and the resulting management guidelines adopted. Recognising that the issue of assessor competence needed to be addressed, and working closely with users of the HCV approach, the HCV Resource Network (HCVRN) developed the Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS).



About the Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS)

The ALS promotes HCV assessor competence and more consistent implementation of the HCV approach through a) **the provision of guidance and standard templates for HCV assessors**, and b) **licensing and monitoring HCV assessors based on the quality of their HCV assessment reports**. Licensed assessors will be required to submit a copy of all HCV assessment reports they produce for review by a Quality Panel¹.

The ALS will license qualified professionals who wish to **lead third party HCV assessments**. The scheme is open to applicants worldwide and is recognized by various certification schemes. **The ALS will replace the current HCV assessor registration system of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). RSPO will therefore require the use of licensed assessors for all new plantings.**

Before being eligible for a full licence, all applicants must first apply for a provisional licence. A provisional licence is awarded to professionals who have experience in at least three HCV assessments and who have relevant academic and professional qualifications. **The ALS is all about minimising risk - proving assessor competence is key for this.** Therefore, moving from a provisional licence to a full licence is only possible after an assessor has successfully led and competently reported on two HCV assessments. Even after an assessor is awarded a full licence, all HCV assessment reports will undergo quality assurance by the HCVRN to check compliance with guidance and templates and independent peer reviews (in cases where there is potential risk to HCVs).

For details on how assessors become licensed see our **briefing note for Prospective Assessors**.



¹ All reports submitted to the ALS will be confidential and will only be used to verify that assessors have followed HCV assessment good practice and comply with HCVRN guidance and templates.



Why choose a licensed assessor?

Proven competence: In order to obtain an assessor licence, applicants must provide evidence of HCV assessment experience, HCV training and relevant academic and professional experience. All HCV reports are monitored by a Quality Panel and may also be peer reviewed for an additional level of quality assurance.

Greater transparency: Stakeholder consultation is an important part of the assessment process and licensed assessors are required to show evidence that consultation was conducted according to HCVRN guidance. Additionally, public summaries of all HCV assessment reports will be made available to stakeholders upon request.

Risk management: More competent assessors, greater levels of quality assurance and increased transparency all contribute to risk reduction. HCVs are more likely to be correctly identified in the first place, the evidence base and recommendations for HCV management should be stronger and stakeholders will have been involved throughout the process – therefore reducing the potential for conflict.

The HCV approach is not meant to be applied in isolation. Most widely recognized certification schemes cover a range of environmental and social topics and include important safeguards of sustainability in their Principles and Criteria. However, for HCV assessments undertaken outside of a widely recognised certification schemes, the licensed assessor is expected to discuss the context and existence of safeguards with the company during the initial information exchange. The company should provide details on: compliance with applicable laws and demonstration of the right to use the land and that the legal or customary rights of indigenous peoples, local communities or other users are not diminished without their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

Where can I find licensed assessors?

To verify whether an assessor holds a licence, or to search for an assessor with particular experience in a region or context, companies can consult the **HCV Assessor Database**. The database will be publically available on the ALS web portal and will provide profiles (qualifications, experience, working languages and contact information) of licensed HCV assessors.

Can company staff get licensed?

Although the ALS was created for licensing third party assessors, some companies may benefit from having licensed assessors amongst their staff. Licensing company staff can improve the understanding of the HCV approach and raise the quality of HCV assessments. Using internal HCV assessors is not permitted for new plantings in the context of Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certification. However, other certification schemes do allow the use of first-party assessors, and in such cases, it is beneficial for staff to obtain licences.

Costs

Improving assessor competence and conducting quality assurance on assessment outputs is not without costs. Licensed assessors are encouraged to recover the costs of report monitoring and peer reviews (if required) from their clients. It is expected that these costs are modest when compared to the benefits of the ALS for improved assessment quality and risk reduction. For more information on costs associated with the ALS please see our **briefing note for prospective HCV assessors**.

Role of companies

Companies are encouraged to support the ALS by requiring the use of licensed assessors. Companies are also encouraged to become members of the HCVRN and participate in decision-making about the further development of the ALS and the HCV approach. For more information on how to support the ALS and become a member of the HCVRN, please see our **membership brochure**.



More Information

For questions regarding the ALS visit our website www.hcvnetwork.org or contact secretariat@hcvnetwork.org