

**Assurance Standing Committee
18th Meeting (via Zoom)
Minutes of Meeting**

Zoom Link : Zoom Meeting (<https://zoom.us/j/95224486544>)

Date and time : 21 February 2024 at 3.00 pm – 5.33 pm (GMT+8)

Members Attendance:

Growers		
Name	Organisation	Group Representation
Anita Neville (Co-chair) (AN)	Golden Agri-Resources (GAR)	Indonesian Growers (IGC)
William Siow (WS)	IOI Group	Malaysian Growers (MPOA)
Florent Robert (FR)	SIAT SA	Growers RoW
Lawrence Quarshie (LQ)	Golden Star Oil Palm Farmers Association (GSOPFA)	Smallholders Group
NGOs		
Name	Organisation	Group Representation
Kamal Prakash Seth (KS) <i>(absent with apology)</i>	WWF International	E-NGO
Jonathan Escolar (JE) <i>(absent with apology)</i>	Rainforest Alliance	E-NGO
Paul Wolvekamp (PW)	Both ENDS	S-NGO
Marcus Colchester (MC)	Forest Peoples Programme	S-NGO
Angus MacInnes (AM) <i>(alternate member)</i>	Forest Peoples Programme	S-NGO
Supply Chain Sector / Downstream / Others		
Name	Organisation	Group Representation
Olivier Tichit (OT)	Musim Mas Holdings	P&T
Michal Zrust (MZ)	Lestari Capital	Financial
Lee Kuan-Chun (LKC)	P&G	CGM

RSPO Secretariat Attendance:

Name	Position
Aryo Gustomo (AG)	Director, Assurance
Mohd Zaidee Mohd Tahir (ZT)	Acting Head, Integrity
Freda Manan (FM)	Assistant Manager, Integrity
Haziq Ikram Rahmat (HIR)	Executive, Integrity

Other attendance:

Name	Organisation	Role
Pauline Smout (PS)	NewForesight	Consultant for De-linking Study
Willem Jansink (WJ)	NewForesight	Consultant for De-linking Study

Item	Description	Action Points
1.0	Introduction	
1.1	Welcome Remarks ZT briefly shared the agenda of the meeting.	
1.2	RSPO Antitrust Guidelines, Consensus-Based Decision Making, Declaration of Conflict of Interest (Col) ZT reminded the members of the RSPO Antitrust Guidelines and the objectives of the ASC. ZT stated that the ASC follows the RSPO consensus-based decision-making process, per the ASC Terms of Reference. ZT reminds that members must declare their potential Col and exclude themselves from the decision process in any relevant Col during the meeting. No Col was raised during the meeting.	
1.3	Acceptance of MoM from the 30 November 2023 Meeting ZT asked the ASC for comments or feedback on the minutes from the previous ASC meeting on 30 Nov 2023. AN asked if there was a full agreement to approve the minutes. The ASC accepted the minutes.	
2.0	For Decision	
2.1	Selection of a Vendor for the Independent Review of the Implementation of RSPO Labour Auditing Guidance (LAG) FM shared that in Sept 2022, the ASC agreed to conduct an independent review for the implementation of the RSPO LAG (an optional voluntary document intended for use by RSPO-accredited Certification Bodies (CBs)). It is currently undergoing a trial period from Nov 2022 to May 2024. The	

study will gather inputs, identify gaps, and assess the feasibility of possible mandatory implementation of the Guidance. The Terms of Reference (ToR) was published on 26 Oct 2023 and closed on 22 Dec 2023. The Secretariat received 3 proposals and an internal evaluation was carried out.

Vendor	Sattva	Proforest	Bizexcel
Team Composition	Project advisor, engagement lead, project lead, project associate	Principal project manager, senior project manager, associate director, independent researcher, sounding board of assurance & labour rights experts	Consultant
Mechanism	<p>Phase 1: Design surveys to assess objectives, requirements and audit expectations of the Guidance.</p> <p>Phase 2: Data collection via (i) virtual interviews with internal stakeholders (ASC, SSC & HRWG), (ii) in-person site visits to 2 certification audits - sampling to include 25-30 external stakeholders, (iii) mapping applicability of the Guidance against latest P&C.</p> <p>Phase 3: Analyse & collate insights before developing and presenting final report and high level recommendations to identified stakeholders.</p>	<p>Phase 1: (i) Desk review building on recent ISEAL labour auditing research plus additional literatures, (ii) equivalent labour auditing guidance, (iii) review of CB feedback, (iv) survey to pre-select interviewees.</p> <p>Phase 2: (i) Virtual interviews with 10-12 CB reps and auditors, upstream companies, small & medium growers that have used the Guidance, (ii) additional interviews with ISEAL, peer VSS, RSPO stakeholders with relevant expertise (iii) 2 CB workshops to dig deeper into the Guidance's usability</p> <p>Phase 3: Develop report of the review incl recommendations grouped into specific sections in the Guidance, overall auditing process & linked docs, voluntary or mandatory nature, and bigger picture actions for RSPO.</p>	<p>In-depth evaluation of the Guidance incl how it covers essential labour standards. Identification of areas for improvement, incl gaps not adequately addressed in relation to realities of labour practices. Collection of stakeholder perspectives. Assessment of practicality of enforcement incl potential logistical, financial, and social implications for various stakeholders. Recommendations for implementation and compliance including strategies for training, capacity building, and monitoring.</p>
Relevant Past Experience	Norad - multi-stakeholder programme to improve ethical treatment of construction workers, USAID - skilling and entitlement programme for workers, UNDP - meta study on female work & labour force participation	RSPO - technical support since inception, incl facilitating P&C development (2007) and revisions (P&C 2013 & 2018), ISEAL - Research on <i>Review of Evidence on Labour Auditing and Recommendations to Improve Practice</i> & supporting multi-stakeholder initiatives e.g. Better Cotton, FSC, SAI	Provide consultancy and training in labour-related standards e.g. RBA, ETI, SMETA, SA 8000, experience in conducting social auditing.
Pricing	INR 3,735,258 (MYR 212,910)	GBP 39,733 (MYR 236,570)	MYR 81,000

FM described the problem statement:

- Sattva and Proforest offer distinct methodologies aligned with project objectives, while Bizexcel's proposal is more general.
- Sattva and Proforest have larger teams, whereas Bizexcel is represented by a single individual.
- Sattva and Proforest charge comparable fees, while Bizexcel's rate is significantly lower. These should be considered in line with project needs.

FM shared the proposed solutions to the stated problems. The Secretariat employed the use of an evaluation matrix as follows:

VENDOR NAME =>	Sattva Proposal 1	Proforest Proposal 2	Bizexcel Proposal 3
CLICK TENDERER'S DOCUMENT FOR EVALUATION =>			
NON-PRICE Criteria Scoring			
Relevance in the Scope of Work	4	5	2
Qualifications & Expertise	4	5	2
Competitive Pricing and Value	4	4	2
Approach & Methodology	4	5	1
Understanding of RSPO & Past Performance	3	5	2
Total Percentage (must equal 100%)	38.50	48.00	18.50
Adjusted Non-Price Score to Evaluation Criteria (%)	34.65	43.20	16.65
Non-Price Criteria Rank	2	1	3
TENDER PRICE Ranking			
Unit/Currency	INR	GBP	MYR
Price	3,735,258	39,733	81,000
Fee	0.057	5.954	1.000
Exchange rate to MYR	212,910	236,570	81,000
PRICE (excl taxes) in MYR	131,910	155,570	-
Variance to lowest price	16.3%	19.2%	0.0%
Variance to lowest price to be deducted	6.29	9.21	10.00
Adjusted Price Score to Evaluation Criteria (%)	2	3	1
Price Criteria Rank	2	3	1
TOTAL SCORE FOR TENDER	28.36	33.99	26.65
OVERALL RANK	2	1	3
Comments (if any)	Sampling covers 25-30 external stakeholders, virtual and in-person interviews including 2 field visits with CBs while LAG is in use.	Recently conducted ISEAL Labour Auditing Review with proposal to review additional literature on top of that for this study. Desk review, virtual interviews & engagement in 2 CB forums.	One person team, methodology of how the review will be conducted is unclear.

FM explained that the price-to-non-price criteria weightage had been adjusted to 90:10 to account for the vast differences in price between the three vendors. Proforest scored the highest in the internal evaluation, and the Secretariat, as per the ASC's request, consulted the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) to review the evaluation.



	<p>FM noted HRWG's overall satisfaction with Proforest's selection in the evaluation, except for two concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Col due to Proforest's delivery of RSPO Lead Auditor Training courses - Two members disagreed, highlighting the clarity of objectives and Proforest's familiarity with RSPO challenges. Proforest responded, emphasising their commitment to enhancing labour auditing quality despite the flagged Col, which constitutes a small portion of their activities, primarily focusing on Responsible Sourcing. • HRWG recommended involving local civil society organisations and unions in stakeholder interviews - The Secretariat will request Proforest to include these groups in the interviews <p>The Secretariat requested the ASC to review and endorse its evaluation, recommending the appointment of Proforest for the study, based also on the HRWG's approval.</p> <p>Discussion points</p> <p>A member inquired about the origin of the evaluation matrix. FM clarified it was adapted from the Procurement team's template. Another member reiterated that the ASC had requested the Secretariat to use a standardised matrix for tenders, which they had done for the second time now. A member explained that while the standard ratio is 60:40 (Price: Non-Price), it was adjusted to 90:10 due to Bizexcel's lone operator status and much lower pricing. Another member expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the scoring method, as the proposals are not entirely technical and the scoring process seems unclear. Another member suggested setting specific thresholds for proposal requirements. They inquired if the proposal details should be reviewed now or after discussion. A member reminded that the proposals were provided in the pre-read and evaluated by the Secretariat, and acknowledged the need for a systematic evaluation to improve efficiency but the ASC may now accept or challenge the recommendation. FM explained that the internally evaluated scores are based on how well the vendors align with the ToR approved by the ASC.</p> <p>A member highlighted Sattva's in-person site visit as crucial, contrasting with the virtual approaches of the other vendors. FM explained that while the engagement is valuable, the Secretariat found it cost excessive, favouring Proforest's more cost-effective benefits. AG noted that only one CB has applied the LAG in audits as of Dec 2023, limiting the effectiveness of the future consultant's site visit. Another member expressed concern over only one CB implementing the LAG. AG explained that CBs find the optional guidance less motivating for implementation despite previous interest shown in the CB workshops. AG mentioned ongoing encouragement from the Secretariat, especially with the trial period ending soon. The member suggested discussion with ASI and for RSPO to draw the line or the independent review could be just another paper exercise. They suggested that since the guidance is not binding, clearer requirements are needed for CB operations. The member agreed with the choice of Proforest but</p>	<p>The Secretariat to publish an announcement to clarify the continued voluntary status of the Labour Auditing Guidance until the BoG mandates otherwise. (Update: Action completed. Announcement)</p>
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	<p>requested interviews with local civil society organisations, NGOs, unions, and growers.</p> <p>Another member said that CBs' reluctance could be due to increased time and cost for clients. A member recounted a CB attempting to charge for an audit with the LAG, mistaking it as mandatory. There should be more interviews with growers and unions impacted by the guidance. AG said that the appointed consultant will be asked to focus on trade union interviews and to uncover reasons behind CBs' reluctance. FM reminded that the guidance shall remain voluntary even after the review until the BoG mandates otherwise. FM proposed publishing an announcement to clarify the voluntary status to which the ASC agreed.</p> <p>A member inquired if they could recommend parties like the International Labour Rights Forum for the interviews, also asking about reaching marginalised workers like migrants and casual labourers. AG clarified that the review focuses on LAG implementation supporting CBs so the consultant's primary focus will be on CB matters rather than community issues. A member asked about how the Guidance relates to the upcoming P&C revision. AG explained that the guidance currently refers to the 2018 P&C. The certification systems review is expected to conclude simultaneously with the P&C revision, for both to be proposed to the BoG. Positive feedback from this review could prompt recommendations for immediate inclusion of the guidance into the new certification systems, potentially leading to mandatory status. The ASC agreed to move forward with Proforest as the vendor for the independent review, subject to the addition of interviews with local civil society organisations and labour unions.</p>	<p>published on 20 March 2024)</p> <p>The Secretariat to proceed with the appointment of Proforest for the independent review of the Labour Auditing Guidance, with the addition of interviews with local civil society organisations and labour unions. (Update: Action completed. Proforest was appointed and is scheduled to start work in April 2024)</p>
<p>3.0</p> <p>3.1</p>	<p>For Discussion</p> <p>Initial Study on De-linking Commercial Relationships between CBs and Auditees: Initial Consultation with the ASC</p> <p>PS presented the agenda for the consultation and gave context for the request. PS said the focus today is to gather input for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What alternative models could work for RSPO? ● Under what conditions could an alternative model improve the current situation for RSPO? <p>PS said that the Evaluation criteria for the success of the model are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Impact: Reduced risk of Col, Improved quality of auditing process, Low risk of unintended consequences. ● Feasibility: Cost-effectiveness, Financial sustainability, Capacity to implement. ● Scalability: Applicability and Adaptability / Flexibility. ● Assurance Monitoring capability / Transparency and Accountability. ● Acceptance: Perceived legitimacy and Willingness to participate. <p>PS presented an overview of the alternative models that NewForesight has identified, scored against the current model and the evaluation criteria:</p>	

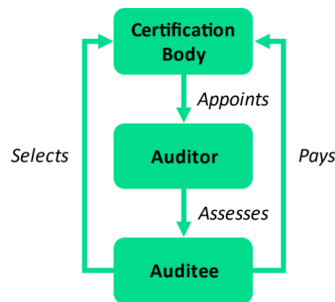
Alternative models

Various types of alternative financial models could potentially be implemented by RSPO, scoring differently on the selected evaluation criteria*

	Current model	Fixed/Tiered fee	Central fund	Multi-stakeholder
Impact	Low	Medium	High	High
Feasibility	High	High	Medium	Low
Scalability	High	High	High	High
Assurance	Low	Medium	High	High
Acceptance	High	High	Medium	High

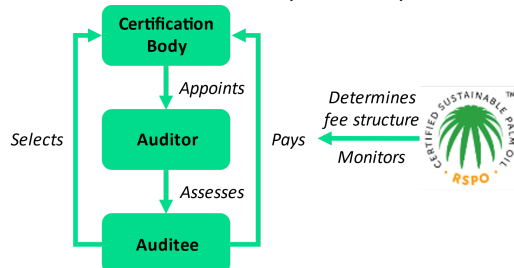
*Initial hypotheses, to be discussed

Current RSPO assurance model & financial link (Model 1)



Direct commercial relationship between CB and auditee. Fee structure based on contractual agreement specifying the complexity and duration of the assignment. Potential avenue: Explore how the current model could be maintained and improved in terms of credibility. Scores low on impact and assurance, but high on feasibility, scalability and acceptance.

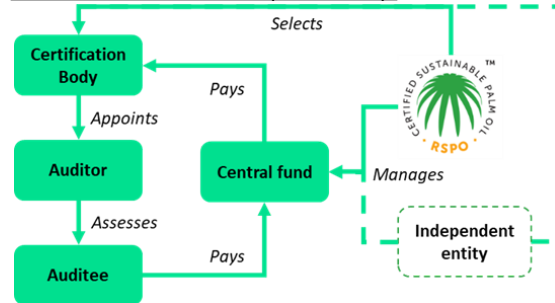
Fixed/tiered fee model (Model 2):



CBs charge a standard, fixed fee for audits. Tiered fee structure can be based on CB's competence and the auditee's size, revenue and general complexity (not directly negotiated). Potential avenues: Fixed fees pre-determined by RSPO or fees negotiated between RSPO & CBs. Scores

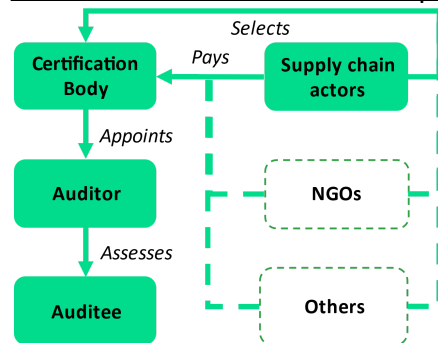
low on acceptance, medium on feasibility and assurance, but high on impact and scalability.

Central fund model (Model 3):



Auditees pay into a central fund managed by RSPO or an independent entity. Central fund then distributes the collected audit funds to CBs based on conducted audits. Potential avenues: RSPO also allocates which CB conducts the audit and combines with tiered fees. This model is similar to how the Rainforest Alliance Cocoa Assurance in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire works. Scores medium on feasibility, scalability, and acceptance, but well on impact and assurance.

Multi-stakeholder or Shared responsibility model (Model 4):



Costs of certification are shared among various stakeholders. Reduces the financial burden on individual auditees. Potential avenues: Shared responsibility among the value chain, shared responsibility in a multi-stakeholder model (incl. NGOs, impact investors, governments & others). This model is similar to how the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) works. Scores low on feasibility, medium on scalability and acceptance, but high on impact and assurance.

Discussion points

A member highlighted concerns about scalability, noting that the issue is not solely about pricing competitiveness among CBs but also about the availability of auditors, which affects CBs' ability to afford trained manpower. Another member critiqued the lack of consideration for accreditation and how that would affect the de-linking. The initial study has not considered the external assurance of CBs in the form of the accreditation body, and how that would affect their access to audits and to the market. PS mentioned that

	<p>NewForesight is addressing auditor allocation concerns and will continue to consider the impact of financial de-linking on auditor selection.</p> <p>A member suggested a practical approach for Model 4: charging CB fees based on downstream certified credit purchases, simplifying funding while linking production volumes to certification funds. They emphasised this as a consideration, not a stance. Another member noted that only Model 3 appears to be a full de-link, while the others maintain a commercial relationship between auditees and CBs. PS clarified that Model 4 also demonstrates a full de-link, with stakeholders funding instead of auditees. The models progress in degrees of financial de-linking. PS agreed that Model 2 is not a full financial de-link, but rather having the fee structure and contract be determined by another party such as RSPO, instead of the CB.</p> <p>A member highlighted the prevalence of patrimonialism and clientelism in some countries, exacerbating relationships between CBs and auditees, potentially compromising independence. Another member expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of decoupling financial relationships to strengthen audit credibility, noting the lack of defined success criteria. PS explained that NewForesight's focus has been on exploring alternative models due to the framed question on financial links, intending to assess their scale and impact on credibility, while avoiding unintended consequences on other aspects of the assurance system.</p> <p>A member inquired about the legal implications of a de-linking model, questioning the responsibilities of certified entities if they are not party to contracts with auditors or CBs. PS acknowledged they are not legal experts but proposed exploring follow-up questions once the model selection narrows down.</p> <p><u>Mentimeter survey and relevant discussion points</u></p> <p>Through the use of a Mentimeter survey, PS collected answers from the ASC regarding the following questions, each with their own discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are these the four most important models to include in this study? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes: 7 No: 4 <p>A member who voted no shared that they believe a potential model to include in the study is different iterations of the central fund (Model 3) . If the central fund is to act as an escrow account, we could incorporate elements of the fixed tier fee (Model 2) and even the multi-stakeholder (Model 3) into the central fund model. Thus, a potential avenue is to have various versions of just the central fund model and test those as well. Another member added that they would have liked to see more variations in the way the central fund is financed, not only by the auditee but also by the supply chain, managed by the RSPO and the CBs selected by the RSPO. A member added that NewForesight should also consider the central fund's terms regarding when members withdraw from certification. Would they be able to withdraw their money, and what happens if the fund runs out of money for the number of certifications needed. PS agreed that a combination of these models could be worth exploring, as well as the terms for managing the central fund, and how RSPO can facilitate a regular exercise of determining audit frequency</p>	
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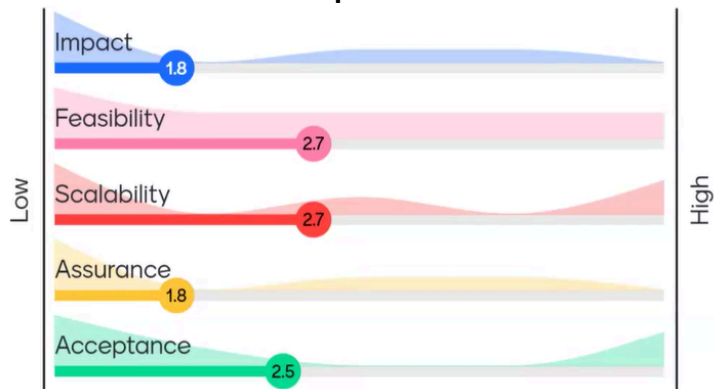
and identifying organisations that require audits, based on which the allocation of funds and the required budget can be determined. A member said that the focus should be more on the allocation of CBs and the prioritisation of allocating more competent CBs to improve the business options. It is not so much a de-linking in the funding source sense, but between the auditee and the auditor. The member suggested allowing the more competently-rated CBs to have the first pick as part of the model (thus rewarding competent effort from the CB), allowing the CB to choose their auditees when a request is in a pool. PS suggested that then another body must put registered CBs in a ranking system, and agreed that NewForesight will continue to consider this avenue in their study.

• Which model has your preference?

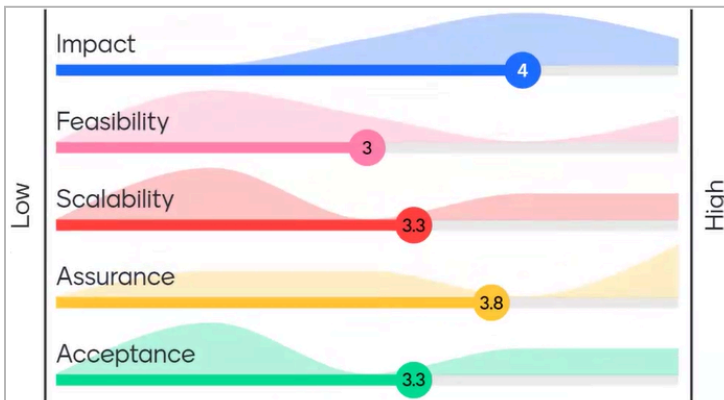


The following questions' models are then numbered by their rank as listed in the graphic above:

#1 An evaluation of an **improved current model**:



#2 An evaluation of the **central fund**:



A member raised concerns regarding the risk of collusion within the body managing the central fund. The risk extends to RSPO should the Secretariat be assigned the responsibility of managing the central fund. PS agreed to consider the potential risk of collusion within the body, highlighting the risk of merely shifting the Col problem from the CBs to RSPO or another body. Another member suggested that the body responsible for the central fund could withhold funds until receiving an audit result, thus increasing oversight of the audit on the ground. A member highlighted that what needs to be questioned in the interviews between NewForesight and selected ASC members are the changes needed to improve credibility in the current model, should the overarching model not be changed.

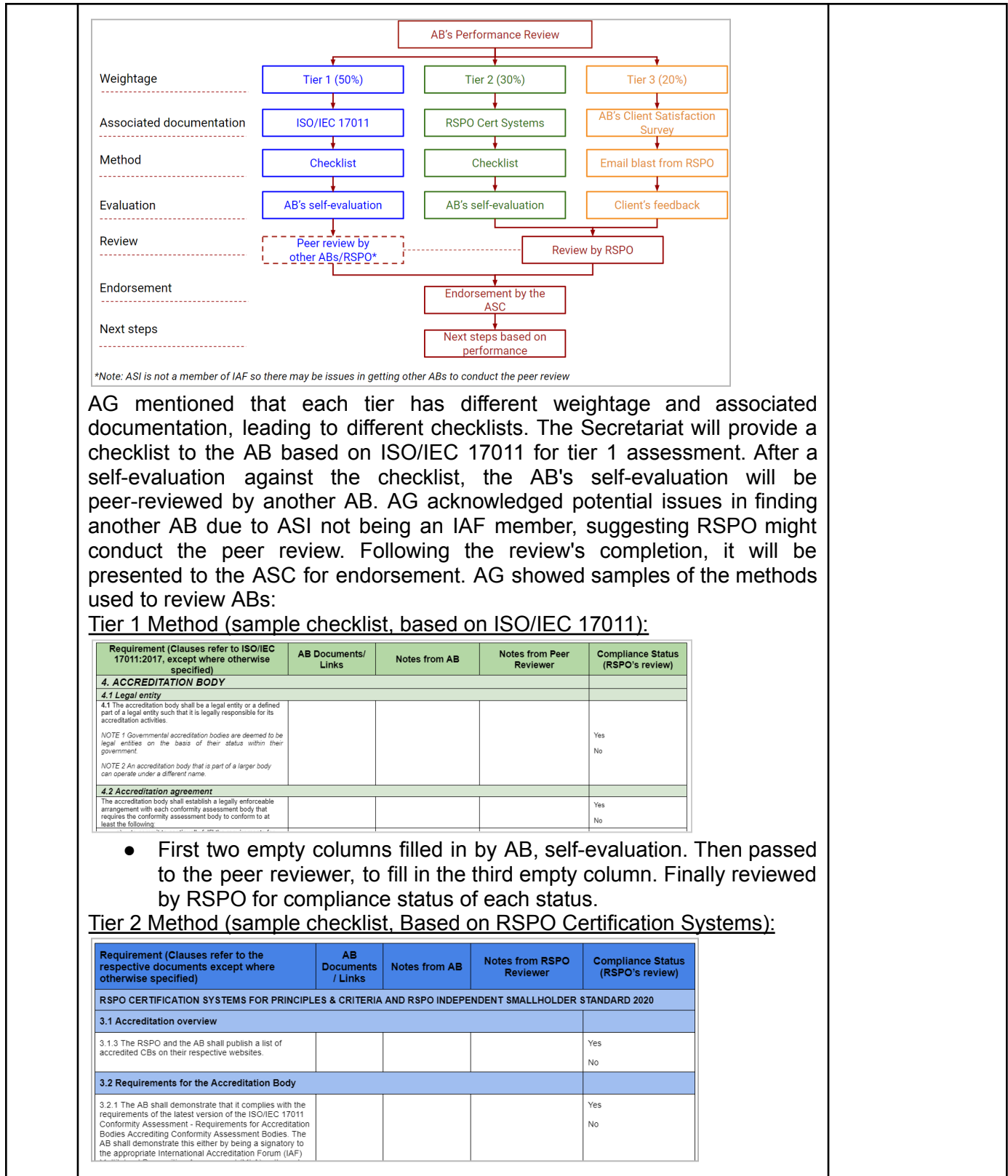
3.2 Framework for Review of Accreditation Body’s Performance

AG showed the scope and purpose of the review:

- To assess the accreditation body’s (AB’s) adherence to ISO/IEC 17011.
- To assess the extent to which the AB adheres to the RSPO certification systems.
- To assess the satisfaction levels of the accreditation body’s clients, comprising CBs and RSPO grower members, covering aspects such as communication, support services, and overall service delivery.
- Identify and mitigate any risks that could negatively impact RSPO’s reputation due to the accreditation body’s performance.

AG showed the framework for the planned appraisal system on AB performance:

A 3-Tier Evaluation was proposed:



AG mentioned that each tier has different weightage and associated documentation, leading to different checklists. The Secretariat will provide a checklist to the AB based on ISO/IEC 17011 for tier 1 assessment. After a self-evaluation against the checklist, the AB's self-evaluation will be peer-reviewed by another AB. AG acknowledged potential issues in finding another AB due to ASI not being an IAF member, suggesting RSPo might conduct the peer review. Following the review's completion, it will be presented to the ASC for endorsement. AG showed samples of the methods used to review ABs:

Tier 1 Method (sample checklist, based on ISO/IEC 17011):

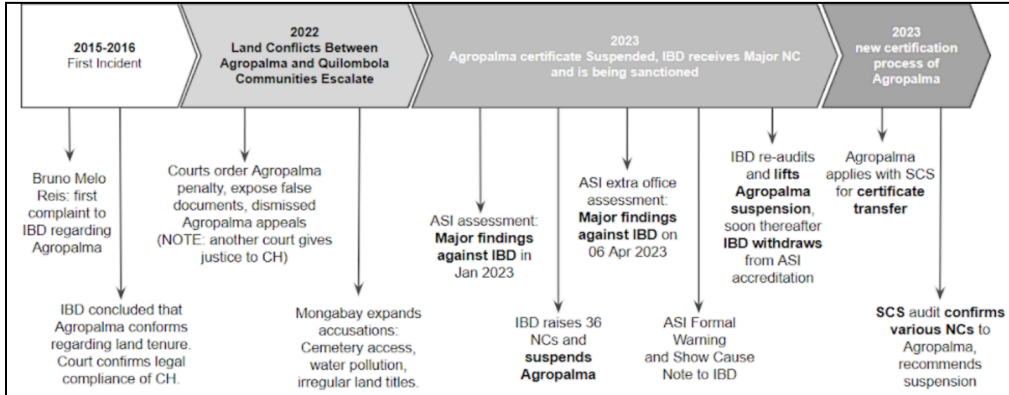
Requirement (Clauses refer to ISO/IEC 17011:2017, except where otherwise specified)	AB Documents/ Links	Notes from AB	Notes from Peer Reviewer	Compliance Status (RSPo's review)
4. ACCREDITATION BODY				
4.1 Legal entity				
4.1 The accreditation body shall be a legal entity or a defined part of a legal entity such that it is legally responsible for its accreditation activities.				Yes No
NOTE 1 Governmental accreditation bodies are deemed to be legal entities on the basis of their status within their government.				
NOTE 2 An accreditation body that is part of a larger body can operate under a different name.				
4.2 Accreditation agreement				
The accreditation body shall establish a legally enforceable arrangement with each conformity assessment body that requires the conformity assessment body to conform to at least the following:				Yes No

- First two empty columns filled in by AB, self-evaluation. Then passed to the peer reviewer, to fill in the third empty column. Finally reviewed by RSPo for compliance status of each status.

Tier 2 Method (sample checklist, Based on RSPo Certification Systems):

Requirement (Clauses refer to the respective documents except where otherwise specified)	AB Documents / Links	Notes from AB	Notes from RSPo Reviewer	Compliance Status (RSPo's review)
RSPo CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS FOR PRINCIPLES & CRITERIA AND RSPo INDEPENDENT SMALLHOLDER STANDARD 2020				
3.1 Accreditation overview				
3.1.3 The RSPo and the AB shall publish a list of accredited CBS on their respective websites.				Yes No
3.2 Requirements for the Accreditation Body				
3.2.1 The AB shall demonstrate that it complies with the requirements of the latest version of the ISO/IEC 17011 Conformity Assessment - Requirements for Accreditation Bodies Accrediting Conformity Assessment Bodies. The AB shall demonstrate this either by being a signatory to the appropriate International Accreditation Forum (IAF)				Yes No

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar system to Tier 1, the AB self-evaluates, but this time RSPO reviews the self-evaluation without a peer review <p>Tier 3 Method (sample survey):</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> <p>Accreditation Process</p> <p>6. How satisfied are you with ASI's accreditation process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 5: Very Satisfied ○ 4: Satisfied ○ 3: Neutral ○ 2: Dissatisfied ○ 1: Very Dissatisfied <p>7. How would you rate the clarity and transparency of ASI's accreditation requirements?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 5: Excellent ○ 4: Good ○ 3: Fair ○ 2: Poor </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A potential survey to be shared via email to CBs and growers to prompt a response to share about the accreditation process, communication and timeliness. <p>AG said that the review process may take place once a year. For example, if the first round is conducted in the middle of 2024 i.e. June, then the duration of each step would then be as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AB's self evaluation (Tier 1 and Tier 2) a client's feedback submission (Tier 3): 3 weeks. • Peer review and RSPO's review (Tier 2 and Tier 3): 3 weeks. • Endorsement by the ASC: 2 weeks. <p>For a likely total duration of 8 weeks for the AB review process.</p> <p>AG said that based on the review then the AB may be categorised into either high (80%-100% score), average (50%-79% score), or low (<49% score). Following actions can then be taken based on the AB's performance rating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High: continuation of service and acknowledgement by RSPO. • Average: continuation of service, address weak areas, develop improvement plans and regular monitoring by RSPO until the next round of review. • Low: conditional service continuation, addressing non-compliance points, identifying corrective actions, providing quarterly updates and monitoring by RSPO until the next round of review. Scoring low for three consecutive rounds of review may lead to the AB's termination. <p>Discussion points</p> <p>A member brought up that a prominent current issue is that there is only one accreditation body, so they asked whether we are considering appointing a second accreditation body, as they think it would help by introducing competition by which the accreditation bodies may measure up against each other. Another member followed up by asking whether there are any alternatives to ASI that can perform to achieve the current parameters, and whether another AB would help scoring by much, as it would only introduce one comparator. AG said that the Secretariat has started looking for other national accreditation bodies who have the capacity and interest in joining the RSPO accreditation scheme. However, most national ABs are heavily focused on ISO accreditation and other food certification schemes, instead of sustainability. AG suggested that the Secretariat can start by approaching large national ABs such as UKAS in the UK and ANAB in America. AG</p>	
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	<p>brought up that as the RSPO's accreditation is very much different from ISO accreditation, more resources are required for an AB to join.</p> <p>A member said the ASC needs to put more pressure on ASI for its performance and added assessing the AB's performance even as a sole AB is worth it. Another member commented that the ASC should note that ASI's income comes from CBs' commissions. Therefore, it would not be too much to expect ASI to do what is expected of them, as ASI is such a key pillar of RSPO's certification operations.</p>	
<p>4.0</p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.2</p>	<p>For Updates</p> <p>Update from Agropalma's Surveillance Audit (Nov 2023)</p> <p>AG gave an update about Agropalma's surveillance audit in Nov 2023. Following IBD's withdrawal, SCS Global took over and found recurring Major NC on indicators 2.1.1, 4.4.1, and 4.8.2 during ASA 21. Suspension of Agropalma's certificate was effective as of 29 Nov 2023 and will last for 6 months. This was based on clause 5.9.4.a of the RSPO Certification Systems Document 2020: "Recurring major NC on the same indicator (including the supply chain indicators) in successive audits shall lead to immediate suspension of the certificate. This suspension shall be lifted when the NC is successfully addressed." Agropalma will work to address the non-conformities to lift the suspension. The timeline for the suspension case shows:</p>  <p>Discussion points</p> <p>A member asked whether the NCs were a continuity of the same problem related to social conflicts or a new problem. AG stated that details of the NCs are confidential as per certification rules but they are on indicators 2.1.1 (legal requirements), 4.4.1 (legal ownership), and 4.8.2 (land conflict resolution).</p> <p>From the Action Tracker</p> <p>ZT briefly showed the ongoing items on the Action Tracker and requested that the discussion be skipped for time, with questions to be forwarded to FM. The ASC agreed and proceeded to any other business.</p>	

5.0	Any Other Business	
5.1	<p>Updates from discussion with Complaints Panel (CP) Co-Chairs (16 Feb 2024)</p> <p>AN mentioned that she and PW (on behalf of KS) had met with the co-chairs of the CP to discuss the formation of the Pool of Experts (PoE). The main question was how does the RSPO put together a database of experts across a range of fields who could be contracted and deployed on a range of assignments, such as for complaints investigation or as audit observers. The key outcome was that there was an agreement that the PoE doesn't necessarily need to be owned by either the ASC or the CP per se, just that it needs to be generated, and that clear rules need to be defined on how the experts will be contracted in order to avoid potential Col. AN said that the priority is to provide the resource to the Secretariat and the CP, and that it would continue to be a database available to members i.e as a benefit of membership. What needs to defined are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the process by which the database will be developed, and how will the experts be identified? • What is the procedure for their use? <p>AN said that this then goes back to Pravin Rajandran (Head of Grievance) alongside the Assurance team to come up with how that it would be put together, as part of the 5 strategic pillars process that is underway by the Secretariat that should report to the board in the March 2024 meeting. PW said the Secretariat should own this process, keeping in mind that it is not easy to identify good independent experts especially in geographies where situations are complex and volatile sometimes. The meeting also concluded with an agreement to commission a consultant to assist the Secretariat with building the database of experts.</p>	
5.2	<p>ASC-CP Joint Meeting (1st meeting 2024)</p> <p>ZT proposed meeting times for the next ASC-CP Joint meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed date: Monday, 29 April or Tuesday, 30 April 2024 • Time: 3 pm - 5 pm, a poll for times will be sent by FM to all members. • Topic and time suggestions should be sent to FM or appended to the poll. <p>AN suggested that when FM sends the poll, she should attach the items discussed in the last meeting especially on compliance to EUDR, as one of the CP Co-Chairs was very eager about having those items available.</p>	<p>The Secretariat to send a Doodle poll to set the first ASC-CP joint meeting in 2024. The agenda will include updates on compliance to EUDR.</p>
5.3	<p>Other Matters</p> <p>ZT opened the floor to other matters. No matters were raised.</p>	
	<p>End of meeting</p> <p>AN thanked everyone, reminding all about the action tracker, to follow up with the Secretariat about the Action Tracker and closed the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 5.30 pm.</p>	