

**Assurance Standing Committee
17th Meeting (via Zoom)
Minutes of Meeting**

Zoom Link : Zoom Meeting (<https://zoom.us/j/93907358392>)
Date and time : 30 November 2023 at 4.00 pm – 6.30 pm (GMT+8)

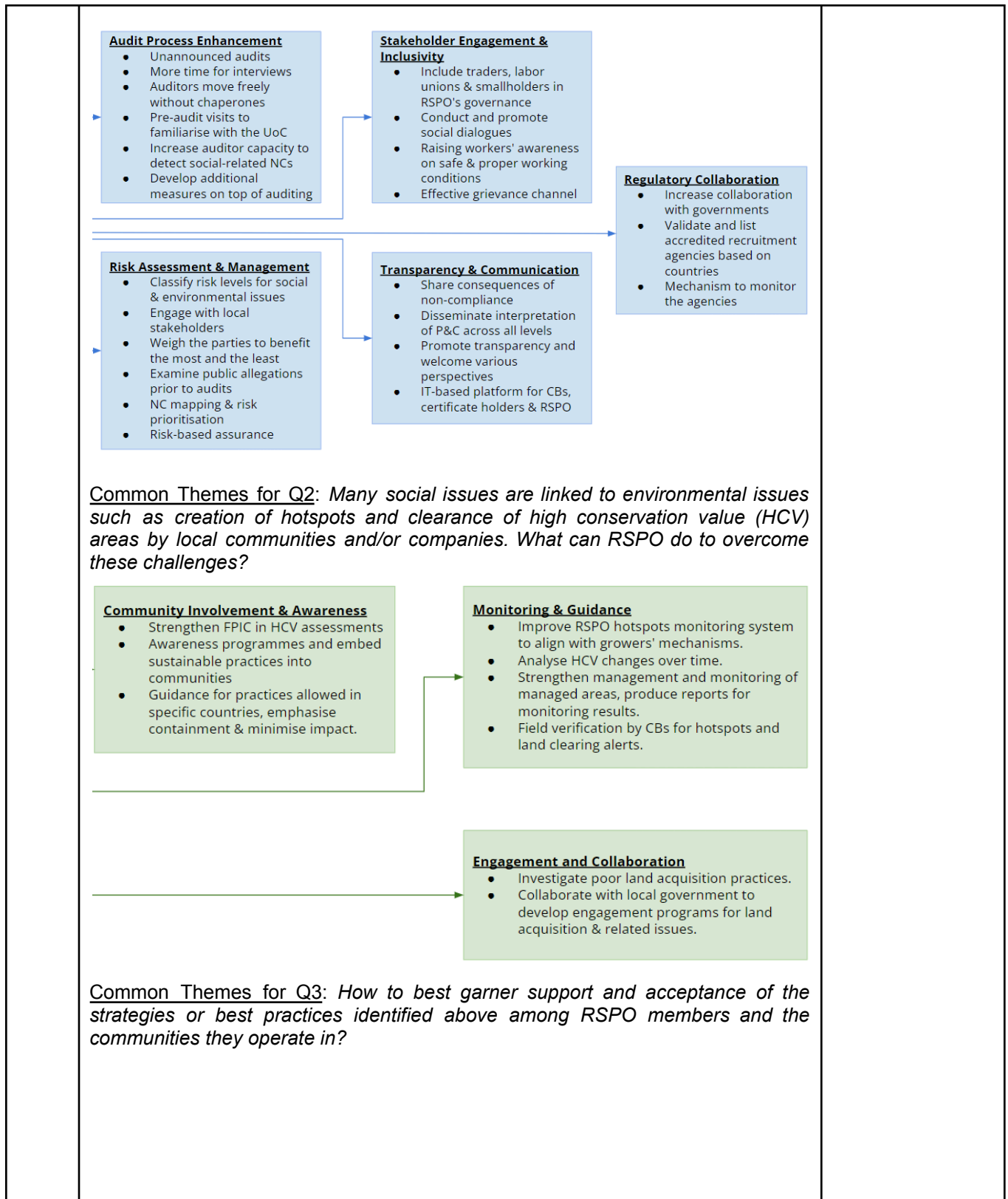
Members Attendance:

Growers		
Name	Organisation	Group Representation
Anita Neville (Co-chair) (AN)	Golden Agri-Resources (GAR)	Indonesian Growers (IGC)
William Siow (WS) <i>(absent with apology)</i>	IOI Group	Malaysian Growers (MPOA)
Florent Robert (FR)	SIAT Nigeria	Growers RoW
Lawrence Quarshie (LQ)	Golden Star Oil Palm Farmers Association (GSOPFA)	Smallholders Group
NGOs		
Name	Organisation	Group Representation
Kamal Prakash Seth (Co-Chair) (KS)	WWF International	E-NGO
Jonathan Escolar (JE)	Rainforest Alliance	E-NGO
Paul Wolvekamp (PW) <i>(absent with apology)</i>	Both ENDS	S-NGO
Marcus Colchester (MC)	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

<p>1.4</p>	<p>Replacement of Representatives in the ASC FM informed that the ASC is undergoing representation changes, with Jonathan Escolar from Rainforest Alliance replacing Paula den Hartog in the E-NGO sector, and Florent Robert from SIAT Group taking over from Mariama Diallo in Growers RoW. In the S-NGO sector, Angus MacInnes of Forest Peoples Programme is succeeding Patrick Anderson as the alternate member. No objection was received on the new appointments.</p>	
<p>2.0</p> <p>2.1</p> <p>2.2</p>	<p>For Discussion</p> <p>Updates from the BoG Meeting during RT2023 KS shared the BoG discussed the budget for Certification, Trade and Traceability System (CTTS) and updates were given on the baseline assessment study. ASC will be kept updated to ensure 'PalmTrace 2.0' will be ready for P&C 2024. Governance review was discussed with the appointed consultant, Catherine Brown. ASC was among other groups that had raised concerns about delays, decision-making and lack of resources in the Secretariat. The review will look at the whole RSPO structures & systems excluding the GA, to ensure success in the next 20 years. A report is expected by mid Dec 2023, and meetings among the Governance sub-committee have been scheduled for Jan and Feb 2024 to discuss a synopsis of interviews, discussions and document reviews, so an update can be given to the BoG in March 2024. KS shared feedback on a presentation from the RSPO leadership team on future strategies for RSPO. At the board level, the focus should be on a higher level 'why' to set the vision for RSPO in the next 5-10 years, whereas the standing committees and the Secretariat should be more focused on the operational aspects. The big vision should be more than just being the gold standard and RSPO needs to better combine its vision for people, planet and prosperity. The BoG asked for an operational strategy plan to be presented in the next 3-4 months.</p> <p>Assurance Breakout at RT2023 AG gave a summary of the breakout session that took place on 21 November 2023, exploring the theme "Solutions vs Sanctions: Meeting the Evolving Demands of Social Assurance in the Next 20" with over 150 RT2023 delegates participating. Moderated by AN, the roundtable discussion, led by panelists including AG, PW, Matthias Wilnhammer, and Renaka Ramachandran, involved 11 groups addressing three key questions related to the enhancement of social assurance, with active facilitation by ASC members and NGOs.</p> <p><u>Common Themes for Q1: What measures can RSPO implement to strengthen social assurance? For example, preventing the recurrence of cases such as human rights and labour rights violations.</u></p>	



	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><u>Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a mechanism to gather input/complaints from CBs regarding the standards implementation. • Conduct socialisation with all stakeholders through proper mapping. </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><u>Economic Incentives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of allowance when Fresh Fruit Bunch (FFB) prices are high to incentivise adherence to strategies. </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><u>Support & Collaboration</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuade certificate holders to adopt the strategies. • Encourage shared responsibility by all stakeholders. • Push for strengthening requirements for the number of audit days. </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px;"> <p><u>Recognition and Reward System</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a reward system to encourage support. </div> </div> <p>AG explained that the ASC will be divided into 3 groups in this meeting to discuss the inputs received. The groups will be facilitated by either AG, ZT or FM. The objectives are to (i) discuss common themes gathered from the Assurance Breakout, (ii) decide which suggestions can be turned into an action plan and (iii) come up with additional suggestions for each question. The groups are (1) AG, KS, LQ, JE; (2) ZT, OT, FR, MZ and (3) FM, AN, MC, KC. After the group discussion, AG invited a representative from each group to share their inputs.</p> <p>Discussion points</p> <p><u>Inputs on Q1</u></p> <p>Group 2 thought that priority should be given to (i) implementing more risk-based auditing, especially for recurring issues where the audit structure should be modified to better focus on problem areas, and (ii) providing better means for Certification Bodies (CBs) to have more qualified auditors, ensuring the right mix of auditors. The group is uncertain about the practicality and actual impact of unannounced audits. Regarding auditors moving freely without chaperones, the group shared that, for security reasons and norms, auditors actually prefer to be accompanied during audits.</p> <p>Group 1 believed that audit process enhancement should be included in the certification systems review. Regarding stakeholder engagement and inclusivity, the group believes it should fall under the Intermediary Organisation (IMO) plan, for which the Secretariat has had a lead for a long time and budgets allocated to engage local communities, NGOs, as well as trade unions. The list of recruitment agencies can be made available on the CTTS platform and also be considered in the certification systems review. The Secretariat has been tasked to check with members such as CNV, Veritas, or Ulula on the party that can verify the list. For risk assessment and management, the feedback is useful to be passed to the consultant for the upcoming de-linking study. The work plan of the ASC and the Assurance Division can include other elements that were not yet captured. Audit process enhancement and risk assessment should also be included in the upcoming review of the certification systems. On regulatory collaboration, the list of accredited recruitment agencies and its monitoring mechanism should be considered in the P&C Review.</p>	
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	<p>Group 3 looked at the existing best practices on the list that can be amplified via education and communication, and which are already in progress to avoid duplication of efforts. Risk-based assurance is key, but it is important to have a shared understanding of the topic. Existing work within ISEAL and upcoming due-diligence regulations can be a reference point. Protection of informants against reprisals should also be looked into. The group also discussed how to better address the assessment process in the run-up to audits, and there is room for discussion with downstream actors, perhaps through the shared responsibility process, about contributing to assessment and audit costs to remove the barrier for growers to enter into the RSPO process.</p> <p><u>Inputs on Q2</u></p> <p>Group 3 thought that strengthening the protection of set-aside areas is outside of the audit process but an activity for the certificate holder prior to assurance. There is an opportunity for community and indigenous peoples' awareness programs so the activity can be mapped against the assurance journey, which has also arisen in discussions with IUCN-NL. There should be a note from the ASC to the BHCVWG to speed up the agreed plan to improve monitoring of High Conservation Value (HCV) set-aside areas to make it more inclusive and welcomed by the community. The Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process in HCV assessments should also be strengthened, and there is a need for more careful social audits to check whether communities have been properly consulted and are satisfied with the actions being taken.</p> <p>Group 2 believed that more awareness and engagement are key. A jurisdictional approach (JA) can support mid-sized companies and increase engagement with the government. There are non-RSPO-sponsored groups (e.g., Serian for ISPO, Sabah for MSPO) in which RSPO members are involved. JA should be standard-blind, and the objective is to achieve better outcomes, rather than certification or legalisation of land.</p> <p>Group 1 suggested that requiring Certification Bodies (CBs) to conduct field verification for hotspots can be considered in the next certification systems review. Currently, RSPO only sends alerts to companies when hotspots are detected and requests feedback from the company, with no further action required. Engagement and collaboration have been discussed in the Jurisdictional Approach (JA) working group, but there is a capacity issue regarding how many pilots can be conducted. Additionally, land title issues can be addressed with ISPO, which can support companies towards RSPO certification. RSPO should also be more vocal about advocating for interoperability with national standards.</p> <p><u>Inputs on Q3</u></p> <p>Group 2 thought that stakeholder engagement is a priority. The Jurisdictional Approach (JA) can improve engagement, offering a better way to address issues and prevent companies or communities from feeling isolated.</p> <p>Group 3 emphasised the need to explore shared responsibility, such as contributions from downstream actors towards the assurance journey.</p> <p>Group 1 shared that when downstream actors pay a premium to growers, it compensates for the production area so they are not contributing enough to the maintenance of protected areas. Further discussion is needed on how downstream actors can recognise growers' efforts beyond the CSPO premium.</p>	<p>The Secretariat to map the outcomes from the Assurance Breakout at RT2023 and discussion within the ASC during Q4 2023 meeting into an action plan consisting of ongoing and new measures to be taken. The action plan will be presented in the Q2 2024 meeting.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>For Decision</p>	<p>The Secretariat to get online</p>

3.1

Extension of Interim Measures for Disclosure and Continuity of Certification for P&C and RISS

LJM explained that in July 2021, recertification issues were discussed in the SSC. It was decided that the BHCVWG will develop a protocol on disclosure for recertification and the ASC will provide interim measures. This led to an announcement on [7 September 2021](#). The protocol underwent several consultations with the SSC and the CTF2 under the BHCVWG. Due to repetitive elements in the Remediation and Compensation Procedure (RaCP), it was decided that the protocol would be added as Section 10 in the revised RaCP v2 which is projected to be endorsed in GA 2024. The BHCVWG endorsed the Secretariat’s proposal to extend the interim measures published in September 2021 until the publication of RaCP v2. The Secretariat now seeks the ASC’s approval for the extension of the interim measures.

Discussion points

Members had no objections but due to lack of quorum, the ASC requested for the decision to be made via an online approval process.

approval for the Extension of Interim Measures for Disclosure and Continuity of Certification for P&C and RISS within a week. (Update: Action completed. Online approval process began on 6 Dec and the decision was finalised on 26 Dec. The announcement was published on [29 Dec 2023](#))

3.2

Potential Consultants for Initial Study on De-Linking Business Relations Between RSPO-Accredited Certification Bodies and Auditees

FM shared a comparison table for the three proposals received and asked if the decision should be made online too due to lack of quorum.

Company	Hijau Daun	Alauda	NewForesight
Consultants	Jules Crawshaw, Dillon Sarim, Rahayu Zulkifli	Steve Jennings, Matthias Diemer, Owen Davies	Laure Heilbron, Joost Backer, Willem Jansick
Mechanism	<p>Discovery Phase: Understand perception of independence, pricing pressure within the company, skill/knowledge level of auditors, competitive environment of RSPO audits & potential impacts of de-linking.</p> <p>Exploration Phase: Investigate processes with the same nature of successful delinking e.g. HCV assessment process within HCVRN, compensation plan for RaCP process, review of standards in other industries.</p> <p>Consultation Phase: Recommend several de-linking options.</p> <p>Integration Phase: Propose integration of the mechanism into RSPO audit process.</p>	<p>Phase 1: Inception to clarify RSPO’s expectations and technical preparation to identify stakeholders, structure and of interviews and identify key documentary resources.</p> <p>Phase 2: 2.1 Literature review on (a) current RSPO assurance procedures; (b) Internal and external reports assessing the specific issues of concern to the RSPO; (c) Examples of alternative models for CB – auditee relationships by other schemes, 2.2 Key informant interviews with relevant RSPO staff, CBs and ASI, RSPO-certified companies, NGOs within and outside RSPO & other certification schemes of interest.</p> <p>Phase 3: Reporting and deliverables incl financial scheme and pilot process recommendations.</p>	<p>Phase 1: Scope & hypothesize to produce (a) inception document with questions tree, evaluation criteria, scope & timeline and (b) consultation pre-read with hypothesized commercial models</p> <p>Phase 2: (a) Interviews with key stakeholders i.e. CBs (preferably: management), ASI, auditees, and certification requesters (e.g. downstream processors, oleochemical manufacturers and other RSPO members that would benefit (or suffer) from an alternative commercial model, and (b) Finetune hypotheses incl testing results with ISEAL Assurance team, recommend the most fit-for-purpose model and the conditions where it can be effective.</p> <p>Phase 3: Finetune proposed commercial model to ASC & recommend next steps for a potential pilot.</p>
Timeline	March to August 2024 (56 consultation days)	Jan to August 2024 (23.5 consultation days)	Mid Dec 2023 - March 2024 (24 consultation days)
Pricing	USD 28,000 excl VAT (MYR 132,000+)	£ 22,560 incl VAT (MYR 131,000+)	EUR 25,600 incl VAT (MYR 130,000+)

Discussion points

OT restated his Col and asked to be excluded from the decision-making. A member commented that the 3 proposals are not focused enough on consulting more certification bodies (CBs) on the financial models that would work and what the limitations are. The member cautioned that failure to do so may result in the study yielding similar results to the previous study. FM reminded the Co-Chairs that based on the discussion with IUCN-NL held during RT2023, the study should be concluded before the new certification system is endorsed, which is some time in June 2024. Therefore, if Hijau Daun or Alauda is chosen, their timeline will need to be reworked. A member commented that the ASC should be given a template to objectively evaluate the proposals. Another member said the Secretariat should make its own evaluation and pass it to the ASC for feedback & guidance, instead of the ASC to make the evaluation. FM said the Secretariat has not used an evaluation matrix before. The ASC requested the Secretariat to check internally for an evaluation matrix that is used in its tendering process and conduct an internal

The Secretariat to conduct an internal evaluation (using an evaluation matrix) and make recommendation for the 3 de-linking proposals before getting online endorsement from the ASC within a week. (Update: Action completed. Online approval process began on 6 Dec and the decision was finalised on 26 Dec. NewForesight was chosen as the consultant to conduct this study)

	evaluation for the 3 proposals before emailing the ASC to endorse the Secretariat's recommendation.	
4.0	For Updates	
4.1	<p>From the Action Tracker</p> <p>FM asked if the members have any comments on the action items. FM took note of earlier comments and said that moving forward, the Secretariat will inform the ASC in advance about any action items that cannot be delivered in a particular meeting. FM highlighted the action point on the independent review of the Labour Auditing Guidance whereby the deadline for proposal submission will end on 15 Dec 2023 and the Secretariat has only one potential interest from Proforest with whom a discussion was held during RT2023 and hoped to get more than one proposal for this. A member asked the ASC to promote this within their networks to get more competitive bids. FM asked if the ASC would agree to extending the deadline by another one or two weeks to which some members commented that the last two weeks of December would not make any difference since most people will be on leave. A member pointed out that some of the next steps involving the P&C Review need to be revised e.g. item 115 mentioning certification systems revision to commence upon the endorsement of the P&C 2023, but it has been agreed that the two processes will run in parallel.</p>	
5.0	Any Other Business	
5.1	<p>Framework for Review of ASI's Performance</p> <p>AG shared the following points for preliminary discussion:</p> <p>Timeline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary discussion: ASC Q4 2023 (30 Nov 2023) • Online consultation with the ASC: Dec 2023 to Jan 2024 • Full discussion on ASI's performance review framework: ASC Q1 2024 (Feb or March 2024) <p>Review criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KPI-based performance (yearly, for RSPO accreditation) • Organisation & management • Competent resources • Impartiality management • Dispute management • Internal audit • Scope & seriousness of complaints (received & addressed by the Secretariat) • Engagement with stakeholders <p>Review mechanism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KPI for each criteria • Rating system: 5-levels Outstanding to Weak? • Who to conduct the review? Secretariat and/or ASC? • Who will endorse the review results? • Who will have access to the results - make publicly available? • Frequency of review (every 5 years i.e. contract renewal) and deadline for delivery? <p>Discussion points</p>	<p>The Secretariat to present the draft framework for review of accreditation body's performance in the next meeting.</p>

<p>5.2</p>	<p>A member said some of the points are operational and should be discussed within the Secretariat. The Secretariat should conduct the review and the ASC to provide feedback on that review. A member asked the Secretariat to consult ISEAL on the review criteria. Another member suggested reaching out to FSC who also uses ASI as its accreditation body. Another member said the Secretariat should also consider any budgetary requirement for this performance review and that the ASC should have oversight of the Assurance Division’s budget for its activities.</p> <p>Tentative Dates for ASC 2024 Meetings</p> <p>FM shared the following dates for upcoming ASC meetings which have been scheduled two weeks prior to BoG meetings. FM will share calendar invites.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Q1 ASC Meeting: 20 Feb 2024 - Conference Call (Actual: 21 Feb 2024) ● ASC/CP Joint Meeting First Half 2024: 26 March 2024 - Conference Call (Actual: TBC subject to confirmation from Grievance Unit) ● Q2 ASC Meeting: 21 May 2024 - Conference Call (Actual: 29 May 2024) ● 9th Assurance Forum First Half 2024: 11 June 2024 - Virtual Forum ● Q3 ASC Meeting: 20 Aug 2024 - Conference Call (Actual: 21 Aug 2024) ● ASC/CP Joint Meeting Second Half 2024: 24 September 2024 - Conference Call (Actual: TBC subject to confirmation from Grievance Unit) ● 10th Assurance Forum/Breakout Second Half 2024: 19 Nov 2024 (during RT2024) - Physical Forum ● Q4 ASC Meeting: 22 Nov 2024 (after RT2024) - Conference Call/Hybrid 	<p>The Secretariat to send calendar invites for upcoming meetings in 2024. (Update: Action completed. Actual highlighted dates are after several adjustments to avoid clashing with SSC and BoG meetings)</p>
	<p>End of meeting</p> <p>AN thanked everyone and closed the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 6.30 pm.</p>	