



Appeal and Complaint Resolution Procedure

1 Policy

To ensure the public accountability of the certification process, all interested parties shall have access to procedures which consider appeals, complaints and comments in a timely and fair way. This is the Soil Association Certification's Appeal and Complaint Resolution Procedure for the Forestry Department.

Through this policy, we aim to:

- Resolve issues that are within the work of Soil Association Certification Scheme standards and procedures.
- Identify improvements to standards and procedures so that future complaints are avoided.

2 Scope

This procedure relates to appeals, complaints, and comments. Submissions should be made using the form CA-GEN-019a SA Certification Appeal Complaint or Comment Form.

This process is separate from the stakeholder consultation process for forest management (FM) certification which is described in IP-GEN-006 Consultation Policy and Guidelines (IP-GEN-006 is publicly available at: www.soilassociation.org/certification/forestry/)

NOTE: Soil Association Certification encourages all stakeholders with concerns in relation to forest management or controlled wood certification to engage fully with the stakeholder consultation process of the certificate holder and stakeholder consultation of the Soil Association prior to lodging an appeal or complaint. If you would like your comment to be considered as stakeholder consultation feedback, please e-mail:

ForestryConsultation@soilassociation.org

Alternatively, please find the phone number and address of our head office on the section 7 (Contacting us). Regional contact details are found on our website.

3 Definitions

Comment: expression of dissatisfaction by any person or organisation presented to a certification body. NOTE: Comments which are not presented as a complaint or appeal are considered case by case and are not subject to the full procedure.

Dispute: Umbrella term for any of the following:

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction **presented as a complaint** by any person or organisation to a certification body relating to the activities of that certification body and/ or the activities of their clients. In the context of Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®), a complaint must include:

- the name and contact information of the complainant
- a clear description of the issue, and

- evidence to support each element or aspect of the complaint.

NOTE: Soil Association may reject a complaint if there is compelling evidence that the complaint is vexatious. The decision to consider a complaint as vexatious shall be approved by the Soil Association Certification Committee. Any information relevant to a certificate holders' conformance with the applicable standards will be evaluated at the next scheduled audit.

Appeal: A request by the client **presented as an appeal** to the certification body for reconsideration of a decision it has made relating to that client.

4 Information about Soil Association Certification's Appeal and Complaint Resolution Procedure

This procedure is made available in the following ways:

- All applicants for certification are told about the procedure as part of the application process.
- If you are consulted during the certification process, you'll be told about the appeal and complaint resolution procedure at this time.
- This procedure document and related form is publicly available at:
<https://www.soilassociation.org/certification/forestry/contact-the-forestry-team/appeal-complaints-resolution-procedure/>
- In addition, the procedure can be sent to anyone (including clients) on request.

NB. Soil Association Certification will not take any discriminatory action in relation to the submission of an appeal/complaint.

5 Summary of the Procedure for Handling Complaints and Appeals

Soil Association Certification will take the following steps in relation to a complaint or appeal:

- Acknowledge receipt.
- Conduct an initial review of the submission and determine if substantiated as an appeal or complaint
- Provide an initial response, including an outline of the Soil Association Certification's proposed course of action to follow up on the complaint or appeal (as per 6.2 below) within two (2) weeks of receiving a complaint or appeal. Contact details for the Soil Association Certification person nominated to be engaged in the appeal or complaint process will be included in the initial response.
- Gather and verify all necessary information (as far as possible) in order to reach a decision
- Keep a record of all complaints and any actions taken.
- Allow the concerned party to have the opportunity to present the complaint or appeal to the nominated Soil Association Certification entity (as specified in 6.3 below).
- Keep parties informed of progress in evaluating the complaint/ appeal.
- Investigate the allegations and specify all the proposed actions in conclusion to the complaint or appeal within three (3) months of receiving the complaint or appeal.
- Notify the complainant when the complaint is considered to be closed, meaning that Soil Association Certification has gathered and verified all necessary information, investigated the concerns and taken a decision on the complaint.
- Respond to complaints and appeals in the same language that is used in the public summary certification report or agree with the complainant on the language used.
- Retain the anonymity of the complainant in relation to the client if this is requested by the complainant.
- Where necessary, inform the scheme owner that the complaint has been lodged.

Soil Association Certification will record and track complaints and appeals, as well as what actions need to be undertaken to resolve them.

Also see [Annex 1 Flow diagram for the Appeal and Complaint Process \(page 5\)](#).

6 Procedure

6.1 Initial Review

On receipt of a CA-GEN-019a SA Certification Appeal Complaint or Comment Form an initial review shall be conducted to determine if a complaint or appeal has been raised in accordance with the definitions in Section 3 (Definitions):

- Soil Association Certification will confirm whether the complaint or appeal relates to certification activities for which it is responsible and, if so, shall address it.
- Soil Association Certification will offer to continue further discussion in an attempt to resolve the issue. NB. If appropriate, we may recommend that you raise the issue directly with the certified organisation first.
- If you want your concern to be treated as an appeal or complaint, but have not submitted the required information, Soil Association Certification will need you to include a clear description of the appeal or complaint, objective evidence to support each element or aspect of the complaint or appeal and your contact details before the matter can be considered in accordance with this procedure.
- We will treat anonymous **or vexatious** complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction which are not substantiated as complaints as stakeholder comments, and we will address them during the next audit. All stakeholder comments **in relation to forest management or controlled wood certification** will be anonymised and included in the certification report along with the Soil Association response. All FSC FM **and Controlled Wood** public summary certification reports are available on the FSC database: <http://info.fsc.org/certificate.php>
- NOTE that 'vexatious' could be defined as the 'manifestly unjustified, inappropriate or improper use of a formal procedure'. The certification committee will consider all the relevant circumstances in order to reach a balanced conclusion as to whether a complaint is vexatious.
- A reply stating the action to be taken by SA or that no further action will be taken and why will be sent within 2 weeks.

6.2 Evaluation of the complaint or appeal

The course of action proposed by Soil Association Certification will depend on the nature of the complaint or appeal and may include one or more of the following options in order to gather and verify all necessary information (as far as possible) to reach a decision:

- Desk based assessment of complaint or appeal, reviewing documents, photographs, letters, and other evidence.
- Verification on site. If a complaint or appeal relates to the actions or activities of a client which require verification on site, we may think it best to make a site visit.

NB. Information about the client that is not publicly available and is obtained from sources other than the client (e.g. from a complainant) shall be treated as confidential, unless the source of information and the client give written consent to disclose it.

Following evaluation, an initial response, including an outline of the Soil Association Certification's proposed course of action to follow up on the complaint or appeal will be provided within two (2) weeks of receiving a complaint or appeal.

Recovery of costs for investigation of an appeal/complaint will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

6.3 Decision resolving the complaint or appeal

If you want to make a complaint or appeal, you will be given the chance to present it to the decision-maker i.e. person (s) who have no conflict of interest and are able to make an unbiased decision.

Depending on the nature of the complaint or appeal, the decision resolving the complaint or appeal will be made by, or reviewed and approved by person(s) not involved in the evaluation related to the complaint or appeal. One or more of the following methods will be used for making a decision on the complaint or appeal:

- A Soil Association Certification employee not involved in the evaluation and has no conflict of interest may make the decision resolving the complaint or appeal.
- A review of the decision and final approval may be conducted by the Head of Forestry at the request of the Soil Association Certification employee.
- The decision may be considered by the Soil Association Certification Limited's Certification Committee at the request of the Soil Association Employee or the Head of Forestry. The Certification Committee shall not include members who have been involved in the decision or otherwise have a conflict of interest.

6.4 Decision to close the complaint or appeal

Soil Association Certification will notify you when the complaint is considered closed, meaning that Soil Association Certification has gathered and verified all necessary information, investigated the allegations, taken a decision on the complaint and responded to you, as the complainant. Appeals and complaints shall be concluded within three months.

6.5 Further Resolution

In the case of appeals, further information is available on request in the Soil Association Guidance on appeals process for licensees' (C277fm). A secondary appeal may be heard by the Certification Scrutiny Committee.

If you are not satisfied with the Soil Association Certification's decision:

For Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification issues, you can take your complaint to

Assurance Services International GmbH (ASI)

Phone: +49 (228) 227 237 0

Email: asi-info@asi-assurance.org

Website: asi-assurance.org

Soil Association Certification's FSC License Code is FSC® A000525.

As the ultimate step the complaint may be referred to **FSC International**

Phone: +49 (0) 228 367 66 0

Email: info@fsc.org

Website: fsc.org/en

For Programme of Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) certification issues, you can take your complaint to the **PEFC National Office** or to **PEFC International**

Phone: +41 (22) 799 4540

Email: info@pefc.org

Website: pefc.org

Soil Association Certification's PEFC Licence code is PEFC/ 16-44-917.

7 Contacting Us

Should you require any further information, please contact us at:

Soil Association Certification - Forestry Team
Spear House, 51 Victoria Street, Bristol, BS1 6AD

Email: forestry@soilassociation.org

Phone: +44 (0)117 914 2435

Website: www.soilassociation.org/forestry

Annex 1 - Flow diagram for the appeal and complaint process

