



External complaints procedure

1 Purpose

1.1 The Climate and Landscape (C&L) Team at SA certification ensures that all complaints regarding C&L carbon programs (verbal and written) are logged, actioned and the outcome recorded and disseminated.

1.2 All C&L staff are responsible for logging any complaints received. For the purpose of this procedure, a complaint is considered to be:

- Dissatisfaction with any aspect of services provided by SA, SA Certification, the C&L Team or its subcontractors.
- Concern about non-validated carbon assertions and statements/opinions in association with Soil Association Certification
- Issues with a product, service, claim or carbon assertion made by a C&L client.

2 Receipt of complaints

2.1 All complaints are taken seriously and investigated according to this procedure.

2.2 Where possible, a complaint should be resolved on receipt which can be done verbally, where a phone call is received, though this must be recorded in Woody. However a complaint is received, the recipient will immediately take ownership and obtain full details of the complaint and contact details for the complainant, provided they are happy to be contacted. The C&L team will notify the team Manager immediately on receipt.

2.3 Information about the complainant will be kept confidential at all times and will not be shared with the subject(s) of the complaint unless expressly agreed. Requests by complainants to remain anonymous must be respected, and any known personal data must not be recorded by SAC in the complaint log.

2.4 Complainants are given the option to contact us or be contacted at an agreed time in order to obtain feedback on how the complaint was handled.

2.5 If a complaint is about a C&L client, the team will make a note in the correspondence record confirming a receipt. Further details are recorded as a complaint case on a separate database within Woody, to preserve the confidentiality of the complainant.

2.6 Where applicable, eg disputes relating to scheme standards or C&L schemes complaints may be more appropriately made directly with scheme owners.

2.7 All complaints will be acknowledged to the complainant as received within five working days of receipt by SA Certification/C&L Team.

3 Investigating complaints

3.1 Once a complaint is logged, it will be assigned to the appropriate member of staff to investigate, determined by the subject of the complaint.

3.2 All complaints about a client will be dealt with and appropriate action taken as long as an application or validation statement/opinion/opinion statement/opinion remains valid.

3.3 Any perceived risk to integrity will be investigated regardless of any stated intention by the client to cease validation in the future.

3.4 The relevant manager or member of staff handling the complaint may refer the complaint to a Certification Scrutiny Committee or scheme owner where appropriate. Appeals will be heard by the Certification Scrutiny Committee unless appropriate to defer to the scheme owner.

3.5 The C&L team aim to follow up fully and close service level complaints within 2 weeks. Complaints involving third parties may require a longer period for investigation and information gathering. Progress updates will be given to keep the complainant updated.

3.6 Complaints relating to project developers in C&L carbon schemes should also be notified to the scheme owner.

3.7 Instances where a references to SA certification in connection with unvalidated carbon/C&L schemes or credits are raised, the C&L team will check if it can be established if the client in connection with the carbon assertions/claims has been validated by SA certification. If not SA Certification contacts the person and/or organization making the claim requesting to cease and desist.

If after 30 days the claims are still being made then the C&L team contact trading standards and/or the scheme owner to notify them, at which point the complaint can be closed.

4 Closing complaints

4.1 A complaint is considered complete when SA Certification has done as much as is reasonably possible to investigate and resolve the complaint. A complaint should not be left open indefinitely; where cases are referred to third parties, e.g. scheme owners, SA Certification closes the complaint once it has discharged its own obligations.

4.2 The C&L Certification Manager will sign off complaints when they are satisfied they have been closed off noting the root cause, actions taken, how it has been left with the complainant, any change to process and outcome of the complaint.

4.3 In all cases, the outcome or action taken as a result of the complaint must be communicated to the complainant, unless anonymous. Where the complaint is about a C&L client, our responsibility is to maintain our clients confidentiality, and the only information SAC can give is that the complaint has been investigated, and the current status of the scheme validation/verification statement/opinion.

4.4 The C&L team maintains a regular review of the complaints register to ensure that outstanding actions are underway.

5 Appeals

5.1 If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint or the complaints procedure, an appeal should be made in writing within one month of the initial decision.

5.2 The matter is referred to the Certification Scrutiny Committee (CSC), made up of a wide range of SA Certification management, senior staff, industry experts, lay persons, scheme owners etc. If no new information is made available to support the initial complaint dispute, this will be classed as a reconsideration.

5.3 The CSC decision is considered final, however further appeals can be directed to scheme owners or Defra where appropriate.