ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems

Version 1.1
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iseal

Contents

Introduction

Sustainability systems or schemes use verification of sustainability standards and performance measures to communicate progress or sustainability status. They can be effective market-based tools for catalysing improvements on critical sustainability issues. The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems ('the ISEAL Code') lays the foundation for sustainability systems to strengthen that effectiveness. It provides a holistic picture of all the components of a credible sustainability system and how they fit together.

The ISEAL Code sets requirements for good practice by the scheme owner who is responsible for the sustainability system or scheme. The ISEAL Code is structured around eight related functions (see infographic on page 4), each presented in a separate section. The dependencies and interactions between these components highlight the holistic nature of the Code and are indicated in the Code by cross-referencing between clauses.

Section 1 on strategy grounds a scheme in defined sustainability outcomes and strategies that are likely to be most effective for the context in which the scheme is applied.

Section 2 on governance ensures that the scheme has good governance practices in place, including appropriate policies, personnel competencies, and risk management.

Section 3 on stakeholder engagement recognises that stakeholders have critical roles to play in implementation of a scheme, and supports scheme owners to define when and how stakeholders can engage.

Section 4 on data and information management provides a framework for scheme owners to manage their data holistically across the scheme to derive more and better insights.

Section 5 on monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) ensures that the scheme owner understands how well their scheme is working and how well they are delivering on their sustainability outcomes and impacts.

Section 6 lays out good practices for setting and revising sustainability standards or performance requirements.

Section 7 includes the components necessary for the effective functioning of an assurance system, including defining the assurance models appropriate for the scheme and ensuring effective oversight of how the assurance system is being implemented.

Section 8 introduces requirements around claims management and traceability (where applicable) to ensure that claims and communications made about the scheme and its results are clear, accurate and reliable.

CORE COMPONENTS AND SUPPORTING STRATEGIES OF A SUSTAINABILITY SYSTEM

KEY

Core components

Supporting strategies

Direction of flow
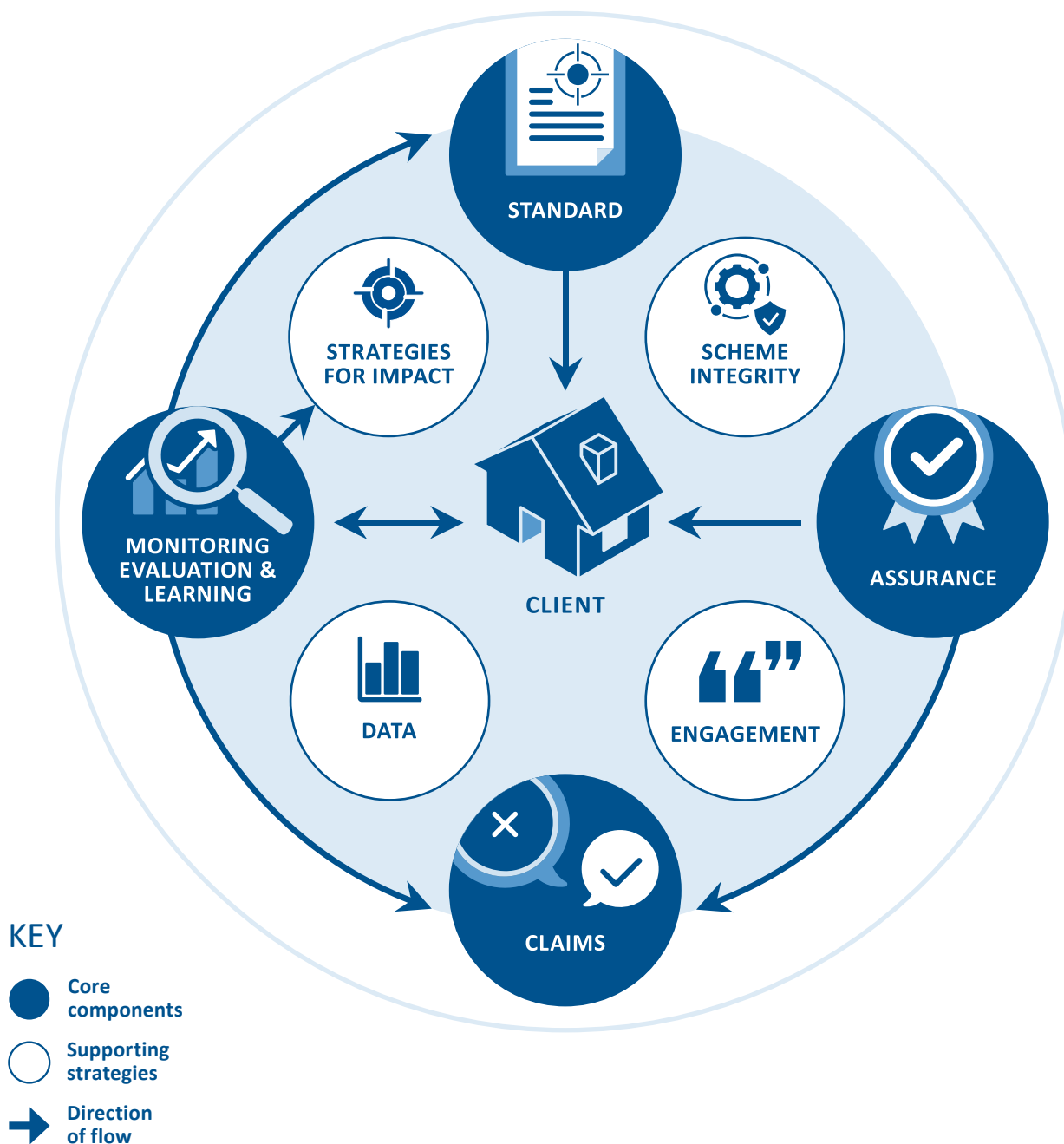
The blue icons represent the core components of a sustainability system - standards development and maintenance, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), assurance, and claims - as described in sections 5 – 8 of the ISEAL Code. The white icons represent supporting strategies - data, stakeholder engagement, scheme integrity, governance and operations, and strategies for impact – as described in sections 1 – 4 of the ISEAL Code.

The interactions and coordination between these core components and supporting strategies enables sustainability systems to achieve their defined sustainability outcomes and/or back up their controlled claims and communications.

Scope

The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems ('the ISEAL Code') applies to the owner of any sustainability system or scheme ('the scheme owner') that:

- Establishes sustainability-focused standards, performance levels, or performance pathways;

- Enables measurement, monitoring or verification of performance and progress against these requirements; and

- Allows for claims or communications about the results.

A scheme owner can operate multiple sustainability systems or schemes, each one differentiated by a distinct standard or set of performance measures. The ISEAL Code applies to all schemes managed by the scheme owner and to the full geographic and sectoral scope of these schemes.

The ISEAL Code supports scheme owners to develop and manage sustainability systems or schemes that deliver meaningful sustainability impacts and credible claims. The requirements in the ISEAL Code apply to all scheme components and strategies that contribute to or result in the scheme's defined sustainability outcomes or that back up the scheme's controlled claims and communications about the results. This includes the core components of a sustainability system: standard-setting; monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL); assurance; and claims. It can also include complementary strategies such as capacity building or company partnerships that are needed to deliver on the scheme's intended sustainability outcomes and impacts.

It is the responsibility of the scheme owner to define the full range of strategies that fall within this scope, in addition to the core components. The scheme owner or its parent organisation may deliver other strategies that are not intended to deliver on the sustainability outcomes defined in a scheme. These strategies are not considered part of a sustainability system or scheme and are not included in the scope of this Code.

Disclaimer

ISEAL Alliance does not assume any responsibility towards any person or organisation choosing to rely on any aspect of the ISEAL Code or ISEAL's evaluation of ISEAL Community Members' schemes, except if and to the extent expressly agreed in writing by ISEAL.

Background

The ISEAL Code v1.0 revised and integrated the ISEAL Impacts, Standard-Setting, and Assurance Codes of Good Practice, along with essential practices from the ISEAL Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide. The ISEAL Code v1.0 was published in December 2023 following two rounds of stakeholder consultation in 2022 and 2023, and approval from the ISEAL Board in November 2023.

The ISEAL Code v1.0 came into effect on 1 March 2024, with an 18-month transition period for ISEAL Code Compliant organisations to meet the requirements. The ISEAL Code v1.1 is effective as of 1 September 2025. The ISEAL Code is reviewed every four years. The next review will be no later than March 2028.

Credibility Principles

The Credibility Principles (see next page) define the core values of credible and effective sustainability systems. They were used as a reference point in the development of the ISEAL Code. They provide the foundations for sustainability systems to deliver greater impact and can be used as a high level reference when implementing the ISEAL Code.

Credibility Principles

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACTS
A credible sustainability system makes a difference where it matters.

A credible sustainability system has a clear purpose to drive positive social, environmental, and economic impacts and to eliminate or remediate negative impacts. It defines and clearly communicates its scope, its specific sustainability objectives, and its strategies for achieving these objectives (its theory of change). The system focuses on the significant sustainability impacts in its scope. It seeks to address the root causes of sustainability issues and deliver wider or systemic impacts. It reflects current scientific evidence and international norms when relevant. It is adapted to local or sector-specific conditions where this helps improve impact.

COLLABORATION
A credible sustainability system works with others to create change.

A credible sustainability system identifies governments, businesses, and civil society organisations, including other sustainability systems, that are working towards shared sustainability objectives. It actively seeks alignment and respectfully pursues collaboration with others. It establishes partnerships and shares learnings to improve its efficiency and its direct or systemic impacts.

VALUE CREATION
A credible sustainability system adds value.

A credible sustainability system strives to create value that fairly rewards the effort and resources that it takes for users to participate in the system. It has a viable business model, and it operates efficiently, minimising costs for users and reaching more users by reducing other barriers to access. It supports users to implement its tools, and it empowers users by demonstrating a clear business case for participating in its system.

MEASURABLE PROGRESS
A credible sustainability system can demonstrate the difference it is making.

A credible sustainability system has tools that are relevant to achieving its sustainability objectives, and these tools allow progress towards objectives to be measured over time. It collects and analyses the data it needs to measure, understand, and demonstrate the progress its users are making towards these objectives.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
A credible sustainability system listens and learns.

A credible sustainability system is inclusive and non-discriminatory. It empowers stakeholders to participate in decisions and hold the system to account. It involves a balanced and diverse group of stakeholders in decisions that will affect them. It strives to understand the context and perspectives of stakeholders who have been under-engaged or under-represented, and it creates opportunities to ensure their participation in decision-making. It provides clear and transparent feedback on stakeholder input and concerns. It has fair, impartial and accessible mechanisms for resolving complaints and conflicts.

TRANSPARENCY
A credible sustainability system earns trust by being open and honest.

A credible sustainability system makes important information publicly available and easily accessible, while protecting confidential and private information. It enables stakeholders to understand and evaluate the system's processes, decision-making, results, and impacts. Stakeholders have the information they need to actively participate in decisions or raise concerns.

IMPARTIALITY
A credible sustainability system is impartial.

A credible sustainability system identifies and avoids or mitigates conflicts of interest throughout its governance and operations, particularly when it comes to assessing its users' performance. Transparency and stakeholder engagement help ensure the system's integrity can be trusted.

RELIABILITY
A credible sustainability system provides trustworthy assessments of users' performance.

A credible sustainability system designs its tools so that these can be consistently implemented and assessed. It ensures assessments of users' sustainability performance are competent and accurate, and that these assessments support any claims it allows users to make.

TRUTHFULNESS
A credible sustainability system's claims and communications can be trusted.

A credible sustainability system substantiates its claims. Any claims the system or its users make are clear, relevant, and can be checked. They enable customers and other stakeholders to make informed choices. The scope and design of the system is accurately reflected in any claims, ensuring these are not misleading. Claims about sustainability impacts are backed up with data and evidence that is publicly available.

CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT
A credible sustainability system keeps improving.

A credible sustainability system regularly reviews its objectives, its strategies, and the performance of its tools and system. It evaluates the impacts and outcomes of its activities. It applies the lessons learned to improve. It responds to new evidence, stakeholder input, and external changes, adapting its strategies to improve its impacts and remain fit for purpose.

Requirements

1. Strategy for enabling impact

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
1.1 **Intended sustainability impacts and strategies**	The scheme owner is clear on what it intends to achieve and how.	The scheme owner defines and documents: 1. the desired short, medium, and long-term sustainability outcomes and impacts it aims to achieve 2. the scheme components and strategies it will use to achieve those outcomes and impacts, or to back-up the claims it makes or allows clients of the scheme to make 3. the causal pathways through which its scheme components and related activities and strategies are expected to contribute to intended outcomes and impacts In documenting the causal pathways, the scheme owner identifies major assumptions inherent in these pathways.	A theory of change is recommended for meeting the requirements of this clause, though other approaches can also be effective. Scheme owners are encouraged to define outcomes, impacts, strategies, and causal pathways from an organisational perspective, including activities beyond the scope of the ISEAL Code, if relevant. The definition of scheme components and strategies is the scheme owner's declaration of the full range of its operations, including the core scheme components and supporting strategies, that contribute to its intended sustainability outcomes and impacts and that, therefore, fall within the scope of the ISEAL Code (See Scope).	Sustainability impacts Continual improvement
1.2 **Background assessment**	The scheme owner makes informed decisions about how to focus its work to maximise its potential sustainability impacts.	To inform its decisions on sustainability outcomes, impacts, and strategies, the scheme owner assesses: 1. the most important sustainability issues within its geographic and sectoral scope 2. emerging sustainability risks and opportunities 3. the possible unintended negative effects of its scheme 4. where it is and is not well-placed to exert influence In assessing the possible unintended negative effects of its scheme, the scheme owner seeks input from stakeholders who have an interest in or could be affected by the scheme, and documents the results of this consultation.	This assessment can draw on the scheme owner's learning and insights from MEL activities; from risk management activities; and from stakeholder input and feedback, including from subject matter experts. It is recommended that the scheme owner includes an assessment of gender-related trends and risks within its background assessment to support the development of strategies with the potential to deliver positive gender outcomes. When assessing where and how the scheme is well placed to exert influence, it is recommended to consider complementarity with schemes with overlapping scopes.	Sustainability impacts Continual improvement Value creation

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
1.3 **Review of intended impacts and strategies**	The scheme's intended impacts, strategies, and logic remain relevant over time.	At least once every 5 years, the scheme owner: 1. updates its background assessment (1.2) 2. reviews and, where necessary, revises its intended outcomes, impacts, strategies, activities, and causal pathways (1.1) to ensure they remain relevant and valid	It is recommended that the timing aligns with any major review that the scheme owner undertakes of its organisational or scheme strategies or its standards.	Continual improvement Sustainability impacts
1.4 **Intended role in corporate due diligence**	The scheme owner has defined the role it intends the scheme to play in corporate due diligence.	The scheme owner decides how its scheme is intended to support corporate sustainability due diligence and publicly documents the specific supporting roles it intends to play.	By publicly documenting how the scheme can be used by companies to support their due diligence responsibilities, the scheme owner is providing clarity on the extent and limitations of its role. The scheme can choose to play no role in due diligence but should still define and document this decision. The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights set out internationally agreed standards on responsible business conduct and the key principles, steps and practical actions for companies.	Sustainability impacts Transparency Value creation
1.5 **Awareness of scheme intended impacts and strategies**	Staff and leadership of the scheme are aware of the scheme's intended impacts and strategies.	The scheme owner ensures that its Board, standards committee or equivalent, executive leadership, and the staff members responsible for each of the scheme components and related strategies have received an orientation to the scheme's desired outcomes and impacts, the articulation of its causal pathways, and the background assessment informing these intended results (1.1 and 1.2). The scheme owner ensures that all staff members have easy access to these materials.		Sustainability impacts Continual improvement

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
1.6 **Public information about scheme impacts and strategies**	Stakeholders have access to information about the scheme's intended impacts and strategies.	The scheme owner makes information about its purpose and strategies publicly available and easily accessible, including at least its desired sustainability outcomes and impacts and how its scheme is expected to achieve those outcomes and impacts. (1.1)	The scheme owner is encouraged to also provide public information on its broader organisational strategy for achieving sustainability outcomes, including activities beyond the scope of the ISEAL Code, if relevant.	Transparency Sustainability impacts

2. Scheme integrity, governance, and operations

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
2.1 **Governance structure**	The scheme owner has a documented governance structure.	The scheme owner maintains the following records to support scheme governance and operations: 1. registration as a legal entity of the organisation responsible for the scheme 2. overview of the scheme's corporate and governance structure 3. terms of reference for all decision-making bodies (including selection criteria for members of the decision-making bodies) 4. list of members of each decision-making body		Stakeholder engagement Impartiality
2.2 **Good governance**	The scheme owner has good governance practices in place.	The scheme owner has the following policies in place that apply to its governing and decision-making bodies, staff, and consultants: 1. impartiality policy (which should address conflicts of interest) 2. diversity, equity, and inclusion policy 3. safeguarding policy 4. whistleblower protection policy 5. complaints policy	A complaints policy is intended to govern complaints raised by staff, consultants, and those serving on its governing and decision-making bodies. The handling of complaints raised by clients and implementing partners such as assurance providers is governed by the dispute resolution system (3.5).	Impartiality Stakeholder engagement
2.3 **Responsibility for scheme components and strategies**	There are clear lines of responsibility for implementing and maintaining policies and procedures.	The scheme owner delineates roles and responsibilities for developing, implementing, and revising its policies and procedures for each scheme component and related strategies.	Policies and procedures also include any guiding frameworks the scheme has developed to direct work in these areas.	Continual improvement

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
2.4 **Personnel competency**	Staff and external partners are competent to carry out their responsibilities.	The scheme owner has processes to: 1. regularly define the qualifications and competency requirements f or its staff who deliver scheme components and related strategies, and for personnel of implementing partners, e.g., assessors; for personnel of assurance providers and oversight bodies, these qualifications include in-depth knowledge of the scheme's standard(s) and assurance requirements 2. regularly evaluate staff against these competency requirements and require this also of implementing partners; for implementing partners, this includes witnessing of assessment personnel carrying out assessments 3. ensure provision of training and ongoing professional development where necessary		Continual improvement Reliability
2.5 **Risk management**	The scheme owner proactively manages threats to the integrity of its scheme.	The scheme owner has a risk management plan that: 1. identifies threats to the impartiality and integrity of each component of its scheme and related strategies 2. quantifies risk associated with those threats, based, where feasible, on data analysis 3. outlines preventive or mitigating measures appropriate to the scale and severity of each of the most significant threats identified 4. includes a review and revision schedule that is responsive to new threats arising or changes to risk ratings	The quantification of a r isk involves assessing the likelihood of a threat occurring and the severity of the impact if it does, in order to derive a risk rating. Risk quantification can be informed by findings from assurance and MEL activities as well as other data sources. The scheme owner can choose to outsource its risk management for assurance to oversight bodies, in line with this clause, but retains responsibility for the integrity of the scheme as a whole.	Continual improvement Reliability Impartiality

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
2.6 **Risk assessments of business partners**	The scheme owner manages the risks of associating with its business partners.	The scheme owner has systems in place to assess and manage the risks of associating with its existing and proposed business partners, and incorporates these in its risk management plan.	Business partners include implementing partners (e.g., assurance providers, oversight bodies) and corporate partners (e.g., certified clients, members, licensees, parent companies of certified sites, etc.). The scheme owner needs to assess the level and type of risks it could be exposed to through interaction and association with a business partner, e.g., links to fraudulent or illegal activity or business practices contrary to the scheme's intended sustainability impacts. As measures to mitigate identified risks of association, a scheme can choose to use tools such as a policy of association or a code of conduct requiring business partners to commit to corporate due diligence as laid out in frameworks such as the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.	Impartiality Reliability
2.7 **Contracts for delegated activities**	The scheme owner has sufficient control measures in place to ensure the integrity of delegated activities.	The scheme owner establishes legally enforceable contracts with implementing partners that include control measures for all delegated functions, as well as clear expectations for good data management, confidentiality and sharing of data with the scheme owner. The scheme owner also requires its implementing partners to have legally enforceable contracts with their respective clients, including steps to address any arising fraudulent behaviour.		Reliability Transparency Measurable progress

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
2.8 **Scheme review and revision**	Scheme components are reviewed and revised regularly.	The scheme owner defines and follows a schedule to review each component of its scheme at least every five years and, where necessary, to revise that scheme component.	Reviews can draw on implementation experience, the data management system, learnings from risk management, stakeholder feedback, and findings generated through MEL activities.	Continual improvement
2.9 **Transition periods**	Clients and implementing partners have adequate time and notice to comply with new requirements.	The scheme owner ensures that for changes to the scheme that will affect stakeholders (e.g., changes to the standard or scheme requirements), procedures set out when changes will come into effect, allowing adequate time for stakeholders to comply, and how the changes will be communicated to those affected.		Transparency Continual improvement
2.10 **Public information about scheme governance and operations**	Stakeholders have access to information about scheme governance and operations.	The scheme owner makes the following information about the scheme's governance and operations publicly available and easily accessible: 1. legal ownership of the scheme (2.1) 2. the scheme's scope of operations (sector, geography, segment of the supply chain, life cycle stage, etc.) 3. composition of the scheme's primary governance bodies 4. summary of income sources for the scheme	Primary governance bodies include governance boards and subcommittees, key technical bodies, and multistakeholder decision-making bodies like standards committees.	Transparency Impartiality

3. Stakeholder engagement

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
3.1 **Stakeholder identification**	The scheme owner understands who its stakeholders are.	The scheme owner defines categories of stakeholders who may have an interest in or could be affected by the scheme. The scheme owner retains contact information for stakeholders who have engaged with the scheme and provides an accessible mechanism for new stakeholders to identify themselves and their interests. The scheme owner uses these records as a resource for public consultation or engagement processes.	Stakeholders who may have an interest in the scheme include those who may be directly or indirectly affected by activities within the sector or geography where the scheme intends to have an impact.	Stakeholder engagement Transparency
3.2 **Contact points for stakeholders**	Stakeholders know how to provide feedback to the scheme owner.	The scheme owner identifies contact points for each scheme component and related strategies and makes this information publicly available and easily accessible.	This can be a central contact point that directs any enquiry or input to the appropriate part of the scheme.	Stakeholder engagement Transparency
3.3 **Opportunities for stakeholder input**	Stakeholders have opportunities to provide input on all scheme components.	At a minimum, the scheme owner provides stakeholders the opportunity to easily provide input on the: 1. scheme's intended impacts and strategies (1.1) 2. scheme's possible unintended effects (1.2) 3. guiding framework for MEL activities (5.1) 4. development and revision of standards (6.5 and 6.13) 5. assessments of clients' conformity or performance (7.2.6) 6. clarity, relevance, and accuracy of claims the scheme makes and allows clients to make (8.8.6) The scheme owner informs stakeholders about these opportunities and how their input will be taken into account. When desired by the stakeholder, the scheme owner ensures they can provide information securely and confidentially.		Stakeholder engagement Transparency Continual improvement

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
3.4 **Under-represented stakeholders**	The scheme owner supports the contributions of under-represented stakeholders.	The scheme owner seeks to address barriers to participation and engagement faced by under-engaged and under-represented stakeholder groups. The scheme owner proactively seeks their contributions to the opportunities identified in 3.3.	Guidance: For all stakeholder categories, it is recommended that the scheme owner considers how best to seek input from women, especially in contexts where social, cultural, or institutional structures may limit women's ability to fully participate in consultations or similar exercises.	Stakeholder engagement Transparency
3.5 **Dispute resolution system**	The scheme owner has impartial and accessible mechanisms in place for resolving complaints and grievances.	The scheme owner has a documented dispute resolution system that is open and accessible to all stakeholders and that facilitates and supports the impartial handling and remediation of complaints and grievances about clients, members, implementing partners, and the scheme itself. The procedure governing the dispute resolution system includes timelines by which complaints and grievances are to be assessed. At a minimum, the system accepts complaints and grievances related to standards development and maintenance, assurance processes and decisions, codes of conduct or policies of association for clients or members, and claims processes and controlled claims The scheme owner ensures that the confidentiality of a complainant is protected when requested by the complainant or when it is otherwise prudent. The scheme owner retains overall responsibility for management of the dispute resolution system and ensures that implementing partners have their own dispute resolution systems that feed into the overall approach, so that complaints and grievances are submitted and managed at the appropriate level.	The conditions under which it would be prudent to protect the confidentiality of complainants or aggrieved parties even when not specifically requested to do so could be defined by the dispute resolution system or by other organisational policies, e.g., safeguarding policy. When considering human rights violations in particular, the scheme is encouraged in design and review of the dispute resolution system to consider the eight effectiveness principles set out in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), guidance from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Accountability and Remedy Project.	Stakeholder engagement Impartiality Transparency

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
3.6 **Implementing the dispute resolution system**	The dispute resolution system is robust and transparent.	The scheme owner or, where relevant, implementing partners are required by the dispute resolution system to: 1. investigate and take appropriate action regarding relevant complaints and grievances within defined timelines 2. elevate any complaints or grievances that cannot be resolved, e.g., from assurance provider to oversight body to scheme owner 3. take or assign any necessary corrective actions 4. disclose decisions at least to the complainants or aggrieved parties 5. keep a record for at least five years of all complaints and grievances, and resulting actions, to be made available for internal audits and other internal review processes 6. on a regular basis, publicly report a summary of all concluded complaints and grievances, and resulting actions, ensuring confidentiality of complainants or aggrieved parties, where requested or prudent	It is recommended that summaries of the number and type of complaints and grievances are used to inform risk management and MEL activities.	Stakeholder engagement Impartiality Transparency
3.7 **Role in remediation**	The scheme owner has defined the role(s) it intends to play in addressing remediation.	The scheme owner determines what role it intends to play, if any, in the remediation of adverse impacts on human rights or environmental issues identified through implementation of its scheme, e.g., through auditing or monitoring.	An effective dispute resolution system in which grievances can be raised (3.5) is the minimum role a scheme must play in remediation. This clause requires scheme owners to consider the additional roles it could play in remediation, such as acting as a remedy enabler (e.g., mechanisms to refer certain types of grievances to judicial authorities) or a remedy provider (e.g., working with state and regulatory agencies to provide remedy). ISEAL's learning report on remedying human rights abuses in supply chains is a useful resource for how schemes can play a role in remediation.	Sustainability impacts Value creation

4. Data and information management

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
4.1 **Data and information management system**	The scheme owner manages its data and information so that it can be used effectively.	The scheme owner has a data and information management system that facilitates analysis and use of data for, at minimum: 1. monitoring and evaluating client performance (5.2.2), scheme sustainability performance (5.2.4) and variations in scheme effectiveness, outcomes, and reach (5.2.6) 2. managing risks to the scheme's integrity (2.5) 3. stakeholder engagement (3.1 and 6.5) 4. assurance (section 7) 5. claims management (8.5)	Data and information does not need to be managed through one integrated system across all scheme components, though integration of data systems and alignment of data taxonomies is highly recommended. Documentation for the data and information management system includes how internal and external data are gathered, organised, and securely stored.	Reliability Measurable Progress Truthfulness Stakeholder engagement Impartiality
4.2 **Data and information sources**	The scheme owner has access to sufficient data to gain insights about scheme performance.	The scheme owner gathers data and information from different sources as needed to achieve at least the purposes outlined in 4.1. The scheme owner maintains lists of data and information sources used for each scheme component.	These data and information sources include information received from stakeholders. They also include some of the data and information sources that feed the risk management plan and the MEL system.	Transparency Reliability Truthfulness Measurable Progress Stakeholder engagement
4.3 **Data quality and integrity**	The scheme owner ensures the quality and integrity of the data and information it manages.	The scheme owner has data quality control procedures that ensure consistency and integrity for the data it manages. The scheme owner has measures in place to ensure that implementing partners and service providers follow adequate data quality control procedures (including indicator protocols) to ensure data consistency and integrity for the data they manage on the scheme owner's behalf.		Transparency Reliability Truthfulness Measurable Progress Stakeholder engagement

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
4.4 **Records and document control**	The scheme owner controls the integrity of documents and records.	The scheme owner has procedures that control document integrity and guide the management, distribution and storage of scheme documents and records. Document controls include change logs to record when and what changes are made to scheme documents.		Transparency Reliability Truthfulness Measurable Progress Stakeholder engagement
4.5 **Data governance**	Governance and use rights of data are clear.	The scheme owner defines who has rights to different types of data within the scheme scope, including what data is available to whom and under what conditions. For data that is available externally, the scheme owner makes this information publicly available.		Transparency Reliability Truthfulness Measurable Progress Stakeholder engagement
4.6 **Data legality**	The scheme owner complies with legal requirements for working with data and information.	The scheme owner has measures in place to ensure compliance with applicable legal requirements for the gathering, storage, and use of data relevant to the implementation of its scheme. This includes procedures to protect and securely store confidential and proprietary data.	It is recommended that the scheme owner regularly verifies that its procedures align with applicable legislation on data privacy.	Transparency Reliability Truthfulness Measurable Progress Stakeholder engagement
4.7 **Access to data**	The scheme owner has access to the data it needs to support effective implementation of its scheme.	The scheme owner takes steps to address any barriers preventing its access to, or use of data required for implementation of its scheme, e.g., through contracts with implementing partners. This includes having the necessary permissions for access and use of relevant data.		Transparency Reliability Truthfulness Measurable Progress Stakeholder engagement

5. Scheme performance and continual improvement
(monitoring, evaluation, and learning)

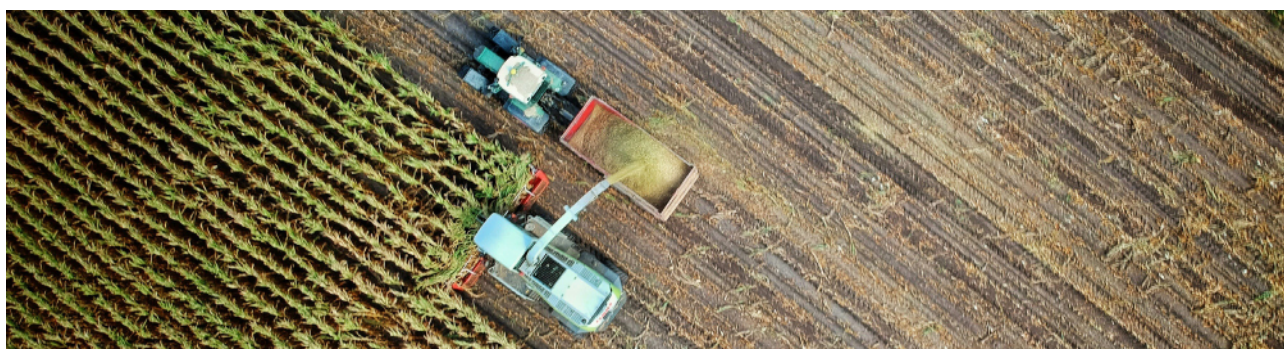| Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
5.1 **MEL guiding framework**	The scheme owner has a consistent framework to guide MEL activities that support scheme impact and improvement.	The scheme owner defines a guiding framework for its monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) activities that includes at least: 1. the objectives of its MEL activities 2 the priority topics that MEL activities seek to address (5.2) 3. the current and intended scope of MEL activities (5.4) 4. how findings and learning will be used to support continual improvement of the scheme (5.6) 5. how findings and learning will be made public (5.7)		Measurable progress Continual improvement Transparency Truthfulness
5.2 **MEL learning topics and outputs**	The scheme owner plans and implements MEL activities that address priority learning topics.	The scheme owner's MEL activities are planned to generate findings and learning on the priority topics it defines. Over a five-year period, the MEL activities result in at least one publicly available output related to each priority topic. The scheme owner's priority topics include at least the following: 1. whether components of the scheme are working as intended (scheme effectiveness) 2. whether clients demonstrate improved practices and/or sustainability outcomes and impacts in alignment with the scheme's objectives (client performance) 3. occurrence of unintended negative effects 4. whether the scheme contributes to its intended sustainability outcomes and impacts (scheme sustainability performance) 5. validity of the scheme's causal pathways and assumptions	The scheme owner determines which types of research, monitoring and data collection, and analysis activities will best address the priority topics and related learning questions. For example, MEL activities can be conducted by scheme staff or commissioned to independent researchers or consultants. MEL activities may involve custom data collection; rely on data and analysis from other parts of the scheme such as assurance; or involve a systematic review or a structured literature review of existing research. MEL activities may include but are not limited to performance monitoring and outcome and impact evaluations. 'Groupings of special relevance to the scheme' could include potentially marginalised individuals or client types (e.g., smallholders), or geographies or industry segments that have a critical role in achieving the outcomes and impacts of the scheme	Measurable progress Continual improvement Reliability Sustainability impacts

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
5.2 **MEL learning topics and outputs**		6. whether there are differences in scheme effectiveness, reach, outcomes, and impacts by gender and/or other groupings of special relevance to the scheme At least some of the MEL activities and published outputs consider causality by employing methodologies that help to assess the extent to which observed changes are attributable to the scheme.		
5.3 **Quality of MEL activities**	The results of MEL activities are methodologically sound.	The scheme owner takes measures to ensure that the MEL activities it implements or commissions produce accurate, reliable, and relevant findings. At minimum, this includes: 1. defining the specific research and learning question(s) to be answered through each MEL activity 2. ensuring that research methodologies and approaches to data analysis are appropriate for answering the research and learning questions 3. maintaining indicator, data collection, and analysis protocols to guide consistent implementation of any MEL activities that will be repeated on a regular basis 4. ensuring that each published MEL output includes a clear description of both positive and negative findings, the methodology and data sources behind the analysis, any possible limitations to the analysis, and any recommendations for improvement	Many other forms of quality assurance measures are possible and valuable for scheme owners to implement, including but not limited to: following recognised guidelines for evaluation quality; subjecting work to peer review; ensuring that evaluators understand the context in which the evaluation takes place as well as the scheme's intended change and strategies; and checking interpretations by presenting evaluation results to those who participated in the evaluation and to local stakeholders before finalising the study.	Measurable progress Continual improvement

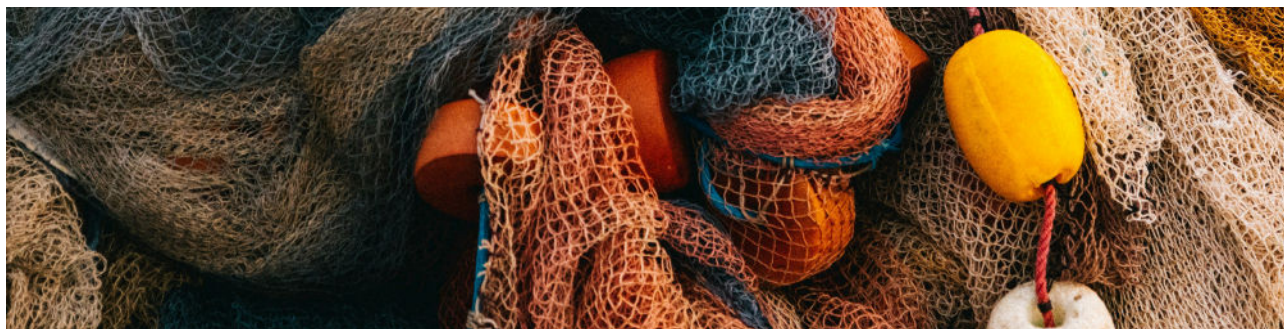| Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
5.4 **Scope of MEL**	The scheme owner defines the scope of application of its MEL activities.	The scheme owner aims to carry out MEL activities that address all scheme components and strategies, and that cover the full product, sectoral, and geographic scope of its scheme. Where this is not feasible, the scheme owner has a clear rationale for any exclusion from the MEL scope and has a plan to address and mitigate any associated risks and to expand the scope over time.	A scheme owner will want to include all its scheme components and strategies in MEL activities to understand their effectiveness. However, a mature scheme with many strategies and a wide scope may choose to exclude some strategies or activities or some of its product, sectoral or geographic scope from the scope of the MEL system. It may also not be feasible for a newer scheme to have MEL activities that cover the full scope of its scheme. Similarly, when a scheme adds new strategies or expands its scope, there may be little value in immediately implementing additional MEL activities if uptake is still very low.	Measurable progress Continual improvement
5.5 **Ethical guidelines for MEL**	MEL activities respect the subjects of the monitoring or research.	The scheme owner defines and applies ethics guidelines to govern any MEL activities that study or involve individuals.	Ethics guidelines could require consideration of risk for subjects involved in research or evaluations; research or evaluation burden and fatigue; data privacy related risks; guidelines on reporting of legal or standards breaches; and other related factors. The scheme owner may develop scheme-specific ethics guidelines; adopt existing guidelines developed by reputable organisations; and/or review and approve guidelines of the researchers or consulting firms it commissions to undertake MEL activities.	Measurable progress Stakeholder engagement Sustainability impacts

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
5.6 **Scheme improvement**	The scheme owner uses outputs from MEL activities to improve the effectiveness and impact of its scheme.	The scheme owner uses the outputs and learning from its MEL activities to inform review and improvement of its standards (6.14) and other scheme components (2.8) and strategies, and its risk management plan and activities (2.5). To facilitate this, the scheme owner shares at least annually with its Board, executive leadership, standards committee or equivalent, and staff members responsible for risk management and all scheme components, the findings, learning, and recommendations from its MEL activities within the scheme.		Continual improvement Sustainability impacts Reliability
5.7 **Public information about MEL activities and learning**	Stakeholders have access to information about the MEL system and its findings.	The scheme owner makes the following information about its MEL system publicly available and easily accessible: 1. MEL guiding framework (5.1) 2. information on planned and ongoing MEL activities (5.2) 3. list of all indicators being regularly reported on (5.3) 4. MEL outputs related to each priority topic (5.2) In addition, at least once every two years, the scheme owner makes publicly available to stakeholders a summary of the findings, learning, and recommendations from MEL activities, and a management response that includes an explanation of the changes and improvements that have been and will be made as a result.	In sharing the list of indicators, the scheme owner is encouraged to add value for scheme users by: (1) informing stakeholders about how these indicators align with published indicator frameworks or reporting initiatives and (2) publicly reporting on progress against these indicators.	Transparency Measurable progress

6. Standards development and maintenance

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
6.1 **Standards policies and procedures**	Development and revision of standards follows a consistent and robust process.	The scheme owner's procedures for standards development and maintenance address at least: 1. the processes for developing, reviewing, and revising standards, including the processes for stakeholder engagement (6.5 to 6.8) 2. decision-making roles, responsibilities, and procedures where these are not addressed elsewhere (6.9 and 6.10) 3. the conditions and process for urgent substantive revisions, if the scheme allows for these (6.12) 4. the conditions and process for non-substantive changes to the standard, e.g., to clarify language (6.11) 5. protocols for changes in the standard, including timelines by which changes come into effect and mechanisms to communicate those changes to affected stakeholders Procedures for standards development and maintenance apply to all of a scheme's standards that are applied to its clients or members.	The scope of the procedures is intended to include the scheme's sustainability standards and any other requirements applied to clients in support of scheme integrity, e.g., chain of custody requirements, etc. Assurance protocols or procedures are not included in scope. Merging of two standards can be considered as a revision process. Standards development and revision processes can vary in intensity for each standard in relation to the complexity of the standard and level of stakeholder interest, so long as the relevant procedures reflect this.	Stakeholder engagement Impartiality Continual improvement
6.2 **Alignment between standards**	The scheme owner seeks synergies through alignment with other standards.	At the outset of a standard's development or revision, the scheme owner identifies external standards with overlapping scopes and assesses whether there are opportunities to strengthen alignment or complementarity.	Seeking alignment and complementarity can support efforts to increase value and reduce unnecessary costs for clients, and to strengthen the combined influence of existing schemes.	Collaboration Value creation Continual improvement

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
6.3 **Terms of reference for standards**	The scheme owner has clearly articulated what the standard aims to achieve and why it is needed.	At the outset of a standard's development or revision, the scheme owner defines the objectives of the development or revision process. These objectives are consistent with the scheme's intended impacts and strategies. The scheme owner also develops or updates a terms of reference for the standard that includes at least: 1. the intended scope of the standard 2. the intended sustainability outcomes of the standard, consistent with the scheme's sustainability impacts and strategies (1.1) 3. a justification of the need for the standard, including how the standard complements existing external standards with overlapping scopes 4. the intended sustainability claims that the standard will substantiate (8.1.3)	6.3.2 is not applicable where the standard does not have sustainability outcomes, e.g., chain of custody standards.	Sustainability impacts Truthfulness Collaboration
6.4 **Public summary**	Stakeholders have the information they need to determine whether and how to participate.	During a standard development or revision process, the scheme owner makes a summary of the process easily accessible to stakeholders, that includes: 1. a summary of the terms of reference for the standard, including its proposed scope and intended sustainability outcomes (6.3) 2. the objectives of the development or revision process (6.3) 3. an outline of the steps in the process, including timelines and clearly identified opportunities for contributing (6.5) 4. an overview of the decision-making procedures, including how decisions are made and by whom (6.9 and 6.10)		Transparency Stakeholder engagement Impartiality

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
6.5 **Public consultation on the standard**	Stakeholders have sufficient time and opportunity to contribute to the standard's development and revision.	The scheme owner holds public consultations that include: 1. at least two rounds of input on initial standards development 2. at least one round of input on standards revision Stakeholders are informed in a timely manner of opportunities to engage. Each round is of sufficient length and format to provide stakeholders adequate time and opportunity to review material and submit comments. Where substantive, unresolved issues persist after the consultation rounds, or where insufficient feedback was received in total or from specific stakeholder groups, the scheme owner carries out additional public and/or targeted consultation, as necessary.	60 days and 30 days have generally been considered adequate time to submit comments in first and second rounds of consultation, respectively.	Stakeholder engagement Transparency
6.6 **Balanced participation**	Consultation processes enable participation from a broad cross-section of stakeholders.	The scheme owner ensures that the consultation process: 1. is open to all stakeholders 2. aims to gather input from a balanced and diverse group of stakeholders with an interest in the subject matter and geographic scope of the standard, or who are affected by its implementation 3. addresses barriers faced by stakeholder groups who are under-engaged or under-represented and proactively seeks their contributions	The goals of seeking input from a balanced and diverse group are that revisions are informed by a diversity of feedback and that all relevant and affected stakeholders feel that their views are represented in consultation.	Stakeholder engagement Impartiality

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
6.7 **Responding to comments**	Stakeholders can see what input was received and how it has been considered.	At the close of a consultation round, the scheme owner: 1. makes publicly available all comments received during the consultation or, at a minimum, accurate summaries of these comments, along with an explanation of how each material issue was considered 2. notifies all parties who submitted comments (and who opted to receive further communications) that the comments and explanations are available	The scheme owner does not need to respond to each individual comment. Each material issue means the scheme owner can group comments received under clauses and respond to these as a group. The scheme owner can redact comments when there are reasonable grounds to do so, e.g., when there is a misuse of the public consultation (e.g., submission of hateful comments), or if it is necessary to protect personal data or other confidential information.	Stakeholder engagement Transparency
6.8 **Feasibility assessment**	Proposed standards are auditable and feasible to comply with.	The scheme owner assesses the feasibility and auditability of the proposed standard as part of the standards development process, and when there are significant changes introduced during standards revisions.	Significant changes include changes in scope or objectives or in the design of the standard. A basic feasibility assessment would include asking auditors to review the standard for auditability, though ideally the assessment also looks at applicability or relevance of the requirements in the field.	Reliability Value creation Continual improvement
6.9 **Balanced decision-making about the standard**	Stakeholders can see that their views are represented in decision-making about the standard.	The scheme owner ensures that there is a governance body responsible for making decisions on the content of the standard and that this body: 1. is open to all stakeholders 2. constitutes a balanced and diverse group of stakeholders, including those that are directly affected by implementation of the scheme or by the sector the scheme seeks to impact	The goal of engaging a balanced and diverse group in decision-making is so that stakeholders feel that their voice is represented in those decisions. The aim is for all major stakeholder groups to be represented and gender balance to be considered, to help ensure that no one stakeholder group or set of interests can control decisions.	Stakeholder engagement Impartiality

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
6.10 **Consensus decision-making**	Decision-making processes about the content of the standard are transparent and aim for consensus.	The scheme owner ensures that its decision-making procedure: 1. promotes consensus decision-making on the content of the standard 2. defines alternative decision-making procedures in advance and criteria for when these should come into effect in the event that consensus cannot be achieved Procedures include decision-making thresholds that ensure no one stakeholder group can control decision-making.		Impartiality Stakeholder engagement
6.11 **Non-substantive changes to the standard**	The scheme owner can easily make non-substantive changes to the standard.	The scheme owner has mechanisms that allow for non-substantive changes to the standard (e.g., to clarify language). The scheme owner ensures that stakeholders are made aware during the next full review and revision process of any non-substantive changes made in the intervening period.		Continual improvement Transparency Stakeholder engagement
6.12 **Urgent substantive changes to the standard**	The scheme owner has a robust approach to urgent substantive changes to the standard.	If the scheme owner allows for urgent substantive revisions to the content of the standard outside a full review and revision process, it has a procedure in place that defines the conditions for triggering these urgent revisions. If the procedure allows for decisions on urgent revisions to be made without public consultation, the scheme owner ensures that the level of urgency is justified and publicly documented and includes the revisions for consultation in the next review and revision process.	Urgent substantive revisions specifically address identified unintended negative effects of the standard. An example of an unintended negative effect for which an urgent standards revision would be justified is that by restricting use of certain pesticides, farmers turn to more dangerous alternatives that have not yet been included on the scheme's prohibited list. Another example is that a specific health and safety requirement is found to be discriminating unintentionally against female workers.	Continual improvement Sustainability impacts
6.13 **Stakeholder input outside consultation**	The scheme owner is responsive to stakeholder input on the standard.	The scheme owner has a process for stakeholders to submit comments and feedback or to seek clarifications on the standard at any time. The scheme owner documents and acknowledges receipt of this feedback and considers it as input in any subsequent review process.		Stakeholder engagement Transparency

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
6.14 **Standards review and revision**	The standard remains relevant over time.	The scheme owner reviews each standard covered by the ISEAL Code at least every five years, drawing on relevant data and information (6.15) to assess: 1. continued relevance of the standard's sustainability outcomes against the scheme's intended sustainability outcomes and impacts (1.1) 2. the standard's continued effectiveness in meeting its stated objectives If the review determines that a revision is necessary, the scheme owner updates the standard's objectives as necessary and then revises the standard in a timely manner, in line with the relevant requirements in the ISEAL Code. If the review determines that a revision is not necessary, the scheme owner reaffirms the standard, communicates publicly about the decision and rationale, and establishes the date for the next review.	As part of the review process, it is recommended that the scheme owner assesses how other scheme components (e.g., its claims policy or assurance protocols) are likely to be impacted by potential changes in the standard, prompting consideration of whether the other system components also need to be included in the revision process.	Continual improvement Sustainability impacts Measurable progress

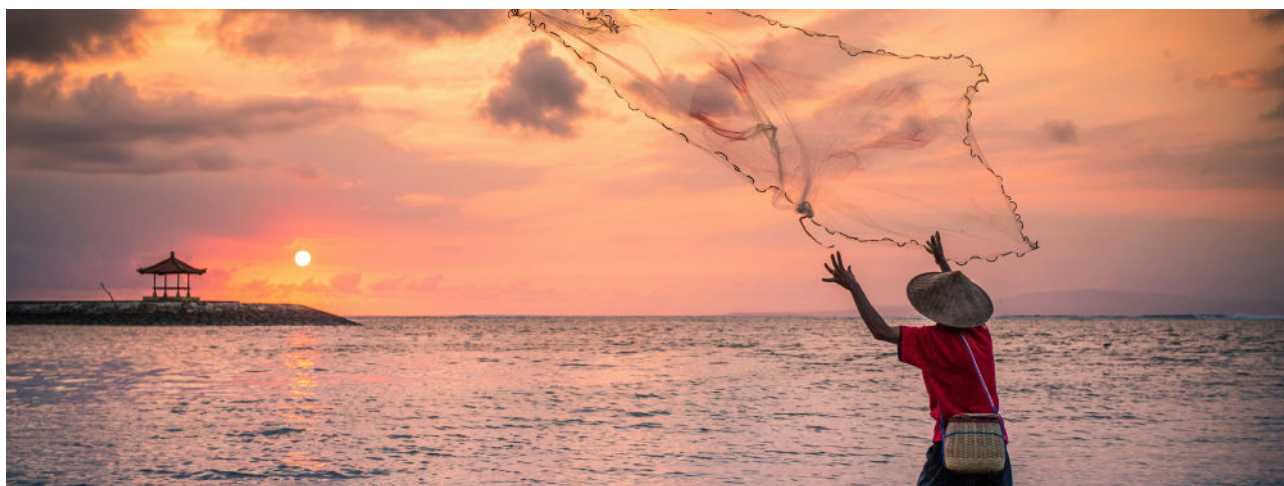| Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
6.15 **Data and information informing standard review**	The scheme owner understands the effectiveness of the standard and how it could be improved.	As input to the standard's review and revision, the scheme owner compiles and analyses relevant data and information, including at least learning since the last revision from: 1. MEL activities, including assessments of the effectiveness of the standard (5.2.1), client sustainability performance (5.2.2), and occurrence of unintended negative effects (5.2.3) 2. assessments of clients' conformity to or performance against the standard (7.3) 3. analysis of feedback received from clients, assessment personnel and other stakeholders, particularly with respect to the standard's effectiveness, implementation, and scope (3.3) 4. any urgent substantive revisions implemented since the last revision of the standard (6.12) 5. external research and industry best practices, including assessments of emerging sustainability risks and opportunities (1.2) 6. changes to relevant legislation across the full scope of the standard.	To stay informed on relevant legislation, the scheme owner can ask its assurance providers to provide updates on any new legislation or applicable changes to existing legislation.	Continual improvement Measurable progress Stakeholder engagement

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
6.16 **Standards structure and content**	The standard is designed to achieve its intended sustainability outcomes.	The scheme owner ensures the standard is structured to meet its intended sustainability outcomes and to be consistently interpreted and applied. This includes ensuring that the content of its standard meets the following requirements: 1. the requirements in the standard are auditable, verifiable, or measurable, and easily understood 2. the standard contains requirements that address all of the standard's intended sustainability outcomes 3. only requirements that are relevant to meeting these outcomes are included, and administrative requirements related to assurance, claims or labels or other matters not connected to sustainability outcomes are presented separately 4. requirements are at least as stringent as existing regulatory requirements in the countries where the standard is applied 5. the intellectual source of content is attributed or cited, where relevant	Requirements that are auditable, verifiable, or measurable are written in such a way that they are clear, direct, and precise and will result in accurate and uniform interpretation. They should also be stated unambiguously using wording that is objective, logical, valid, and specific (ISO/IEC 17007).	Sustainability impacts Reliability Value creation Transparency
6.17 **Adaptation of standards**	The standard is relevant in the contexts where it is applied.	Where the scheme owner develops adaptations of its standard (e.g., for national or regional relevance, scale of enterprise, or for specific products or sectors), it does so through multistakeholder consultation processes. The scheme owner documents the justification for any substantive differences between the adapted version and the standard and makes this documentation publicly available.		Stakeholder engagement Transparency
6.18 **Interpretation and implementation guidance**	The standard is consistently interpreted and applied.	The scheme owner prepares guidance that is detailed enough to support consistent interpretation and implementation of the standard's requirements across its scope of application.		Reliability

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
6.19 **Standards equivalence**	Other standards recognised by the scheme owner are meaningfully equivalent to all or to relevant parts of the scheme's standard.	Where the scheme owner recognises an existing standard as partially or fully equivalent to its standard, this is based on: 1. a determination of the equivalence of sustainability performance between the two standards 2. an assessment that the existing standard is relevant and applicable to the contexts in which it is applied	ISEAL's good practice guidance on benchmarking is a useful resource for how to assess equivalence. The determination of equivalent performance can be based on intended performance, e.g., the standard's requirements; or actual performance, e.g., assessments of client performance. This assessment of equivalence relates only to the content of the standard. Where the scheme owner also intends to accept external assurance of compliance with this standard, the scheme owner needs to have confidence in the results of the assurance process (7.11).	Reliability Collaboration

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
6.20 **Public information on standard-setting**	Stakeholders have access to information about the scheme's standards and supporting information.	The scheme owner makes consultation drafts and final versions of its standards freely available and easily accessible in the scheme's official languages. In addition, it makes the following supporting information publicly available: 1. date by which a standard comes into effect and planned dates of any subsequent standards review 2. any additional translations of the standards to support accessibility and uptake 3. procedures for standards development and revision, including decision-making roles and responsibilities (6.1) 4. terms of reference for its standards (6.3) 5. comments received during the consultations or, at a minimum, accurate summaries of these comments, along with explanations of how the comments were considered (6.5) 6. any interpretations or variances to the standard arising from its implementation 7. if applicable, the justification and the details of any urgent substantive revisions made to its standards since the last review and revision (6.12)		Transparency Stakeholder engagement

7. Assurance

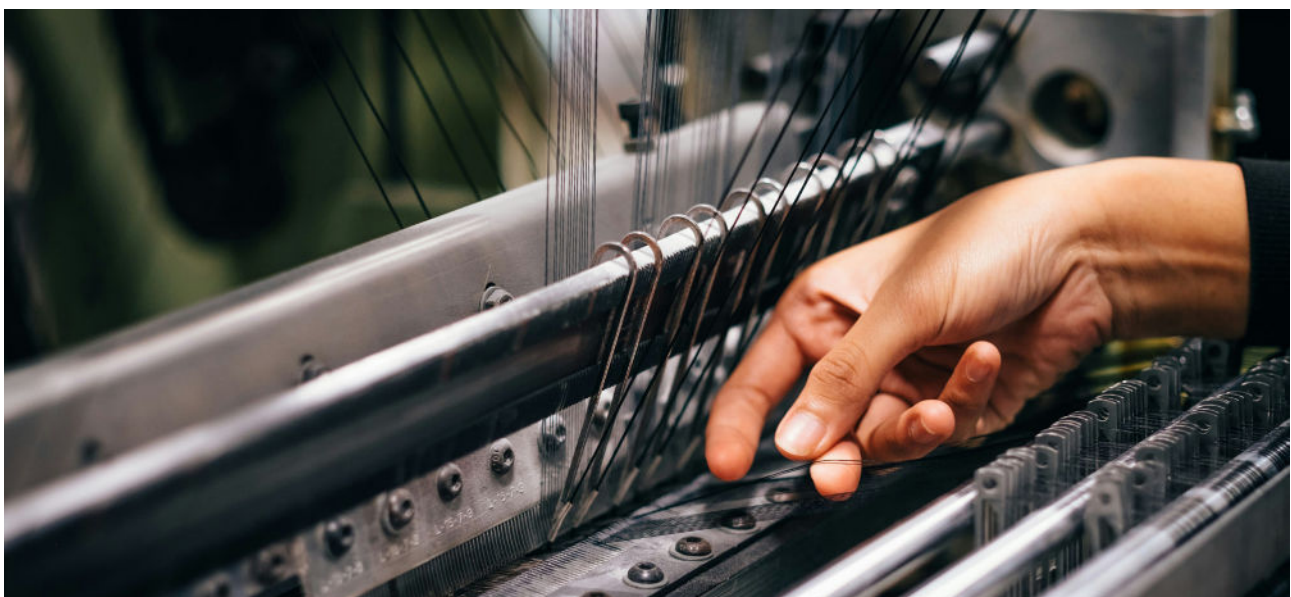| Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
7.1 **Assurance model**	The scheme owner's assurance model gives confidence in the results of assurance.	The scheme owner establishes an assurance structure and assessment models consistent with: 1. the scope of the scheme and the risks inherent to its scope (e.g., sector, geography, part of value chain, types of chain of custody, etc.) 2. intended impacts and strategies of the scheme (1.1) 3. strategies for how the scheme intends to create value for clients 4. types of claims allowed by the scheme (8.1.3) The scheme owner documents a rationale for its choice of structure and assessment models, based on the above characteristics. It also has a process in place for checking consistency with relevant regulatory requirements.	Establishing the assurance structure includes deciding on roles and responsibilities in the assurance system, e.g., decisions about the role of the scheme, its decision-making bodies, and external partners such as oversight bodies and assurance providers. Examples of regulatory requirements include regulations on the type of accreditation required in a jurisdiction, or the definition of what qualifies as a certification system.	Reliability Truthfulness Sustainability impacts Value creation
7.2 **Assurance policies and procedures**	Operating policies and procedures support consistent implementation of the assurance system.	The scheme owner ensures policies and procedures for the assurance system include at least: 1. decision-making roles, responsibilities, and procedures where these are not addressed elsewhere 2. criteria for accepting assurance providers to the scheme and for assurance providers to remain in the scheme, including that they are registered legal entities 3. criteria for accepting clients to the scheme 4. types of assessments used in the scheme and a methodology for each (7.3)	The scope of the assurance system includes the scheme's sustainability standards and any other requirements applied to clients in support of scheme integrity, e.g., chain of custody requirements, etc.	Reliability Stakeholder engagement Truthfulness Impartiality

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
7.2 cont.		5. types of chain of custody allowed by the scheme, where relevant, and an assessment procedure for each (8.4) 6. procedures for engaging stakeholders in the assurance system (3.3) 7. procedures for regulating exceptions to the standard and exceptions to the assessment procedures, including how stakeholders can provide input on proposed exceptions 8. requirements for the certificate/ verification results (7.3) and/or claims related to assurance status of clients (8.1.3) 9. scheme-related requirements for the assurance system implementing partners 10. a mechanism for oversight of assurance activities and providers (7.18) 11. models of legal contracts with implementing partners and with clients, that delineate responsibilities and obligations, including data sharing, data use and confidentiality, and repercussions for fraudulent behaviour (2.7) 12. document and record control for the assurance system 13. protocols for changes in the assurance system, including timelines by which changes come into effect and mechanisms to communicate those changes to stakeholders The scheme owner includes in scope of its assurance system all its standards that are implemented by its clients.		

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
7.3 **Assessment methodology**	Procedures support consistent and competent implementation of each type of assessment.	The scheme owner defines requirements and procedures for each type of assessment implemented within the assurance system, addressing at least the following: 1. frequency and intensity of assessment 2. knowledge, skills, and experience required in an assessor or assessment team 3. minimum set of criteria or requirements that need to be checked in every assessment 4. the role of remote auditing techniques within the assessment 5. a means or parameters for calculating the time needed for an assessment 6. sources of data and information that feed into the assessment; this includes specification of how stakeholders are to be consulted, as one source of information 7. how data sources are to be combined to provide an understanding of sustainability performance and risk, and how this informs the assessment process 8. minimum content of assessment reports including, at least, a list of non-conformities 9. timelines for submission of completed reports, following assessments 10. how to consider exceptions to the standard or assessment process	The scheme owner can also choose to define the minimum evidence needed to assess criteria or requirements. It is recommended the methodology also addresses how an assessor or assessment team should respond if adverse impacts on human rights or environmental issues outside the scope of standards compliance are identified, including the role of the dispute resolution system (3.5) in handling complaints and grievances.	Reliability Measurable progress Impartiality

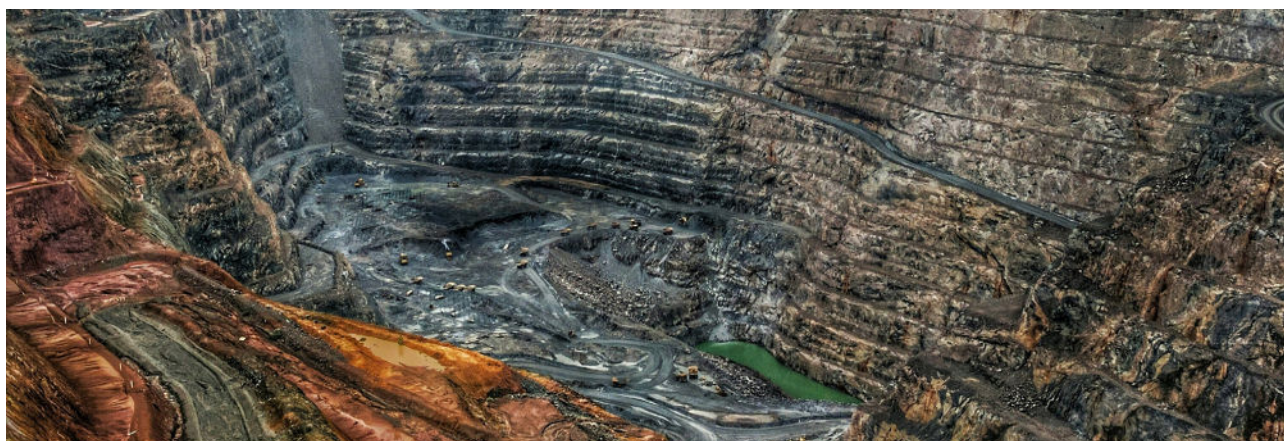| Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
7.4 **Risk-based assessment**	The intensity of assurance activities is informed by the level of risk present.	Where a risk-based approach is used to determine assessment frequency, intensity, or focus in either assurance or oversight, the scheme owner has a documented risk management procedure to assess the risk level of clients and/or assurance providers and the resulting assessment frequency and intensity. The procedure provides instructions on how to assess threats of non-conformity and the implications for the assessment of different levels of risk. The scheme owner requires use of the procedure by assurance providers and/or oversight bodies.	Assurance providers and oversight bodies can implement their own risk assessments but the scheme owner is responsible for ensuring overall consistency of approach.	Reliability Measurable progress Impartiality
7.5 **Sampling protocol**	Sampling that is conducted during assessments is robust and consistent.	The scheme owner develops a sampling protocol for assurance providers and oversight bodies to use during assessments that includes, at a minimum, a description of when sampling is to be employed in the assessment, what influences the depth and intensity of sampling, and the type of sampling to be employed in each instance.		Reliability Measurable progress
7.6 **Decision-making protocol**	Decisions on conformity and performance are determined consistently.	The scheme owner defines a decision-making protocol that enables consistent determination of conformity or performance status, the severity of non-conformities, a nd repercussions for each level of non-conformity. The scheme owner requires assurance providers and oversight bodies to implement this protocol.		Reliability Impartiality
7.7 **Performance insights**	Assurance providers deliver performance insights to clients.	The scheme owner requires assurance providers to provide sufficient information to clients to enable those clients to derive insights about their performance. At a minimum, this includes detailed information about any non-conformities. [Guidance: This information can be provided in assessment reports or through additional information and insights shared with clients, e.g., client performance changes over time or in relation to peers.]		Value creation Transparency

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
7.8 **Appeals Mechanism**	There is scope to appeal assurance decisions.	The scheme owner requires assurance providers to implement a publicly available appeals procedure where clients can appeal their assurance decisions. It also requires oversight bodies to implement this for assurance providers.		Impartiality Transparency
7.9 **Addressing non-conformities**	There is a robust approach to addressing non-conformities.	The scheme owner defines consistent procedures for addressing non-conformities. At a minimum, the procedures: 1. define the action required to address different types of non-conformity, and whose responsibility it is to take that action, e.g., scheme owners have a legal obligation to report some types of non-conformities to local authorities 2. include guidelines for determining whether corrective actions adequately address non-conformities 3. define time limits for implementing corrective actions 4. define steps for verifying corrective actions 5. define repercussions where non-conformities are not adequately addressed		Reliability Measurable progress

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
7.10 **Group assessment**	Assessment of groups and their internal management systems is robust and consistent.	Where the scheme owner allows for group assessments, it specifies 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. The scheme owner: 1. defines consequences for non-conformities detected at the level of individual group members 2. ensures that non-conformities are issued against the group as a whole when there is a systemic problem with the group's internal management system, including when the number of non-conformities identified within a sample of individual group members signifies a systemic failure		Reliability Impartiality
7.11 **Assurance equivalence**	The scheme has confidence in assurance results of equivalent schemes.	Where the scheme owner accepts as equivalent or partially equivalent assurance results of another scheme, it defines the steps taken or the additional assurance activities or documentation required to have confidence in the results of the other scheme.	Where the scheme owner accepts the results of another scheme it is also taking responsibility for the quality of those assurance results. ISEAL's good practice guidance on benchmarking is a useful resource for how to assess equivalence.	Reliability Collaboration
7.12 **Internal audits**	Assurance providers and oversight bodies are competent to carry out assessments for the scheme.	The scheme owner requires that assurance providers and oversight bodies: 1. conduct annual internal audits of their performance relative to the requirements of the scheme 2. share the results of these internal audits and how any findings were addressed with the scheme owner		Continual improvement Reliability
7.13 **Responsibility for outsourcing**	The quality and integrity of outsourced assurance activities is maintained.	The scheme owner requires that assurance providers and oversight bodies retain: 1. authority for assessment decisions 2. responsibility for ensuring the quality and integrity of all assurance activities they outsource to other parties		Reliability Impartiality

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
7.14 **Calibration of assurance personnel**	Assurance personnel interpret requirements consistently.	The scheme owner requires assurance providers to implement calibration activities that support consistent interpretation of the standard by auditors and assurance personnel, including sub-contracted personnel. Where the scheme owner works with multiple oversight bodies, it requires a similar programme of calibration for the auditors working for these bodies.	The scheme owner can support or prescribe these calibration activities to ensure greater consistency in interpretation.	Reliability Impartiality Continual improvement
7.15 **Impartiality of interpreters and technical experts**	Interpreters and technical experts act impartially.	The scheme owner requires that interpreters or technical experts contracted by assurance providers or oversight bodies are independent of the client or assurance provider being assessed and do not have conflicts of interest. The scheme owner can allow for exceptions due to logistical constraints such as absence of alternative options, and in such cases, requires that exceptions are justified and recorded.		Impartiality Reliability
7.16 **Impartiality in the assessment**	Clients are supported to improve their practices without compromising the impartiality of assessments.	Where the scheme owner allows assessors or other assurance personnel to provide information to clients about improving performance, the scheme owner documents the types of information that can be provided and the steps taken to avoid conflicts of interest.		Impartiality Reliability
7.17 **Impartial decision-making**	Impartiality of decision-making is strengthened by involving multiple personnel in decision-making.	The scheme owner requires that assurance providers and oversight bodies assign competent personnel other than the assessor or assessment team to review assessment findings and any other relevant information and make impartial decisions about the client or assurance provider's assurance status.		Reliability Impartiality

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
7.18 **Oversight mechanism**	Oversight of assurance improves the quality and integrity of assurance results.	The scheme owner defines an approach to oversight of assurance activities and assurance providers, ensuring this is consistent with the scheme's assurance models (7.1). The scheme owner defines: 1. its oversight mechanism, including roles and responsibilities for different oversight functions 2. the frequency of oversight activities 3. the oversight procedures to be followed 4. the process that oversight bodies should follow for assessing the performance of assurance providers, including a decision-making protocol that enables levels of non-conformity to be determined consistently 5. the consequences of non-compliance with performance requirements by assurance providers 6. the requirements for oversight bodies to report back to the scheme owner	Defining the oversight mechanism includes taking decisions about roles and responsibilities for oversight, e.g., decisions about the role of the scheme, its decision-making bodies, and external partners such as oversight bodies and assurance providers.	Reliability Impartiality
7.19 **Independence of oversight**	Oversight of assurance is independent of assurance providers.	The scheme owner ensures that its oversight mechanism, including any oversight bodies, is independent of the assurance providers being assessed.		Impartiality Reliability
7.20 **Authority for oversight**	The oversight mechanism has the authority to maintain the integrity of assurance.	The scheme owner ensures that its oversight mechanism, including any oversight bodies, has responsibility and authority to enforce actions or rules regarding non-compliance of assurance providers. Where the scheme owner is the assurance provider, it defines measures to mitigate the conflict of interest, ensuring that issues raised by an oversight body are addressed by the scheme owner.	Mechanisms to ensure that issues raised are addressed can include public reporting of the findings of the oversight body and/or direct reporting of the findings to decision-making bodies within the scheme.	Reliability Impartiality

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
7.21 **Accreditation**	Accreditation bodies meet industry standards for independence, impartiality, and competence.	Where the scheme owner relies on accreditation bodies for its oversight, it ensures that accreditation bodies conform to the current version of ISO/IEC 17011 in addition to the requirements in the ISEAL Code that apply to oversight bodies.		Reliability Impartiality
7.22 **Proxy accreditation**	Proxy accreditation is reliable.	Where the scheme owner accepts an assurance provider's accreditation against other similar standards as a proxy for the assurance provider's competence, it requires that these assurance providers carry out regular internal audits against the scheme-specific scope and share the findings and any resulting actions with the scheme owner. The scheme owner takes additional measures to ensure these assurance providers meet its personnel competence requirements (2.4).	In addition to requiring internal audits against the scheme's scope, the scheme owner can employ supplementary measures to assess the scheme-specific competence of assurance providers.	Reliability Collaboration Continual improvement
7.23 **Public information on assurance**	Stakeholders have access to relevant information about how the assurance system operates.	The scheme owner makes the following information about its assurance system publicly available and easily accessible: 1. a description of the structure of the assurance system (7.1), including the oversight mechanism (7.18) and decision-making roles and responsibilities (7.2.1) 2. criteria and procedures for accepting assurance providers and clients to the scheme, including the rationale behind any restrictions on access (7.2.2 and 7.2.3) 3. current list of implementing partners that are approved to work in the assurance system 4. details on how potential clients can access information about fees for assurance 5. description of each assessment methodology: type(s) of assessment employed, how clients are assessed, how often and by whom, and the basis for decisions (7.3)	The list of current and past clients and information about their assessments can alternatively be made publicly available by the assurance provider. For information about results of assessments, it is recommended that the scheme owner discloses additional information about the nature of non-conformities detected and the corrective actions planned or taken. Non-conformities that are mitigated before a decision on certification is taken do not need to be made public.	Transparency Reliability Collaboration Value creation

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
7.23 **Public information on assurance**		6. description of how the scheme manages information provision (knowledge sharing) to clients by assurance providers (7.7) 7. description of how stakeholders can provide input to assurance processes (7.2.6) 8. description of the consequences for different levels of non-conformity (7.6) 9. description of the steps the scheme has taken to have confidence in the results of other schemes deemed equivalent or partially equivalent (7.11) 10. current list of clients, the scope of their assessments, and the expiry date of their certificate or assurance claim (where expiry dates are used) 11. at least basic information about the results of assessments of clients and assurance providers, that includes, at a minimum, information about the client's assurance status 12. list of past clients withdrawn from the scheme within the last five years, and the date of their withdrawal		

8. Claims

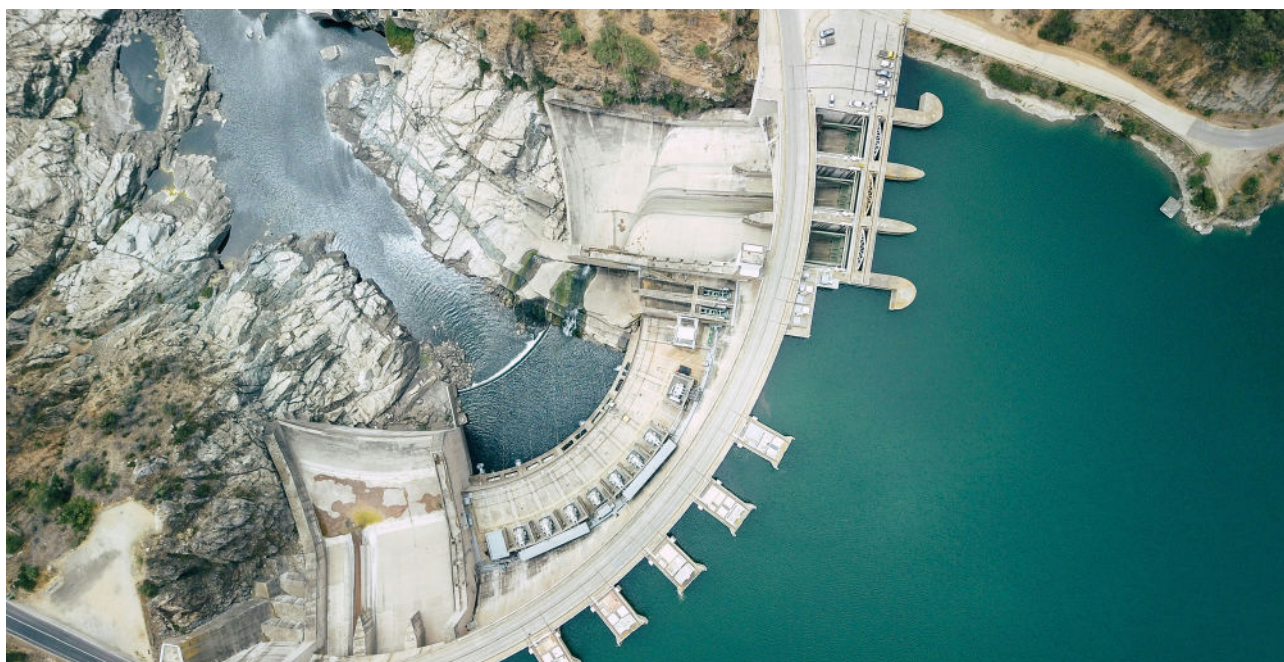| Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
8.1 **Claims policies and procedures**	Documented policies and procedures ensure the claims system is implemented consistently.	The scheme owner ensures the documented claims system includes at least: 1. a list of the scheme's registered copyrights and trademarks 2. procedures that govern the scheme's development and substantiation of the claims it uses and the claims it allows clients to use 3. a list of all claims that the scheme allows and, where relevant, disallows clients to use, including sustainability claims and claims about assurance status 4. rules and procedures for client use of claims, including specifications about who is allowed to make which types of claims and where they can appear (8.3) 5. procedures for approving claims and renewing approvals (8.5) 6. procedures for monitoring use of claims and addressing misuse (8.7) 7. procedures for suspending and withdrawing permissions to use claims (8.7.3) 8. a list of all approved users of claims (e.g., licensees/certificate holders/clients) and the specific approvals granted 9. where relevant, procedures addressing the roles and responsibilities of implementing partners in the claims system	Claims can be about a product, process, service or organisation; relate to sustainability attributes, performance, progress and/or assurance status of a client, and/or the client's association with the scheme; be business-to-business or business-to-consumer; and be made via a range of media including text, logos, labels, trust marks, etc. Claims about assurance status can also include validation or verification opinions or statements.	Truthfulness

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
8.2 **Truthfulness of allowed claims**	Allowed claims are clear, relevant, and accurate.	The scheme owner ensures that the claims it makes about its scheme and the claims that it allows clients to make are clear, relevant, and accurate. At a minimum, this includes ensuring that allowed claims are consistent with: 1. the scheme's scope, sustainability outcomes and strategies (1.1) 2. the requirements defined in its standard(s), including performance levels, where relevant (6.16) 3. the scheme's assurance model (7.1) 4. the chain of custody models allowed by the scheme, where relevant (8.4) 5. the scope of assurance, e.g., assurance of an enterprise, product, etc. 6. sustainability performance data from monitoring and evaluation (5.2)		Truthfulness

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
8.3 **Substantiation of claims**	Allowed claims are substantiated.	The scheme owner defines the information that determines when each type of allowed claim can be made. The scheme owner takes into account at least the following information: 1. the requirements to be met by the client 2. the scheme's assurance model (7.1) 3. assurance status of clients 4. assessment results on client sustainability performance 5. the types of chain of custody models employed, when applicable (8.4) 6. findings on scheme performance, e.g., its contributions towards its intended sustainability outcomes and impacts (5.2 Scheme owners with improvement-focused standards and claims should also take into account client progress over time when determining when claims can be made.		Truthfulness Measurable progress Reliability
8.4 **Chain of custody**	The scheme owner's approach to chain of custody is sufficient to prevent fraud and appropriate for the types of claims it allows.	Where the scheme incorporates supply chain traceability, the scheme owner determines which types of chain of custody are fit for purpose and appropriate for the claims the scheme enables clients to make, and documents a rationale for its choice. The scheme owner makes publicly available a summary of how each of the scheme's chain of custody models works and what controls it has in place to manage their integrity.	Chain of custody models are fit for purpose if they are applicable in the sectoral or geographic context in which the scheme operates, meet business expectations and regulatory requirements, and are consistent with the types of claims that the scheme owner allows.	Reliability Truthfulness Transparency
8.5 **Claims approval**	The scheme owner controls claims made by clients about the scheme or its results.	The scheme owner has or delegates to implementing partners a mechanism to approve clients' use of claims and to require clients to report on any changes that would affect their ability to make claims.		Truthfulness Reliability Impartiality

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
8.6 **Supporting information for claims**	Stakeholders can find supporting information about claims made by the scheme's clients.	The scheme owner specifies what supporting information must accompany or be linked to approved claims and any requirements or conditions for how this information is provided or displayed. The scheme owner ensures that this supporting information is accessible to stakeholders and supports their understanding of the claim.	Supporting information can include reference to websites or other accessible sources of information.	Truthfulness Transparency
8.7 **Monitoring use of claims**	The scheme owner mitigates the misuse of claims.	The scheme owner has procedures for monitoring the use of claims that include at least: 1. steps taken to monitor the misuse of claims in the market, including a publicly available and easily accessible mechanism for stakeholders to report misuse of claims 2. investigating and acting on identified cases of misuse of claims 3. suspending and withdrawing permissions to use claims, including defining the conditions and actions that lead to the suspension and withdrawal of permissions 4. monitoring that suspended or former clients have stopped making claims	The mechanism for stakeholders to report misuse of claims can be integrated into the scheme's dispute resolution system (3.5). Misuse of claims includes cases of fraud or corruption. Additional steps taken to monitor misuse can include automated monitoring (e.g., through internet searches), sample-based or risk-based monitoring, or responding to stakeholder complaints. Monitoring activities can be undertaken by the scheme owner's implementing partners. Monitoring of suspended or former clients can be for a limited period of time.	Truthfulness

Clause/Topic	Desired outcome	Requirement	Guidance	Credibility Principles
8.8 **Public information on claims**	Stakeholders have access to relevant information about how the claims system operates.	The scheme owner makes the following information about its claims system publicly available and easily accessible: 1. rules and procedures for client use of claims (e.g., claims and logo use guide) (8.1) 2. general information on fees associated with claims use 3. procedures for approving claims and renewing approvals (8.5) 4. procedures for monitoring use of claims and addressing misuse (8.7) 5. procedures for suspending and withdrawing permissions to use claims (8.7.3) 6. opportunities for stakeholder input on the clarity, relevance, and accuracy of the scheme's allowed claims (3.3) 7. the mechanism for reporting misuse of claims (8.7)		Transparency Truthfulness Stakeholder engagement

Glossary

About this glossary

The aim of the glossary is to support all users to understand the ISEAL Code, and includes terms related to implementation of sustainability systems. It is not a definitive list of all technical terms, or the only definition for each term. Please note that some terms may have other contextual and legal definitions that supersede the ISEAL Code definition or inform how these activities are undertaken in different jurisdictions.

Term	Similar terms	Definition	Definition source
Accreditation		Third-party attestation related to an assurance provider, conveying formal demonstration of its competence, impartiality and consistent operation in performing specific assessment activities. Note: Refers specifically to accreditation carried out in conformity to ISO/IEC 17011.	Adapted from ISO/IEC 17000:2020
Appeal		Request by the client to the assurance provider, or by the assurance provider to the oversight body, for the reconsideration of an assessment decision.	Adapted from ISO/IEC 17000:2020
Assessment	audit, inspection	Review of compliance or performance of a product, process, system, person or entity against specified requirements.	ISEAL
Assessment methodology	audit methodology, audit procedure, assessment plan	The steps and techniques that comprise an assessment.	ISEAL
Assessor	auditor, inspector, verifier	Person with the competence to conduct an assessment.	Adapted from ISO 9000:2015
Assurance	conformity assessment, certification, verification	Demonstration that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person or entity are fulfilled.	Adapted from ISO/IEC 17000:2020
Assurance equivalence	equivalence of conformity assessment results	The sufficiency of different assurance processes to provide the same level of assurance with regard to the same specified requirements.	Adapted from ISO/IEC 17000:2020
Assurance model	assurance framework	The approach that results from decisions made by the scheme owner about the type of assurance activities the scheme will carry out, the structures in place for coordinating and overseeing these activities, and the roles and responsibilities for implementing the assurance system.	ISEAL
Assurance provider	certification body, verification body, validation body, conformity assessment body (CAB)	Body responsible for the assurance of clients, excluding accreditation. Note: In the context of this Code, an accreditation body is considered an oversight body rather than an assurance provider.	Adapted from ISO/IEC 17000:2020

Term	Similar terms	Definition	Definition source
Assurance system	conformity assessment (system / scheme), certification (system / scheme)	A systematic approach to carrying out assurance in which a set of requirements, rules and procedures are consistently applied. Note: In the context of this Code, 'assurance system' in assessment methodology requirements (7.3) applies to the assessment of clients. Oversight requirements for assessing the performance of assurance providers are included in the oversight mechanism (7.18)	Adapted from ISO/IEC 17000:2020
Causal pathway	results chain, impact pathway, change pathway, change process	The logical and causal relationships between activities/strategies, outputs, outcomes, and impacts.	Adapted from Center for Theory of Change
Chain of custody		A means by which inputs, outputs, and associated attributes are transferred, monitored and controlled as they move forward through each step in the supply chain.	Adapted from ISO 22095:2020
Claim(s)		Promotional communications about the sustainability attributes of a product, process, service, or organisation. This includes communications about the assurance status of a client and/or the client's association with the scheme. Note: These communications can be business-to-business or business to-consumer and can be made by the scheme owner or by its clients. Claims can be made via a range of media including text, logos, labels, trust marks, etc.	ISEAL Credibility Principles v2
Claims system		A systematic approach to managing claims use by clients and other stakeholders, in which a set of rules and procedures is consistently applied.	ISEAL
Client	user, participant, member	The person, organisation, or enterprise that is applying the standard or performance requirements and being assessed against it.	ISEAL
Code of conduct		A defined set of rules, standards, acceptable and unacceptable practices outlining what is expected of staff, suppliers, partners, or others.	ISEAL
Competence		The quality of having sufficient knowledge, judgement, and skill for a particular duty.	Adapted from ISO 9000:2015
Complaint		Expression of dissatisfaction, other than an 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/IEC 17000:2020
Conflict of interest		Any circumstance in which the impartiality and professional responsibilities of an individual or organisation are, could be, or may appear to be compromised. Thus, conflict of interest can be actual, potential, or perceived.	ISEAL
Conformity	compliance	Demonstration that requirements of a standard or performance measure are fulfilled.	Adapted from ISO 9000:2015

Term	Similar terms	Definition	Definition source
Consensus		General agreement, characterised by the absence of sustained opposition to substantial issues by any important stakeholder group. Note: Consensus should be the result of a process seeking to take into account the views of interested stakeholders, particularly those directly affected, and to reconcile any conflicting arguments. It need not imply unanimity.	Adapted from ISO/IEC Guide 2: 2004
Corrective action		An action to eliminate the cause of a non-conformity or another undesirable situation and to prevent recurrence.	Adapted from ISO 9000:2015
Data		Reinterpretable representation of information in a formalised manner suitable for communication, interpretation or processing. Note: Data can be qualitative or quantitative.	Adapted from ISO/IEC 2382
Data and information management system	data management system, information management system	Procedures, processes, and structures for gathering, storing, organising, analysing, and distributing information and data.	ISEAL
Data governance		The framework used to maintain, control, monitor and protect the use of data by individuals and applications.	ISEAL
Data quality		The degree to which data is valid (i.e., the data is an accurate representation of what it is intended to represent) and is fit for its intended use.	ISEAL
Data rights	data ownership	The possession, authority over, and responsibility for data assets. Data rights determine the scope and approach to governance and accountability for data management.	ISEAL
Data taxonomy		A tool for data categorisation and classification based upon relationships and common characteristics.	Adapted from ISO/IEC TS 38505-3:2021
Dispute		Any disagreement between parties (e.g., a complaint, grievance).	ISEAL
Dispute resolution system	complaints mechanism, grievance mechanism	A mechanism that allows individuals, communities, or organisations to raise and resolve complaints and grievances with scheme owners, assurance providers, or oversight bodies.	Adapted from the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
Diversity, equity and inclusion		The creation of opportunities and reduction of disparities in opportunities and outcomes for diverse communities; fair and respectful treatment of all people; the creation of an environment where everyone feels welcome and respected and able to fully participate.	Adapted from University of Toronto glossary of terms: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion
Due diligence		The ongoing process enterprises carry out to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address actual and potential negative impacts in their own operations, their supply chain and other business relationships.	Adapted from OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct
Easily accessible		Findable and available in an effortless way, such as through an organisation's website.	ISEAL

Term	Similar terms	Definition	Definition source
Effects	intended effects, unintended effects	Intended or unintended change due directly or indirectly to an intervention.	OECD Glossary Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management, 2nd Edition (2022)
Exception	variance	An instance when a requirement in a standard or policy is excluded from an assessment for being not applicable or is adapted for suitability to a particular circumstance.	ISEAL
Governance structure	scheme governance	The roles, responsibilities and relationships of the decision-making bodies that have the responsibility and accountability for the scheme and its components.	ISEAL
Grievance		Formal, legal or non-legal (or 'judicial/non-judicial') complaint from affected stakeholders about the negative impacts they incur that are generated by the scheme owner, implementing partners, or its clients.	Adapted from OECD Glossary of Technical Terms Related to Due Diligence
Group		An organised 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 (e.g., groups of farmers, of retail stores, of distributors).	ISEAL
Group member		The individual enterprise (e.g., farmer, retail store owner, distributor) that is enrolled in a group.	ISEAL
Guiding framework		Sets out the objectives, scope and operational approach for an area of work. For example, see the MEL Guiding framework in 5.1.	ISEAL
Impacts	intended impacts, unintended impacts, results, sustainability objectives	Long-term, higher-level changes resulting from the scheme. Intended impacts are the long-term, higher-level changes the scheme owner intends for its scheme to produce.	Adapted from OECD Glossary Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management, 2nd Edition (2022)
Impartiality		Presence of objectivity within the scheme, its implementation, and its decision-making bodies, where objectivity is the freedom from bias or freedom from conflicts of interest	Adapted from ISO/IEC 17000:2020
Implementing partner		An individual, group, enterprise, or organisation, to which the scheme owner has delegated responsibility for the implementation of the scheme or scheme component, such as assurance or oversight. For example, assurance providers or oversight bodies.	ISEAL
Indicator	monitoring indicator, performance indicator	Quantitative or qualitative factor or variable of interest that provides a means to track and understand changes and performance. Indicators may be related to the scheme, its clients, scheme or client performance or results, or the context in which the scheme or client operates.	Adapted from OECD Glossary Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, 2nd Edition (2022)
Indicator protocol		A detailed explanation of how an indicator is constructed and is to be measured. It includes the metrics needed for an indicator, units of measure, definitions for key terms, data source(s), and approach used for data collection.	ISEAL
Integrity		The accuracy and consistency of the scheme, scheme component, or attribute that contributes to the reliability of the scheme.	ISEAL

Term	Similar terms	Definition	Definition source
Internal audit	internal assessment, first-party assessment	An assessment carried out by an organisation on itself in order to determine the extent to which specified requirements are fulfilled.	Adapted from ISO/IEC 17000:2020
Internal management system		The documented set of procedures and processes that a group implements to ensure it can achieve 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.	ISEAL
Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (system)	MEL; monitoring and evaluation; MEL system	An ongoing set of interconnected functions, processes and activities that involve the systematic collection or collation and analysis of data and information to provide management and other stakeholders with an indication of the extent of progress and improvement, achievement of intended results, the occurrence of unintended effects or implementation problems, answers to specific learning questions, and lessons to support continual improvement.	Adapted from OECD Glossary Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management, 2nd edition (2022)
Non-conformity	non-compliance	A requirement identified as non-fulfilled during an assessment.	Adapted from ISO 9000:2015
Outcomes	results	Short-term and medium-term results or changes resulting from the outputs of a scheme or part of a scheme.	Adapted from OECD Glossary Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, 2nd Edition (2022)
Output	results	The products, capital goods, or services that result directly from the activities of a scheme or part of a scheme.	Adapted from OECD Glossary Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, 2nd Edition (2022)
Outsourcing		The contractual obtaining of goods or services from a third party.	ISEAL
Oversight	accreditation	Responsibility for ensuring that assurance providers are competent, impartial and consistent when performing specific assurance activities.	ISEAL
Oversight body		Body that assesses the performance of assurance providers. Note: Can be an accreditation body.	ISEAL
Oversight mechanism		The requirements, rules and procedures that enable the evaluation of assurance providers.	ISEAL
Policy of association		A legally enforceable policy that defines unacceptable positions, practices, or activities by stakeholders that are associated with the scheme owner, and the means of disassociation with those stakeholders.	Adapted from FSC Policy of Association
Proprietary data		Information for which the rights of ownership are restricted so that the ability to freely distribute the data is limited.	ISEAL

Term	Similar terms	Definition	Definition source
Proxy accreditation		A type of oversight employed by a scheme owner, whereby recognition of another scheme's oversight mechanism is deemed partially sufficient to demonstrate quality of assurance.	ISEAL
Publicly available		Obtainable by any person, without unreasonable barriers of access.	ISEAL
Remediate		Effectively redress negative impacts or effects (including cumulative or historic negative impacts).	ISEAL Credibility Principles v2
Requirement	criteria	A need or expectation that is stated in normative documents such as standards or technical specifications.	Adapted from ISO/IEC 17000:2020
Results	outputs, outcomes, effects, impacts	The outputs, outcomes, and impacts (intended or unintended, positive or negative) resulting from the implementation of a scheme.	Adapted from OECD Glossary Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management, 2nd Edition (2022)
Review		An assessment of an element of the scheme that determines if a revision of that element is necessary. Note: A review can assess qualities such as continued relevance, effectiveness, validity, or suitability.	ISEAL
Revision		The process of updating a scheme component or element.	ISEAL
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.	ISEAL
Risk management plan		A documented process that allows individual and overall threats to be understood and managed proactively, reducing or minimising risks to an acceptable level.	ISEAL
Safeguarding policy		A documented process or procedure that defines the protection needed for vulnerable groups, individuals, communities, and stakeholders from discrimination or any form of harm.	ISEAL
Sampling protocol		The policy or procedure that defines the scale and nature of a sample needed to confidently ascertain performance or compliance against a standard or system requirement. The protocol will define all of the factors used or considered to determine an adequate sample size for assessment.	ISEAL

Term	Similar terms	Definition	Definition source
Scheme	sustainability system, sustainability standards, certification programmes, voluntary sustainability standards (VSS), multistakeholder initiatives (MSI), market-based initiatives.	The collective set of decisions and strategies carried out by an organisation or group of organisations to: • establish standards or similar tools focused on one or more sustainability issues • measure, monitor, or verify performance or progress against these tools • allow for claims Note: A scheme can also undertake additional strategies that contribute to its sustainability outcomes and impacts, such as capacity-building or advocacy work. See ISEAL's resources on sustainability systems for more information.	Adapted from ISEAL Credibility Principles v2
Scheme components		A subset of activities (often representing a system, process, or department), that contribute to or result in the scheme's defined sustainability outcomes or that back up the scheme's controlled claims and communications about the results. Core scheme components include: standard-setting; monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL); assurance; and claims.	ISEAL
Scheme owner	standard setter	The legally constituted organisation that is responsible for the standards or performance requirements and accountable for the effectiveness of the assurance and claims management systems. The scheme owner determines the objectives and scope of the scheme, as well as the rules for how the scheme will operate. Note: The scheme owner can be the standards owner, assurance provider, a governmental authority, trade association, group of assurance providers, or other body.	ISEAL
Scheme performance		The contribution of the scheme towards its intended sustainability outcomes and impacts.	ISEAL
Stakeholders	interested and/or affected parties	Individuals or groups who are interested in or who will be affected by the decisions or activities of the scheme.	Adapted from ISEAL Credibility Principles v2
Standard	tool, code	A document that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for products or services, or related processes and production methods, with which compliance is not mandatory. Note: It may also include or deal exclusively with terminology, symbols, packaging, marking, or labelling requirements as they apply to a product, service, process or production method. Note: in the context of the Code, the term standard is inclusive of similar tools that define sustainability performance levels or improvement pathways.	Adapted from WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade
Standards equivalence		The sufficiency of other standards to provide the same level of sustainability performance in a similar context that is relevant and applicable to the scheme.	ISEAL

Term	Similar terms	Definition	Definition source
Strategies		The approaches and activities implemented by a sustainability system in pursuit of its sustainability objectives.	Adapted from ISEAL Credibility Principles v2
Substantive		Involving matters of major or practical importance to those concerned. In the context of sustainability standards or performance requirements a substantive revision changes the practices or performance levels required of the client.	ISEAL
Sustainability		Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability has three main interdependent dimensions: social, environmental, and economic.	ISEAL Credibility Principles v2
Theory of change	results framework, logical framework	A planning and management tool that defines all building blocks required to bring about a defined long-term goal or impact. This set of connected building blocks, made up of outputs and short and medium term expected outcomes, is often depicted graphically as a causal pathway that maps the expected steps and links in the change process. A theory of change also identifies assumptions underlying the logic and steps in the causal pathway.	Adapted from Center for Theory of Change
Threat		Any event, action, potential action, or inaction that could prevent an organisation from achieving its objectives. Quantifying the likelihood and severity of a threat in a specific context creates the risk categorisation.	ISEAL
Traceability		The ability to track and verify the history and location of a material's movement through defined stages of production, processing and distribution.	Adapted from ISO 22095:200
Under-represented stakeholders		Individuals or groups who are interested in or who will be affected by the decisions or activities of the scheme but are either not included or only partially included, notified, or aware of the decisions or activities of the scheme.	ISEAL
Whistleblower protection policy		A document that outlines how those who report wrongdoings are to be protected from retribution, retaliation, or any other possible negative outcome that may be directly linked to their whistleblowing actions.	ISEAL

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