

Soil Association Certification Climate and Landscape

Peatland Code

Guidance for applicants



About the Peatland Code

The Peatland Code is a scheme to support the **restoration of UK peatlands**. The scheme provides a funding mechanism for peatland projects to access carbon markets, whilst offering assurances to carbon buyers that any scheme they are investing in has been **validated and verified** to deliver the climate benefits it promises.

Land managers can use the Peatland Code to **generate new income streams** for peatland restoration. Used alongside government agri-environment schemes, which typically only pay for limited restoration activities, the additional funding can be used to **restore, manage, and maintain peatlands** in an improved condition in the long-term.

With 80% of the UK's Peatlands currently modified or damaged, the Peatland Code offers a way to restore peatlands and avoid millions of tonnes of carbon emissions annually, **helping combat climate change** whilst also improving water quality, mitigation of downstream flooding, and preventing biodiversity loss.

Soil Association Certification have been authorised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) UK Peatland Programme to validate Peatland Code projects.

With over 20 years' certification experience across multiple land-management sectors, including agriculture and forestry, Soil Association Certification can act as a trusted partner to support your Peatland Code project.



The Peatland Code process

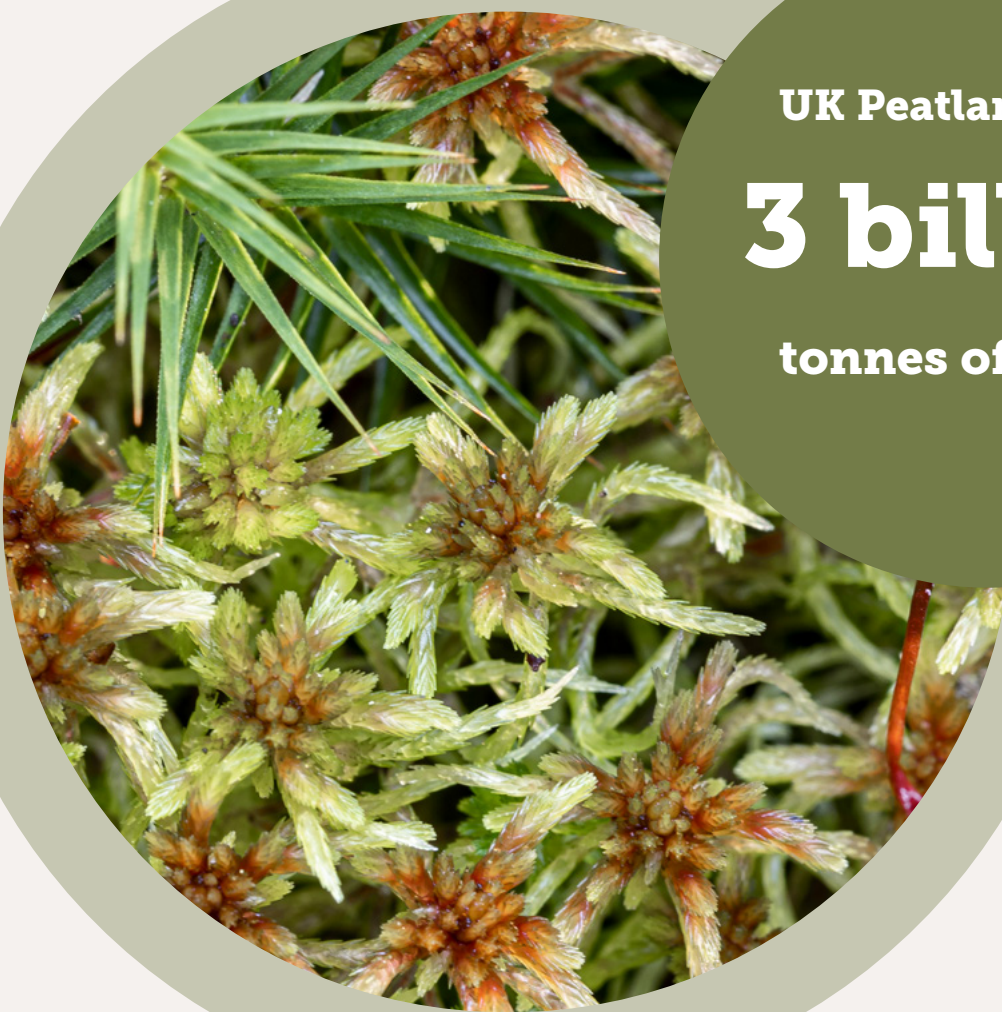
To take the first step to Peatland Code validation/verification you will first need to **register your project on the UK Peatland Code IHS Markit registry**. This should be done before the start of any restoration work.

➤ www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org

Approval of a project against the Peatland Code standards then follows a two-stage process:

1. Validation
2. Verification

Contact an approved Certification Body, such as Soil Association Certification to begin this process. Project validation should be achieved within 3 years of registration.



UK Peatlands store
3 billion
tonnes of carbon

Validation

Validation involves independent assessments by the appointed Certification Body to determine that the implementation of a project plan will result in the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions reduction asserted.

Overview of the Validation process:

1. Pre-Restoration Validation

Project plan and predicted GHG emission reductions evaluated.



2. Implementation of the Restoration Plan

Restoration work takes places.



3. Post-Restoration Validation

Restoration work evaluated against the validated documents.



1.

Pre-Restoration Validation

The project plan and its predicted GHG emission reductions are evaluated against the requirements of the Peatland Code to check if implementation of the project plan can be expected to result in the GHG emission reduction asserted.

Pre-Restoration Validation should take place before the implementation of the peatland restoration plan and will consist of a review of documentation to determine if Peatland Code requirements have been met. If needed however, restoration could start prior to completion of project validation, if sufficient baseline evidence is handed to us. The risk of not achieving project validation is for the project. In this instance, Pre-Restoration Validation should be achieved as soon as possible and before finishing the restoration.

Once Soil Association Certification is satisfied that the project has met all Peatland Code requirements a Validation Statement is issued, and the project will be listed on the UK Land Carbon Registry as Validated. The Validation Statement will expire three years from the date of issue.



2. Implementation of the Restoration Plan

After the Validation Statement has been issued the validated restoration plan can be implemented. Restoration can be done over two years for one single Peatland Code project.

The completion date of restoration activities is the project **Start Date**, and you will need to inform Soil Association Certification of said date. We will then agree a date for your Restoration Validation audit to be arranged.

Changes from the Restoration Plan

If the implemented restoration differed from the restoration plan submitted at project Validation, all relevant documents need to be updated and resubmitted during Post-Restoration Validation. The Validation statement may be withdrawn should Soil Association Certification determine that the proposed changes materially affect the GHG assertion. Changes to the restoration plan include changes in the area of peatland restored; changes in the amount of carbon emissions asserted; changes to the restoration techniques used.

3. Post-Restoration Validation

The Restoration Validation audit takes place within one year of the project Start Date.

Soil Association Certification will evaluate the restoration activities undertaken and assess whether any resulting impact on peatland condition category has been achieved. The evaluation will consist of a review of documentation and a site visit to determine if Peatland Code requirements have been met. During the site visit the independent Validator will walk over the site and carry out a risk-based assessment of any evidence on site at risk of reversal in condition category, e.g. evidence of increased deer numbers, erosion evidence, dams failing.

If no non-conformances are raised or if all non-conformances are suitably rectified within the required timeframe, as determined by Soil Association Certification, a Restoration Validation Statement will be issued.

Required Evidence to be provided for Pre-Restoration Validation

The following documents and information need to be provided to Soil Association Certification before a Validation can commence.

Documents should be submitted 4-6 months before restoration works are intended to go ahead on-site to ensure there is ample time to complete the Pre-Restoration Validation before works begin.

Documents created by the Peatland Code scheme can be accessed from [IUCN](#).

Key project documents

- Project Design Document
- Additionality Spreadsheet ([Standard 1.5](#))
- Assessment Unit Map(s) (created using the guidance within the Peatland Code Field Protocol)
- Restoration Management Plan ([Standard 2.1](#))
- Restoration Monitoring Plan ([Standard 2.2](#))
- Risk Assessment ([Standard 2.3](#))
- Signed Landowner and Project Developer Commitment Document (Standard 2.4)
- Emissions Calculator ([Standard 3.3](#))
- Peat depth survey spreadsheet, created as per the Peatland Code Field Protocol
- Survey map showing surveyed points and the Assessment Units present as per the Peatland Code Field Protocol

Key supporting evidence

- **Aerial photography or georeferenced photographs to support the Peat Survey**

This is essential so that we can confirm the baseline peatland condition remotely. If the evidence provided is insufficient to confirm the peatland condition, we will need to conduct our own site visit at extra cost.

- **Proof of ownership for the duration of the project**

Ownership can be demonstrated by title registers and plans in the land registry, if the project area is registered. Other suitable forms of evidence include title deeds or a solicitors or chartered surveyor's letter. If the land is leased then a certified copy of the lease is required (by solicitor or chartered surveyor) ([Standard 1.3](#)).

- **Signed commitment from landowner and tenants to commit to the requirements of the Peatland Code**

This should include a clause that states that if the land is sold, the current landowner must inform the future landowners of the commitment to the Peatland Code and any carbon contracts ([Standard 1.3](#)).

- **Proof of any Grant Funding**

For example Peatland ACTION funding.

- **Proof of any stakeholder consultation outcomes**

For project validation to be completed successfully, evidence must be supplied to the validators to show that proactive stakeholder engagement has taken place (PC Standard 1.4). Project developers must provide evidence of the stakeholders that have been contacted and provide access to all responses. Where concerns arise during engagement and consultation processes, the project developer shall enter into constructive dialogue to resolve the issues, incorporating any necessary changes in their project design.

What to expect for a Pre-Restoration Validation Audit

1. Submission of Key Documents

Your Pre-Restoration Validation will begin once contractual documents are signed and all Key Project Documents (listed above) are provided to Soil Association Certification. These will then be sent to one of our Validators who will review the documents and assess compliance to the Peatland Code Standards.

2. Appraisal of Key Documents by Validator

Upon receipt of your documents the Validator will begin an appraisal of your Project. If during this initial appraisal the Validator identifies any errors, omissions, or misstatements, or believes further evidence is required to prove compliance to the Standards, you will be contacted by the Validator to correct the issues, answer any questions, and provide additional evidence as required.

If the Validator is unable to satisfactorily confirm the baseline condition of the peat on your site remotely, they will request that an on-site audit is undertaken.

3. Return of Key Documents with comments from Validator

The Validator will either add comments directly onto your Project Documents, using the 'review' or 'comment' functions in Microsoft Word, or they will provide you with a list of comments and questions in an email or separate document.

You will need to save any versions of documents received from the Validator on file, archiving and replacing older versions, to ensure you are both working off the most recent version of the document. It is very easy for versions to become confused if you do not do this, delaying the Validation process.

4. Resubmission of adapted Key Documents

You will then need to update the documents or provide additional information to address the Validator's comments. If you are required to update a document (e.g. the PDD), make sure you update the version that was sent to you by the Validator, and rename it by adding your initials to the end of the file name.



Once you have addressed all comments, return all updated documents, plus any additional evidence to the Validator who will review your amendments and confirm whether their comments have been satisfactorily resolved.

Repeat Steps 2 to 4 until all comments raised by the Validator have been resolved. At this point the documents will be sent for independent review.

5. Independent review

Once the Validator is happy their comments are all addressed, they will send your Key Project Documents to an independent Reviewer, who will double check the documents and raise any issues they identify with the Validation.

The Validator will be expected to resolve these issues, which may require further input from you as the Project Developer to address the comment. For example, if the Reviewer notices an inconsistency between Key Project Documents, you may be asked to clarify which piece of information is correct and will be asked to update the documents to reflect this.

Once all of the Reviewer's comments are satisfactorily resolved, the set of Key Project Documents will be sent to the IUCN to conduct a second review.

6. IUCN's review

The IUCN will review the Key Project Documents to ensure the project meets the requirements of the Peatland Code Standard. If during this initial appraisal, the IUCN identifies any errors, omissions, or misstatements, or believes further evidence is required to prove compliance to the Standards, they will ask our Reviewer to correct the issues. As a result you may be contacted by the Validator again to provide further clarification on any points raised by the IUCN. Once the IUCN is satisfied the Key Project Documents fully demonstrate compliance to the Peatland Code Standard, they will contact Soil Association Certification to confirm this.

7. Validation complete and documents uploaded to the UK Land Carbon Registry

Following the IUCN's approval, we will upload the Key Project Documents to the UK Land Carbon registry and approve the Validation of your project.

As part of this process, we will create your Pre-Restoration Validation Statement which will summarise the key information about your project, including the Project Name, ID number, net area restored, and the amount of Pending Issuance Units that can be claimed by the project.

TOP TIPS

Preparing for Pre-Restoration Validation

Consistency is key!

To ensure a swift Validation, consistency is key. The information held within your project documents must not differ between documents. If you update a piece of key information in one document, you must ensure this is also updated on all other project documents where this information is held.

Key information points which often get overlooked are:

- Project Name (this needs to match the Registered name that appears on the Markit Registry)
- ID Number (this needs to match the Registered ID number as it appears on the Markit Registry)
- Grid Reference (this needs to match the grid reference that appears on the Markit Registry)
- Area of Assessment Units (the maps provided must also match your other documents)
- Expected PIUs – the table in the PDD must match the emissions calculator
- Percentage of project restoration and management costs that will be funded by carbon finance (the PDD must match the additionality spreadsheet)

Gather objective evidence

Before your project can be Validated you must provide objective evidence to support statements made in your documents and to prove compliance to each of the Peatland Code standards. For example, if you say you have consulted with neighbouring landlords about your project plan, you will be expected to provide evidence of this consultation.

Double check your baseline evidence

Soil Association Certification can remotely Validate your project, but only if you provide us with sufficient baseline evidence.

As outlined in the Peatland Code Field Protocol (V1.2), this evidence will need to be provided in the form of high-resolution aerial imagery, georeferenced photographs and/or drone imagery which clearly shows the conditions of the peat across the site. This evidence should be provided in conjunction with the on-site peat depth and condition survey spreadsheet, and photos should be numbered, and these numbered points should be shown on the map.

Use appropriate terminology

You should use consistent terminology throughout your Validation documents that is in line with the terminology used by the Peatland Code. For example, when referring to the different condition categories of peat present within your site, use the Assessment Unit names, put forward in the Peatland Code Field Protocol e.g. Actively Eroding Hagg/Gully.

Read the Standards carefully

To successfully Validate your project plan you must have met each requirement within the Peatland Code. For example, your Restoration Management Plan must include each bullet point listed under section 2.1. of the Peatland Code Standard document. If any of the bullet points are missing you will be required to update the plan and submit a new version to our contracted Auditor. Therefore, before submitting your documents for Validation, check that each requirement has been met.



Required evidence to be provided at Post-Restoration Validation

These documents must be submitted before Post-Restoration Validation can begin.

If the implemented restoration differed from the restoration plan submitted at project validation, all relevant documents need to be updated and resubmitted during Post-Restoration Validation. If necessary, an adjustment to the amount of PIUs issued will be made. When submitting the set of Key Documents below, please confirm whether any changes to the Validated documents has been made.

Documents created by the Peatland Code scheme can be accessed from the [IUCN](#).

Key Project Documents

- Project Design Document
- Additionality Spreadsheet ([Standard 1.5](#))
- Assessment Unit Map(s) (created using the guidance within the Peatland Code Field Protocol)
- Restoration Management Plan ([Standard 2.1](#))
- Restoration Monitoring Plan ([Standard 2.2](#))
- Risk Assessment ([Standard 2.3](#))
- Signed Landowner and Project Developer Commitment Document ([Standard 2.4](#))
- Emissions Calculator ([Standard 3.3](#))
- Final Restoration Report summarising the restoration activities that were carried out, including evidence of this, and cross referencing with the Validated Restoration Management Plan
- Maps and/or spatial data that outlines the restored area, and the restoration activities that were completed
- Photographic evidence of restoration activities undertaken. These should show before, during and after photos, preferably of all restoration techniques and machinery used

Key Supporting Evidence

- Aerial imagery of the site pre and post restoration
- Shape files if available, in .kmz or .kml format showing the restoration activities that were carried out
- Evidence to explain changes to the Validated Restoration plan (if applicable)
- Peatland ACTION final report document (if applicable)

What to expect for a Restoration Validation Audit

The Post-Restoration audit follows the same general processes as the Pre-Restoration Audit outlined above, but with one key difference: the inclusion of a site visit.

The Restoration Audit site visit

The aim of the site visit is to assess whether the Validated Restoration Management Plan has been put into action as anticipated, and whether there has been any impact on peatland condition category present within the site.

The Validator will prepare for the site visit by reviewing your Key Project Documents to get an idea of the size of the restored area(s), the number of restoration techniques used, and highlight any potential high-risk areas. They will then plan their site visit to ensure they are able to visit a good representation of all restoration techniques used on site, and focus their attention on any areas of concern.

During the site visit the Validator will walk over the site and carry out a risk-based assessment of any evidence on site that suggests a risk of reversal in the peat condition category, e.g., evidence of increased deer numbers, erosion evidence, dams failing.

If it is identified that there is a risk of reversal in the peat condition category, corrective actions may be raised which will require remedial action to be undertaken to avoid this reversal. For example, if a significant number of peat dams have failed, action will be needed to repair these dams. Evidence of the remedial action that is taken will then need to be submitted to Soil Association Certification.

If no non-conformances are raised or if all non-conformances are suitably rectified within the required timeframe, as determined by the Soil Association Certification, a Post-Restoration Validation Statement will be issued.



Verification

Following successful Validation and completion of the restoration activity a regular schedule of Verification Audits will be conducted by Soil Association Certification to ensure the project achieves and maintains the expected condition category change, delivering the expected Greenhouse Gas benefit over its duration.

The Verification audits involve a site visit by an independent Validator to determine if the requirements of the Peatland Code are met and any additional evidence may be considered, e.g. fixed-point photographs.

During the site visit the Validator will walk over the site and carry out a risk-based assessment of any evidence on site at risk of reversal in condition category, e.g. evidence of increased deer numbers, erosion evidence, dams failing.

If no non-conformances are raised or if all non-conformances are suitably rectified within the required timeframe, a Verification statement will be issued, and the project will be listed on the IHS Markit Peatland Code Registry as Verified.

Timeline of Verification Audits

Verification takes place at year 5 of the project "Start date" and thereafter every 10 years, an additional Verification is required at the end of the project if the time since last Verification is less than 10 years. For example for a 30 year project Verification would take place at year 5, 15, 25 and an additional Verification at year 30.

To find out more visit:

www.soilassociation.org/peatland-code

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