

# High Carbon Stock Approach

## Quality Review Process *Including a Guide for Companies and Practitioners*

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## HCS APPROACH QUALITY REVIEW PROCESS: An Overview

### Scope

#### I Stand-alone HCS Assessments

The procedure outlined in this document should be followed for all stand-alone High Carbon Stock (HCS) assessments completed by members of the Steering Group, as well as any other non-members who request 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 High Conservation Values (HCV)/environmental impact assessment and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)/community consultation and looks at how both are integrated alongside HCS in the proposed land use and conservation plan.

The HCS Approach Steering Group does not require third-party certification in order to verify that HCS assessments were carried out according to the methodology explained in the HCS Approach Toolkit. Instead, companies must use trained practitioners to conduct their assessments and submit each assessment to a small Peer Review Panel. The Peer Review Panel will conduct a desk-based review<sup>1</sup> and their feedback will be published alongside a summary of the assessment. Stakeholders can then enter into a dialogue with the company about the results.

For a more in-depth guidance for companies/practitioners on submitting HCS assessments to the HCS Approach Quality Review Process, please refer to the section on the “Guide for Companies and Practitioners” in Appendix III.

#### II Integrated HCV-HCSA Assessments

The procedure outlined here is valid for HCS assessments conducted before November 2017. Any HCS assessments starting after November 2017 will be conducted jointly with HCV assessments according to the HCV-HCSA Assessment Manual.<sup>2</sup> Completed HCV-HCSA joint assessments will need to follow the HCV Resource Network (HCVRN) Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS) Quality Review system that will be coordinated by HCVRN. More information is available [here](#).

In the transition to the ALS, the HCS Approach QAWG will be considering changes to the training requirements for new and existing practitioners as well.

**To find out about Integrated HCV-HCSA assessments, you may contact the HCVRN Secretariat at [info@hcvnetwork.org](mailto:info@hcvnetwork.org).**

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the integrated procedure is not adapted for smallholder or landscape-level integrated assessments. Please contact the Secretariat if you plan to do a landscape-level HCS assessment.

## HCS Assessment Team Qualifications

### I Registered HCS Approach Practitioners and Practitioner Organisations<sup>3</sup>

If a HCS assessment is a stand-alone assessment which began before November 2017, these organisations are the registered organisations that may lead HCS assessments as part of the Quality Review Process.

The Registered HCS Approach Practitioners and Practitioner Organisations are:

- 1) Practitioners who have attended the HCS Approach Practitioner Training organised by the HCS Approach Secretariat and;
- 2) The plantation companies or Practitioner Organisations who have sent at least two practitioner staff to the 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)<sup>4</sup>, 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, when a staff member who has attended a HCS Approach training 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 registration. Registered Practitioner Organisations whose registration is affected by staff departure must inform the HCS Approach Secretariat so that this transition can be arranged.

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<sup>3</sup> For a full list of HCS Approach Registered Practitioners and Registered Practitioner Organisations, please see the HCS Approach Website here: <http://highcarbonstock.org/hcs-approach-quality-review-process/hcs-approach-registered-organisations/>

<sup>4</sup> 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.

## II HCS Assessment Team Qualifications

The assessment team must have the following members and qualifications. Note that a list of Registered Practitioner Organisations, from which at least two employees have been trained in the HCS Approach, is available [here](#). Not all of the team members need to be from a Registered HCS Approach Practitioner Organisation.

***Team leader:*** Must 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 member of the land cover image specialists on the team 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 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.

***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 a species identification technician/botanist who has experience with forest inventory and identification of tree species in plots. Further details of the recommended survey team can be found in [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 (FPIC) 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.

## HCSA Peer Review Process

### I General Information

HCS assessments must be submitted to the HCS Approach Secretariat for Peer Review by a small panel of experts before final publication (herein referred to as Peer Review Panel). This section briefly describes the information that must be presented and the process flow for Peer Review. For full guidance on the submission of HCS assessments to the HCS Approach Quality Review Process, please see the below section which covers a Guide for Companies and Practitioners.

If there is insufficient information 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 peer review feedback will be more focused on how to carry out additional steps, with the suggestion that the final report is later submitted for further review.

### II Peer Review Panel

The Peer Review Panel is to consist of one lead reviewer and one to two additional expert Peer Reviewers (total 2-3). The Peer Review Panel must have expertise in forest-related Remote Sensing/GIS, inventory and statistics, tropical forest ecology, forest disturbance and regeneration, social values, community rights and participatory mapping, and in addition, it is recommended that the Peer Review Panel have expertise in conservation planning. For more information, refer to **Appendix I**.

The Peer Review Panel is decided by the HCSA Secretariat and QAWG, by rotation and depending on availability of a list of recognised individuals. However, the company may request to change the Peer Reviewer(s) if the company perceives a conflict of interest. This request must be justified.

### III Costs

Scope	Cost
<b>Standard submissions</b>	<b>USD 3,000</b> for all standard assessments, which will include payable fees to the Peer Review Panel and the Secretariat administration fees.
<b>Submissions for Registered Practitioner Organisations</b>	First time submissions: <b>USD 2,250<sup>5</sup></b> Subsequent submissions: <b>USD 3,000</b>
<b>Special cases</b>	Additional costs do apply for non-standard assessments (e.g. regional basis, etc.) and the final costs for these assessments will need to be agreed between the Company and the Secretariat prior to the commencement of quality review process.

#### Payment Process

- The Secretariat will commence Peer Review once payment is received from the Company.
- Payment for Peer Review is submitted to the HCS Approach Secretariat. The Secretariat will coordinate payment of the respective fees to the Peer Reviewers.
- If a review is cancelled after the first round of feedback is given, the Secretariat will close the review and pay the Peer Reviewers.

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<sup>5</sup> The registration fee (USD 750) paid during your participation in the HCS Approach Practitioner Training is deducted from the total. It can only be claimed once. This is not applicable to organisations that did not pay the registration fee.

## IV Timeline

The actual review time for each assessment submitted can vary from one (1) – three (3) months, as each review will depend on the availability of the appointed Peer Reviewers and the time needed by company to prepare the complete documentation needed. After the complete submission of documentations to the Secretariat, the Peer Review starts following the complete payment by the Company; and is finalised once the Summary Report and accompanying documents have been published on the HCS Approach website.

- **Before the start of Peer Review:** The Secretariat needs to wait until the company’s HCV report has finished at least first round of review by HCVRN ALS, or until it is completely finished to achieve Satisfactory result with HCVRN ALS, before the Secretariat can start on the HCSA peer review assessment. In the case where the HCV report is deemed Unsatisfactory by HCVRN ALS, the company needs to rework on their HCV report until it achieves Satisfactory result before we can start on the HCSA peer review assessment. These are applicable to HCV reports done after the HCVRN ALS started in January 2015.

For the HCV reports done prior to HCVRN ALS (before January 2015), the Secretariat can continue with the HCSA peer review assessment on HCV section.

- **1<sup>st</sup> round of Peer Review:** The Peer Reviewers will have about<sup>6</sup> two (2) weeks to complete the Peer Review Report with their findings and recommendations based on the Summary Report and supporting documents;
- **Company review:** The Company then has about two (2) weeks to address the findings/recommendations and provide their responses, an updated Summary Report if needed and produce further documents for a full final review. However, if the company takes longer than **one (1) month** to provide their responses without reason, the review is “**paused**” and this will be reflected on the HCSA website. If the company takes longer than **three (3) months** to revert back with their responses without reason, the review will be **cancelled** and will need to undergo re-submission with a new panel. This also means full fees for the process will need to be charged again.
- **Final round of review:** The Peer Reviewers then have another two (2) weeks to finalise the findings and recommendations before producing a final Peer Review Report.

After the final report is produced, the company has about **two (2) weeks** to provide a public response either as an accompany document or in-line comments to the Peer Review Report. For more information, see **Appendix II**.

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<sup>6</sup> **Two (2) weeks** is an approximate time for both Peer Reviewers and the Company at each stage but depending on certain circumstances, request for extension is possible with justification to be approved by the HCSA Secretariat and QAWG.

## Submitting for Peer Review

### I Register your HCS Assessment

Company will be requested to register their HCS assessment with the HCS Approach Secretariat through the **HCS Assessment Registration form**.<sup>7</sup> The basic information will be logged onto the HCS Approach website.

### II Submissions for Peer Review

Next, the registered company submitting for HCS assessments will need to fill in the **Summary Report** template<sup>8</sup>. The Summary Report template outlines the full set of information/documents to be presented to the Peer Review Panel in order for them to review if the HCS Approach methodology was followed throughout the assessment.

For a complete checklist of documents/data required through the Peer Review Process, see **Appendix II**. This checklist will also indicate the documents/data that will be published on the HCS Approach website.

### III Outcomes of Peer Review Process

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**.<sup>9</sup> This template ensures that all aspects of the HCS Approach methodology are assessed, and that the Peer Review is conducted in a consistent and standard manner.

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, either as an accompanying letter or in-line comments embedded within the Peer Review Report, which will be uploaded onto the website.

It is **important to note** the following:

- **No official 'approval' will be provided as this process is not a certification.** The company which commissioned the review can state that they have completed the HCS Approach Steering Group's Quality Review Process.

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<sup>7</sup> See **Appendix II**

<sup>8</sup> See **Appendix II**

<sup>9</sup> See **Appendix II**

## Appendix I: Requirements for Peer Review Panel<sup>10</sup>

The Peer Review Panel will consist of one lead reviewer and one to two additional expert reviewers (total 2-3). The Peer Review 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**

It is also recommended that the Peer Review Panel have the following expertise:

- 4. Conservation planning**

*In Addition:*

- 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.

### Suggested division of labour

No.	Section of HCS assessment
1	Initial image classification (using ArcGIS or similar), refining classification after Forest Inventory, and Patch Analysis Decision Tree.
2	Forest Inventory and statistics (carbon calculation).
3	Review of community mapping/social integration process, Social Impact Assessment, social sections of HCV assessment.
4	HCV quality review, Rapid Biodiversity Assessment (if any).
5	Summary of findings of Peer Review Panel and whether the assessment followed the HCS Approach (lead reviewer).

<sup>10</sup> For a list of the current Peer Review Panel engaged for the HCS Approach Peer Review Process, please see the HCS Approach Website: <http://highcarbonstock.org/hcs-approach-quality-review-process/hcsa-peer-review-panellists/>

## Appendix II: HCSA Peer Review Process Documents

Template/ Document <sup>11</sup>	Description	Notes before publishing onto <u>Registered HCS Assessment</u> page
HCSA Assessment Registration	Information about HCS assessment area.	Basic information will be published on HCSA website when registered.
HCS Assessment Summary Report	Provides all relevant information related to the assessment.	The Appendix, which includes supplemental information provided for the Peer Review, will be removed before the Report is published onto the Website.
HCSA Peer Review Report	Contains the Peer Reviewer’s findings and recommendations.	Final findings and recommendations will be updated in light of responses provided by the Company during their Peer Review phase.
Company’s public response	If a Company wishes to make an additional statement relating to the assessment or in response to the findings, they may add a public response to the published Peer Review findings, either as an accompanying letter or in-line comments embedded within the Peer Review Report, which will be uploaded onto the website.	This only applies to companies that wish to submit a public response.

<sup>11</sup> All documents available on HCS Approach Website: <http://highcarbonstock.org/documents/>

## Appendix III: GUIDE FOR COMPANIES AND PRACTITIONERS

This section aims to provide a more in-depth guidance for companies or practitioners on submitting HCS assessments through the Peer Review Process. To begin your submission, please get in touch with the HCS Approach Secretariat at [QA@highcarbonstock.org](mailto:QA@highcarbonstock.org).

### Overview of the process

No.	Step	Description	Documents
<b>REGISTRATION</b>			
1	Register your HCS assessment	Company to submit registration to the Secretariat. The HCS assessment will be registered onto the HCSA Website.	HCS Assessment Registration form
<b>SUBMISSION</b>			
2	Submit your HCS assessment for Peer Review	This includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Submitting the Summary Report using the template provided.</li> <li>2) Alongside the Summary Report, you will be asked to submit supporting documents and information <i>via</i> a link to SharePoint for the peer reviewers to do their reviews.</li> <li>3) You will also be prompted to confirm the details below for Secretariat to use as a basis to engage with the right Peer Reviewers and schedule the review accordingly:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Languages of reports to be submitted</li> <li>ii. Conflicts of Interest with Peer Reviewers</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	Summary Report & Supporting documents to be uploaded on the SharePoint
3	Make payment	Peer Review can only start once payment is received. Companies requiring DGT form to inform the Secretariat and the process of acquiring the approved form will take minimum 14 working days.	
4	Peer Review Begins	The Peer Reviewers will gain access to the SharePoint where all completed documents will be made available for the duration of the review period. The Company will be updated once the review has started.	
<b>PEER REVIEW PROCESS</b>			
5	1 <sup>st</sup> Round of Review	Peer Reviewers to complete the Peer Review Report with their findings and recommendations based on the Summary Report and supporting documents.	Peer Review Report draft 1
6	Company Review	The Company can choose to address the findings/recommendations and provide their responses, and to update the Summary Report if needed and produce further documents for a full final review. Else,	Company Review of Peer Review

		to accept the peer review report as it is and to be published on the HCSA website.	Report draft 1
7	Final Review	Peer Reviewers to finalise the findings and recommendations based on updated summary report/information provided by company (if any) before producing a final Peer Review Report.	Final Peer Review Report
8	Public Response	If the Company wishes to make an additional statement relating to the assessment or in response to the findings, they may add a public response to the published Peer Review findings, either as an accompanying letter or in-line comments embedded within the Peer Review Report, which will be uploaded onto the website.	
9	Publishing onto the Website	The final results will be published on the HCSA website and will include the Summary Report, Peer Review Report and public response, if any. Refer to <b>Appendix II</b> for more information.	

## Description of roles

Party	Description of Roles
<p><b>Reviewee</b></p>	<p>The Company that submits their assessment to be reviewed by the Peer Reviewers. The reviewee does not have to be a member of the HCS Approach Steering Group to submit their assessment for review, however, <b>all Steering Group members must submit their assessments for review.</b></p> <p>Once the Peer Review is published, it is the responsibility of the Reviewee to handle all further feedback/comments from their stakeholders with regards to the result of the review published.</p>
<p><b>Peer Review Panel</b></p>	<p>This is the panel of experts that will review the assessment submitted and will consist of one lead reviewer and 1-2 additional expert reviewers (total 2-3)<sup>12</sup>. The scope of the Peer Reviewers is to highlight any concerns they have about the assessment. As experts in the field are asked to bring their experience and knowledge to conduct the Peer Review to help the company improve its study. Peer Reviewers do not provide a pass/fail decision, but rather give expert opinions and suggestions for changes to the company's plans or activities to ensure that the HCS Approach methodology is implemented correctly.</p>
<p><b>Facilitator</b></p>	<p>The HCS Approach Secretariat will take on the role of facilitating the Peer Review, and will perform all administrative tasks, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receiving submissions, providing guidelines and other supporting documents;</li> <li>• Ensure submissions from Companies and Peer Reviewers are complete;</li> <li>• Correspond with Reviewees and Peer Review Panel, to provide support for all parties throughout the process;</li> <li>• Coordinate all payment-related matters regarding the Peer Review Process;</li> <li>• Liaise with the HCS Approach QAWG when required;</li> <li>• Publish the results of the Peer Review on the HCS Approach website.</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> To view the requirements of the Peer Review Panel, please see **Appendix I**.