

## High Carbon Stock Approach: Scope of Applicability for RSPO Certification

On the 15th of November 2018, the RSPO's general assembly adopted the '*RSPO Principles & Criteria for the Production of Sustainable Palm Oil (2018)*' which integrated the High Carbon Stock Approach (HCS Approach) as its main no deforestation requirement under criterion 7.12<sup>1</sup>. This document explains the scope of applicability of how the HCS Approach Toolkit can be used and when it requires formal trialing to support potential toolkit adaptations in different countries, biomes, production setups, and forest types.

[The HCS Approach](#) is a practical methodology that identifies High Carbon Stock forests in the humid tropics for conservation, through an integrated conservation land use plan, and allows degraded non-forest land (with no HCS forest and no High Conservation Values) to be developed for agricultural or plantation commodities (including palm oil) while ensuring the rights and livelihoods of local peoples are respected.

### HCSA Toolkit Scope of Applicability for RSPO Certification

The HCS Approach was first developed in company landholdings with plans for new plantation development, assessing land cover over many hundreds or thousands of hectares, and in fragmented medium or low forest cover landscapes. To date the Toolkit has been applied in Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia), West Africa (Liberia, Ghana, Sierra Leone & Nigeria), Central Africa (Cameroon, Gabon), and the Pacific (Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands).

Based on the dozens of HCSA assessments which have been conducted in these diverse countries and contexts, the current Toolkit can be used to differentiate forest from degraded or non-forest areas in tropical moist forest landscapes. This means that the HCSA Toolkit can be used as-is for growers for whom the RSPO Principles and Criteria 2018 are applicable; this does not include independent smallholders.

#### *Using the HCS Approach in new countries*

When the HCS Approach is first implemented in a new country it is important to incorporate any learnings to assess if there are any clarifications or guidance to the methodology/Toolkit required in relation to its application in a local context. For example, due to faster rates of ecological succession of the humid tropical forests in Liberia and Papua New Guinea, it was found that the vegetation classes of Young Regenerating Forest and Scrub had a different composition and higher biomass compared to Kalimantan in Indonesia. This learning was incorporated into the second version of the HCSA Toolkit. Other examples could be where land tenure and social conditions are different, or where there are distinct local ecosystem types that need special consideration (such as Gelam forests – *Melaleuca spp.* in Indonesia), which have resulted in specific guidance and case studies being included in the Toolkit.

Due to these improvements to the Toolkit already having been made, land managers in tropical moist forest landscapes in countries where the Toolkit has not yet been applied should still be able to use the HCSA Toolkit

---

<sup>1</sup> RSPO secretariat has also published a guidance document '[Interpretation of Indicator 7.12.2 and Annex 5](#)' which shows how the new requirements apply in the different scenarios of existing and new certification. Therefore, Annex 5 may be used for compliance to meet RSPO certification requirements.

for land use planning purposes and to achieve RSPO certification. Using the Trialling Protocol developed by HCSA is not necessary. If any challenges arise or if support is needed, the landholder and/or assessor can

contact the HCSA Secretariat for official guidance and technical support. In addition, the methodology is determined to also be valid for scheme smallholders in the RSPO certification system.

For other forest types, or for doing landscape-level assessments, the HCS Toolkit cannot be used as-is and must be adapted through a formal trialling process. These scenarios are described in the next section.

## **HCSA Toolkit Adaptation and Formal Trialing-Required Scenarios**

*Using the HCS Approach in smallholder contexts, at the landscape level, or in other forest types*

### ***Smallholders***

Using the HCS Approach with independent smallholders will require modifications to the existing methodology and Toolkit.

The HCSA is developing a ‘*Simplified Approach to Identify, Manage and Monitor HCS forest and HCV areas for Smallholders*’ which will be used, in collaboration with RSPO, to develop a simplified combined HCV-HCS approach to identify and conserve HCS forests by November 2020. For guidance on how independent smallholders should currently comply RSPO’s no deforestation requirements under the Principle 4 of the RSPO Independent Smallholder Standard, please refer to RSPO’s [website](#).

### ***Landscape level or in other forest types***

For forests other than tropical moist forests and for landscape-level large-scale assessments, the current Toolkit is not able to be used without modifications. The HCSA Steering Group has therefore developed a [protocol for trialing](#) to be able to capture learnings to support the development of new methodologies and necessary adaptations to the existing Toolkit. HCS Approach trials which adhere to the protocol and which are registered with the HCSA Secretariat via: [info@highcarbonstock.org](mailto:info@highcarbonstock.org) can claim that they are trialing the HCS Approach. HCSA is also planning to develop an adapted procedure for large-scale assessments (indicative HCSA/HCV assessments).

Once the trialing has been completed, the HCSA Steering Group Executive Committee must approve any guidance or advice notes as necessary to be used in these new scenarios, and/or make a recommendation to the HCSA Steering Group to approve any changes to the HCSA Toolkit itself. The table below outlines where new HCSA methodologies are being trialed in across various scales and countries. **Companies seeking RSPO certification in forest types outside of tropical moist forests can work with the HCSA to conduct a trial and consult with RSPO regarding how to comply with RSPO Criterion 7.12.**

## HCS Approach Trials (as of December 2019)<sup>2</sup>, by country and production scale

Country and type of forest:	HCS Approach being trialed	
	Independent Smallholders	Landscape
Tropical moist forests in:		
Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia)	✓	✓
Central America (Mexico)		✓
South America (Peru)		✓

For HCSA and RSPO application in **High Forest Cover landscapes in High Forest Cover countries**, a No Deforestation Joint Steering Group (NDJSG), a collaboration between RSPO and HCSA, has been established to oversee the development of procedures, methodologies, and guidance for the implementation of No Deforestation (C7.12) in High Forest Cover countries and landscapes. Please see the RSPO and HCSA websites for latest developments and outputs by the NDJSG.

<sup>2</sup> For the latest status on HCSA implementation and trials, see the HCSA website here: <http://highcarbonstock.org/further-resources/hcsa-application-and-trials-dashboard/>