

High Carbon Stock Approach

Quality Review Process

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Scope	3
Registered HCS Approach Practitioners and Practitioner Organisations	3
Starting the HCS Assessment	4
HCS Assessment Team Qualifications	4
Peer Review	5
Peer Review Panel	5
Key Information on the peer review process for HCS assessments	5
Information to be presented to the Peer Review Panel	6
Output of the Peer Review Panel	6

Scope

The procedure outlined in this document should be followed for all HCS assessments completed by members of the Steering Group, as well as any other non-member who requests review by the HCS Approach Steering Group.

The Quality Review Process mainly focuses on the quality of the HCS forest identification, however, the procedure also considers other elements. For example, it also includes a cursory review of the quality of the HCV/environmental impact assessment and FPIC/community consultation, and looks at how both are integrated alongside HCS in the proposed land use and conservation plan.

The procedure is valid for HCS assessments conducted before 1 August 2017. Any HCS assessments conducted after 1 August 2017 will be conducted jointly with HCV assessments according to the HCV-HCS Assessment Manual. HCV-HCS joint assessments completed will need to follow the HCV Resource Network (HCVRN) ALS Quality Review system that will be coordinated by HCVRN and HCS Approach Quality Assurance Working Group. More information is available [here](#).

In the transition to the ALS, the HCS Approach Quality Assurance Working Group is considering changes to the training requirements for new and existing practitioners as well.

Registered HCS Approach Practitioners and Practitioner Organisations

These are the:

- Practitioners who have attended an HCS Approach Practitioner Training organised by the HCS Approach Secretariat and;
- The plantation companies or practitioner organisations who have sent at least two practitioner staff to an HCS Approach Practitioner Training organised by the HCS Approach Secretariat and who have paid a registration fee to the Secretariat.

Only registered HCS Approach Practitioners working within a registered Practitioner Organisation can lead HCS assessments (see 'HCS Assessment Team Qualifications' below)¹, but the assessment team may include individuals from non-registered organisations.

Registered organisations and practitioners must agree to follow the HCS Approach methodology as explained in the HCS Approach Toolkit and inform the HCS Approach Secretariat of any changes which might affect their registration, for instance if a staff member who has attended a HCS Approach training has left the organisation. Registered organisations are expected to commit adequate internal resources, including internal staff training, to support the execution of quality HCS assessments.

Note that individuals who have attended HCS Approach Practitioner trainings and are registered can transfer and work under a different registered organisation, i.e. they could be counted as one of the two staff required to be trained and registered. If this leaves the original Registered Practitioner Organisation without two trained and registered staff members, the original organisation would need to have a new member of their staff trained and registered in order to keep their organisational

¹ Note: prior to leading an assessment, it is strongly encouraged for assessors to obtain experience in the field, for those that have not engaged in an HCS assessment previously. The Training provides guidance on a technical level, but is not a replacement for the required practical experience for conducting a quality HCS assessment. To assist in providing practical guidance, mentorship opportunities have been included in the practitioner registration fee, to be provided as part of the organisation's first assessment to the Quality Review Process.

registration. Registered Practitioner Organisations whose registration is affected by staff departure must inform the HCS Approach Secretariat so that this transition can be arranged.

Starting the HCS Assessment

All companies conducting or commissioning HCS assessments will be requested to submit the following information to the HCS Approach Secretariat, at the start of the assessment:

- Product
- Country/Region
- Size of the development
- Nature of land use rights, tenure, ownership
- Details of any FPIC or HCV processes which are completed or ongoing, including timelines
- Status of HCV Assessment submission to HCV Resource Network Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS)
- Details of relevant certifications, ongoing or achieved
- Outside organisations contracted to help undertake the HCS assessment, if any
- Composition of the HCS assessment team
- Timeline for completing the assessment

This information may eventually be logged on the public HCS Approach website.

HCS Assessment Team Qualifications

The assessment team must have the following members and qualifications. Note that not all of the team members need to be from a Registered HCS Approach Practitioner Organisation.

Team leader: Must be from a Registered HCS Approach Practitioner Organisation and have attended a HCS Approach Practitioner Training. This person is responsible for making sure that the HCS Approach methodology is followed throughout the process; the required integration with HCV, FPIC, community land use maps, and other data; presenting the final land use and conservation plan; and meeting the Quality Review Process requirements.

Land cover image analysis and GIS experts: At least one must be from a Registered HCS Approach Practitioner Organisation and have attended a HCS Approach Practitioner Training. It is preferred that image analysts have at least a tertiary level qualification in GIS and at least two years of experience, including with forest field measurement. The team must have expertise in mapping software in order to be able to go through the Decision Tree and create the final land use map. Note that the HCS Approach Steering Group is developing additional training for image analysts which, once available, will be required for any new registered organisations and provided as an optional training course for already-registered organisations.

Forest inventory team members: The forest inventory team is generally made up of 6-8 people, including a team leader with a tertiary level qualification in forestry, botany or related field, and who has experience with forest inventory and identification of tree the local species. Further details of the recommended survey team are found on page 57 of the HCS Approach Toolkit.

Conservation expert: This person will oversee any Rapid Biodiversity Assessments and advise on HCV and HCS conservation during the creation of the final land use plan. He or she must have research and/or conservation experience in the type of forest of concern. This function could be fulfilled by the team leader if he or she has the relevant training.

Social expert: This person has experience with participatory mapping, community engagement, and/or Free, Prior and Informed Consent processes, and will be able to ensure the quality of the social aspects of the HCV assessment and community engagement efforts. This function could be fulfilled by the team leader if he or she has the relevant experience.

Peer Review

HCS assessments must be submitted to the HCS Approach Secretariat for peer review by a small panel of experts before final publication. This section briefly describes the information that must be presented and the process for Peer Review. For full guidance on the submission of HCS assessments to the HCS Approach Quality Review Process, please view the HCS Approach Quality Review Process Guide for Companies & Practitioners, available on the HCS Approach website.

If insufficient information is available to complete the review (e.g. no Patch Analysis completed), this report is either rejected prior to commencing review, or the company is advised that feedback will be more focussed on how to carry out additional steps, with the suggestion that the final report is later submitted for further review.

Peer Review Panel

The panel to consist of one lead reviewer and one to two additional expert reviewers (total 2-3). The panel must have the following expertise:

1. Forest-related Remote Sensing/GIS, inventory and statistics
2. Tropical forest ecology, forest disturbance and regeneration
3. Social values, community rights and participatory mapping

In addition, it is recommended that the panel have the following expertise:

4. Conservation planning

Note:

- All should preferably have experience on ground within the country of the HCS assessment.
- The lead reviewer should have experience of the whole HCS Approach process and in-country experience
- All should have been involved with a HCS assessment
- All should have an understanding of the principles of Forest Patch Conservation and Land Use Planning for plantation development.
- All should have a working knowledge of HCV assessments/procedures

Key Information on the peer review process for HCS assessments

- The company for which the HCS assessment was completed cannot select the review panel; this is decided by the Steering Group/Quality Assurance Working Group, probably by rotation of listed individuals. However, the company may request different panel members if the company perceives a conflict of interest.
- Cost will be USD 2500 payable to the Secretariat². The Secretariat will then pay the reviewers for their time. Likely, the lead reviewer would need two full days, one day to review and one day to

² Cost for companies listed as Registered Practitioner Organisations that have paid the registration fee is **USD 1750** for first time submissions.

coordinate other reviewers and with the company. The other one or two specialists would require between 0.5 – 1 day. The registration fee paid by HCS Approach Registered Practitioner Organisations will be deducted from the total for first time submissions. For the first HCS assessment it is recommended to use the peer review team before the final study is completed.

- The peer review process is intended to be desk-based. However, the Steering Group may request field verification visits to be undertaken at an additional cost.

Information to be presented to the Peer Review Panel

The Steering Group has developed a Summary Report template³ which will need to be filled out by companies submitting HCS assessments at the start of the peer review. The Summary Report template (available on the HCS Approach website) outlines the full set of information/documents to be presented to the Peer Review Panel in order for them to ensure that the HCS Approach methodology was followed. The template will require such information as:

- Project Description
- Names and qualifications of the HCS Assessment Team members
- Land cover stratification map
- Shape files of community land use maps showing any garden/farmland areas
- Satellite images from which stratification was made
- Methods of stratification forest inventory results

For a complete checklist of documents/data, see Appendix II of the HCS Approach Quality Review Process Guide for Companies & Practitioners. This checklist will also indicate the documents/data that will be published on the HCS Approach website.

Output of the Peer Review Panel

- The Peer Review Panel will provide recommendations on how to finalise or improve the HCS report and process going forward. The recommendations will be presented in the form of a Peer Review Report.
- The company may make changes and re-submit the Summary Report for review before the Peer Review panel's findings are published. One round of revisions is included in the Peer Review fee; any further rounds might require additional fees to pay for reviewing time.
- The company may also add a public response to the published peer review findings.
- No official 'approval' will be provided as this is not certification.
- The company which commissioned the review can state that they completed the HCS Approach Steering Group's Quality Review Process.

The Steering Group has developed a Peer Review Report Template⁴ to ensure that all aspects of the HCS Approach methodology are assessed, and that the peer review is conducted in a consistent and standard manner.

³ The Summary Report template is available on the HCS Approach website: <http://highcarbonstock.org/how-to-submit-an-assessment/>

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