

Meeting the RSPO certification requirements for the management and monitoring of biodiversity and High Conservation Values

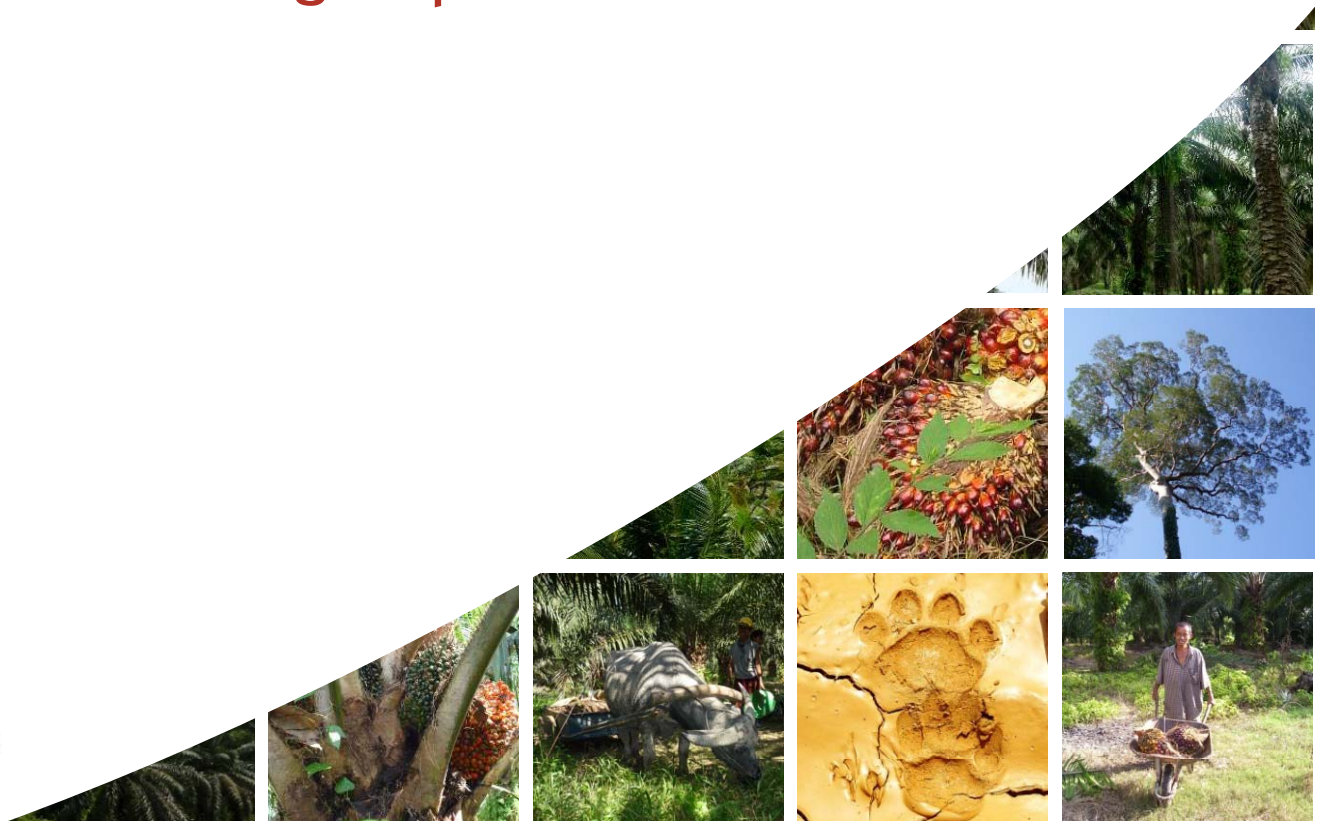
Guidance for smallholder groups and schemes

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Introduction

Purpose of this guidance document

This guidance document is intended for the managers of out-grower schemes or groups of independent smallholders to help their members comply with the certification requirements of the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), related to biodiversity management and maintaining High Conservation Values (HCVs).

These requirements apply to existing planted areas (Principle 5), and to new plantings (Principle 7).

Existing plantations should follow the guidance set out in Section 1. For any proposed new plantings or expansions, refer to Section 3.

The guidance is intended to be applied at the level of individual smallholdings. It is not intended for use by large plantation companies or anywhere where large scale forest conversion is planned. In such cases, the reader is referred to “*Good practice guidelines for High Conservation Value assessments: A practical guide for practitioners and auditors*” available from www.hcvnetwork.org or www.proforest.net.

Table 1. RSPO requirements relating to biodiversity and other HCVs

Criterion 5.2 The status of rare, threatened or endangered species and high conservation value habitats, if any, that exist in the plantation or that could be affected by plantation or mill management, shall be identified and their conservation taken into account in management plans and operations.

Criterion 7.1 A comprehensive and participatory independent social and environmental impact assessment is undertaken prior to establishing new plantings or operations, or expanding existing ones, and the results incorporated into planning, management and operations.

Criterion 7.3 New plantings since November 2005, have not replaced primary forest or any area required to maintain or enhance one or more High Conservation Values.

High Conservation Values and biodiversity

HCVs are highly significant environmental or social features which can occur in and around palm oil plantations, and may be affected by palm oil management. They include biodiversity values (rare or threatened species, rare habitat types) but also other environmental services (i.e. benefits that nature provides such as clean water), and social and cultural values.

There are 6 HCVs as outlined on the right hand side of this page.

In order to comply with the RSPO standard, palm oil growers need to demonstrate that their plantation management is not damaging or degrading any of these High Conservation Values.

To do this, the plantation area must be assessed for the potential presence of any of the HCVs listed on the right. If one or more of these features is found to exist, or if it is likely to be present, specific measures need to be taken to ensure that plantation management does not threaten or diminish the value.

HCV 1 Concentrations of biodiversity

- Protected areas
- Concentration of threatened species
- Concentration of endemic species
- Concentration of migratory species

HCV 2 Large landscape level forests

- Landscape level forest areas that contain most naturally occurring species

HCV 3 Rare or threatened ecosystems

- Rare ecosystems
- Ecosystems that are threatened by human actions

HCV 4 Services of nature in critical situations

- Protection from catastrophic flooding
- Protection from catastrophic erosion
- Protection from catastrophic fire

HCV 5 Basic needs for local people

- Sources of products or services where local people have no alternative source

HCV 6 Sites of critical cultural significance to local people

- Sites of cultural significance to local people

Section 1

Managing existing plantations

For existing planted areas, the overall management of these areas must be described in a management plan (RSPO Criterion 5.2). Any measures to protect biodiversity or other High Conservation Values must be:

- Based on an assessment of the possible presence of one or more of the HCVs
- Explained in the management plan

Therefore, group/scheme managers should answer the following *Key Questions* about their plantation areas.

There are two key questions to consider for biodiversity aspects, and three for environmental services, social and cultural aspects. These are explained using simple steps in the following sections.

Biodiversity aspects

Biodiversity values may be present in the plantation if there are forest patches in or around the plantation, or if the plantation area contains or borders with other natural habitats such as wetlands or grasslands. The two key questions to ask are:

Key questions for biodiversity assessment:

1. Does the plantation contain or share borders with natural forest areas?
2. Does the plantation contain or share borders with other natural habitats (e.g. wetland areas)?

If the answer is yes to either of these questions, there is a chance that these areas may contain High Conservation Value biodiversity features. The management plan must contain:

- An evaluation of the *condition* of the areas (are they affected by cultivation, or *natural forest* vegetation?)
- An evaluation of the *species* present (are there any *rare*, or *protected* species that are seen in the area or around the plantation? See Table 2)
- An evaluation of the *importance* of the examples in the plantation area relative to the surrounding landscape or region

Any areas that are in a 'natural' condition and that support rare or protected species may be valuable. They will need to be subject to a specific monitoring and protection plan.

Table 2. Rare or protected species

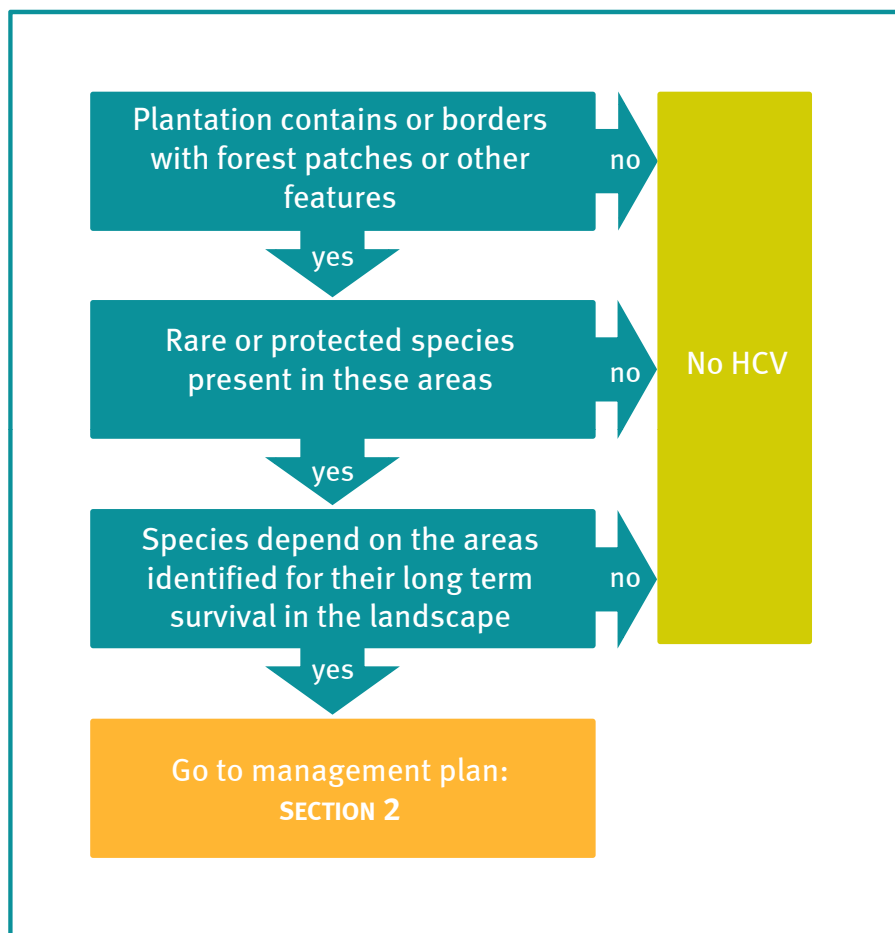
Rare or protected species are most likely to be species that are *dependent* on certain types of habitat, (e.g. forest, grassland or wetland). They are *specialist* species that cannot survive in agricultural landscapes. For example:

- Many hornbill species need large forest trees in which to nest, and certain fruiting trees that produce forest fruits on which they feed. They are specialist, forest dependent species.
- Proboscis monkeys rely on forest near rivers for their food. They are dependent on this type of habitat.
- Some species have special legal protection against hunting or harvesting. Usually these species are also rare or threatened. You will need to know which species are protected by law: ask the local authority for an up to date list.



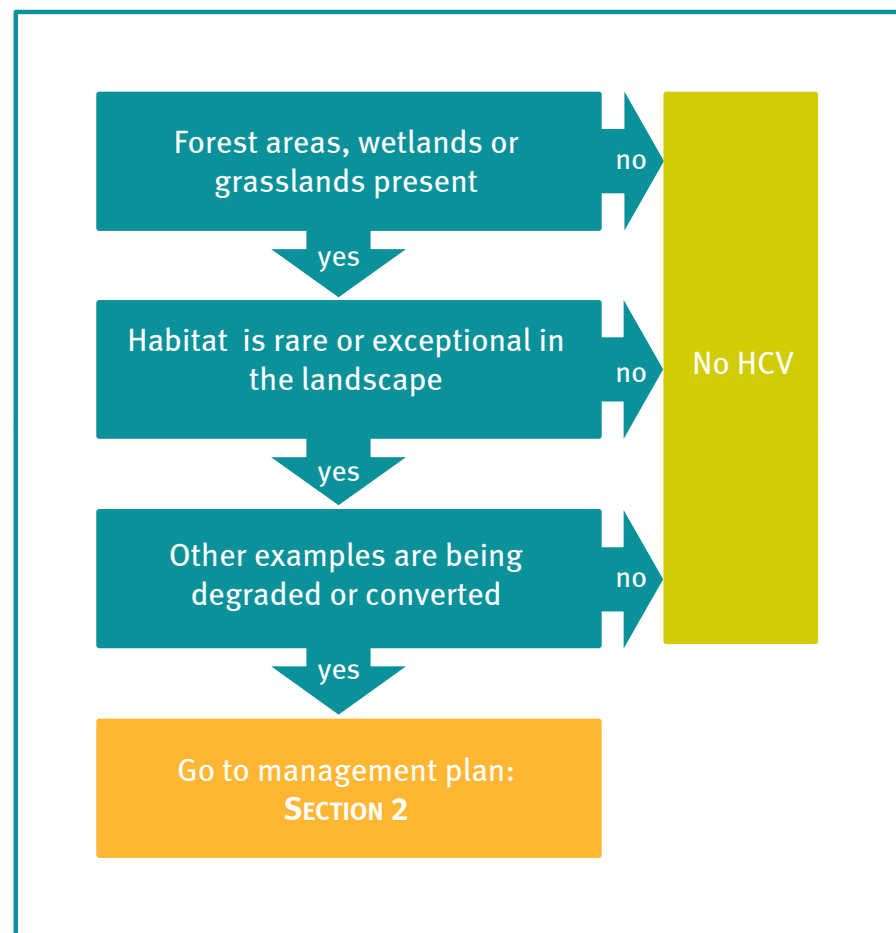
Key Question 1

Does the plantation contain or share borders with natural forest areas or other natural features?



Key Question 2

Does the plantation contain or share borders with other natural habitats (e.g. wetland areas)?



Environmental services and social aspects

Social aspects include any benefits provided by natural areas to local communities, including “environmental services”. There are three questions to consider for social aspects which may be considered High Conservation Values.

Key questions for social assessment:

3. Does the plantation contain any water courses or streams that provide local people with water?
4. Do local people collect products or hunt in the plantation area?
5. Does the plantation contain cultural or religious sites?

Answering these questions necessarily involves checking with the growers themselves and with local residents

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, the benefit provided by the natural areas identified may be a High Conservation Value. This will need to be described in detail in the management plan. In particular the management plan must show the following:

- An *evaluation* of who is using the resources, i.e. what products are being collected and for what uses.
- An *evaluation* of the importance of the area or site visited for the people’s livelihood or culture.

Bear in mind that the use rights of local people are also addressed in other parts of the certification process. See Criterion 2.3 for example.

Table 3. Other relevant requirements of RSPO

Criterion 2.2 The right to use the land can be demonstrated, and is not legitimately contested by local communities with demonstrable rights.

Criterion 2.3 Use of the land for oil palm does not diminish the legal rights or customary rights of other users without their free prior and informed consent.

Criterion 4.3 Practices minimise and control erosion and degradation of soils.

Criterion 4.4 Practices maintain the quality and availability of surface and ground water.

Criterion 6.1 Aspects of plantation and mill management, including re-planting, that have social impacts are identified in a participatory way, and plans to mitigate the negative impacts and promote the positive ones are made, implemented and monitored, to demonstrate continuous improvement.

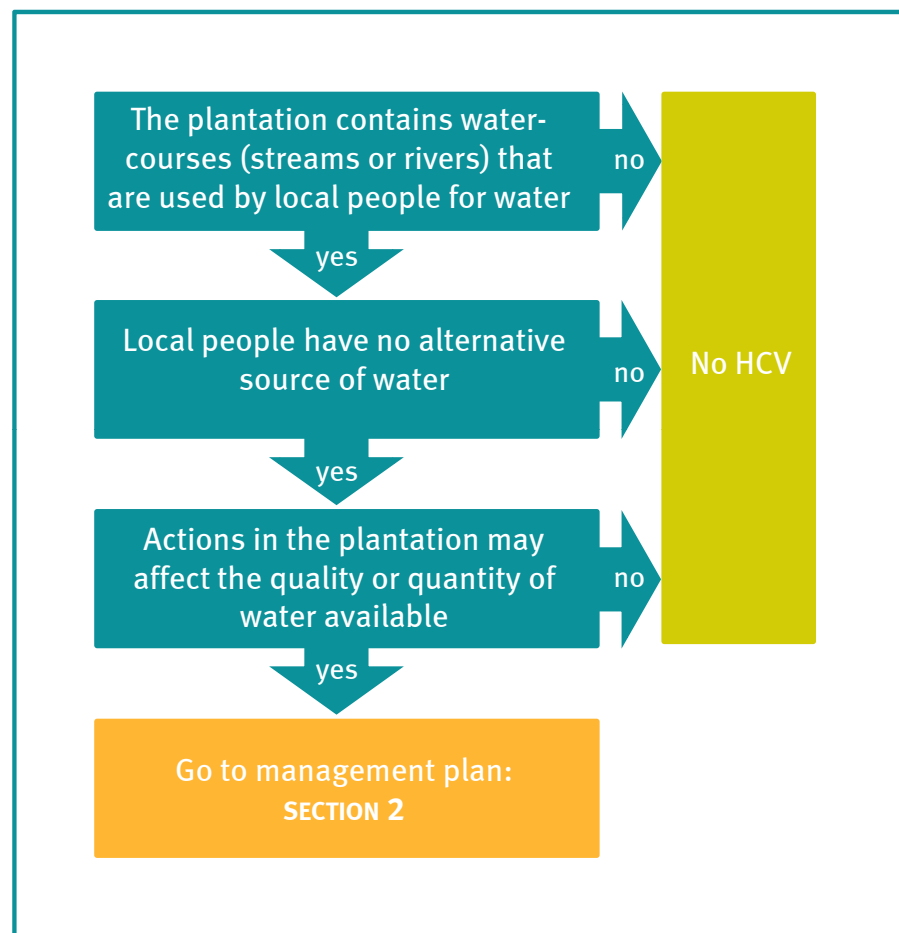
Criterion 6.4 Any negotiations concerning compensation for loss of legal or customary rights are dealt with through a documented system that enables indigenous peoples, local communities and other stakeholders to express their views through their own representative institutions.

Criterion 7.4 Extensive planting on steep terrain, and/or on marginal and fragile soils, is avoided.

Criterion 7.5 No new plantings are established on local peoples’ land without their free, prior and informed consent, dealt with through a documented system that enables indigenous peoples, local communities and other stakeholders to express their views through their own representative institutions.

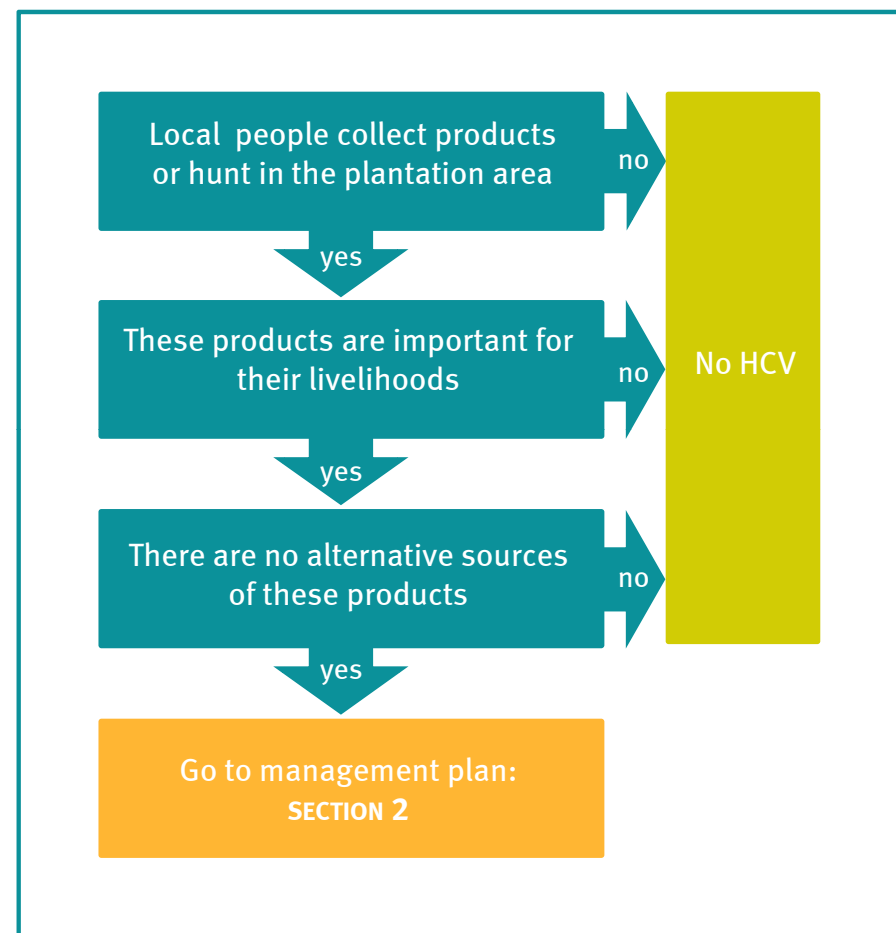
Key Question 3

Does the plantation contain any water courses or streams that provide local people with water?



Key Question 4

Do local people collect products or hunt in the plantation area?



Key Question 5

Does the plantation contain cultural or religious sites?



Section 2

Management and monitoring

If you think that your plantation may contain an HCV, this needs to be described in the management plan. Specific measures will need to be taken to ensure the value can be maintained. These also need to be spelled out in the management plan. To do this the following process is recommended:

1. **Define the objective:** For any High Conservation Values that exist, the aim should be to maintain or enhance the condition of the value.
 - Define precisely what needs to be maintained
 - Set targets or goals for what needs to be achieved
2. **Identify threats to the objective:** Things that may prevent you from achieving your objective, such as existing production practices, risks of fire or other disturbance, activities of local communities (e.g. hunting/trapping).
 - Evaluate whether threats are severe, immediate or both
 - Prioritise your own actions accordingly

3. **Put in place management measures:** These are measures you can take to reduce or eliminate a particular threat. For example, reduce the threat of soil erosion by improving road drainage and the use of silt traps. The threat of chemical pollution can be reduced by controlling the places where chemicals are stored and mixed, by safe disposal of used containers, and by avoiding the use of chemicals near streams and rivers.

This may include proactive measures, such as replanting riparian zones with natural vegetation in order to protect river banks and provide habitat for wild animals and plants.

4. **Evaluate effectiveness of management measures:** This involves checking that the management plan is properly applied. You should periodically re-assess the condition of the value to check whether the management measures have been effective.

This may require community consultation for some values, and may require a species survey or habitat quality assessment.

5. **Re-visit objectives:** This means making a judgement on whether the objectives are still sensible, or whether they need to be changed.

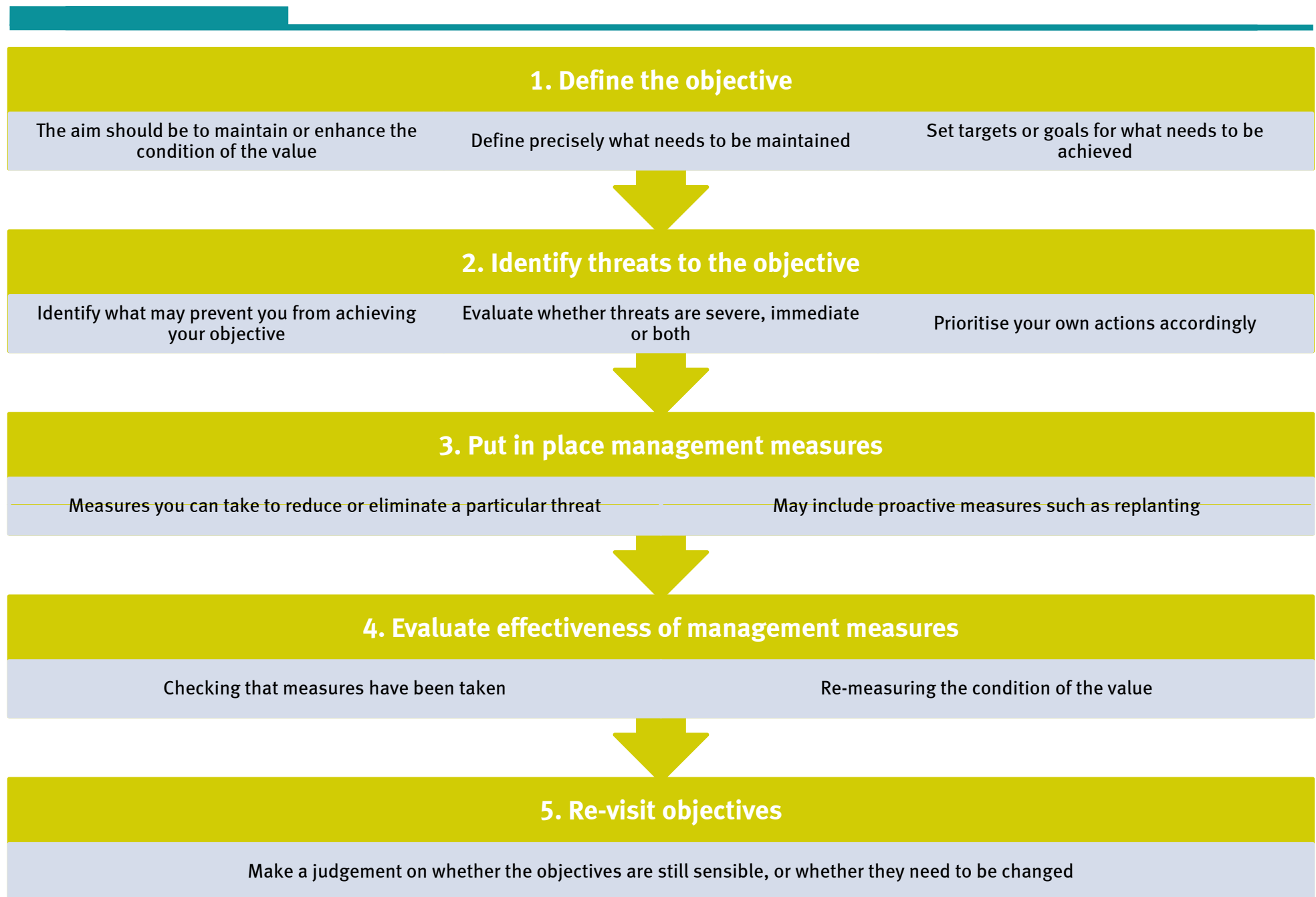


Table 4. Management plan example

Value	Objective	Threats	Management measures	Monitoring
Rare species of hornbill	Maintain 2 breeding pairs in riparian forest within plantation	Loss of nesting and fruiting trees	• Identify and mark all nesting trees	Every 6 months
			• Identify and mark all fruiting trees	Every 6 Months
			• Replanting of fruiting trees in degraded riparian areas	July - Aug
			• Education of local workers	March - April
		Clearance of nearby forest	• Collaborative planning with group members	Meeting on 18/06
			• Creation of group conservation area	Pending
		Hunting	• Education and information sharing	Beginning April
			• Community based monitoring	Beginning July

Section 3

New Plantings

RSPO certification requires that new plantings should not replace primary forest or HCV areas. If you are planning new plantings in areas that currently contain forest or other natural ecosystems (such as grasslands, peatlands or wetlands), or important community areas, it will be necessary to assess the area for the presence of High Conservation Values.

The assessment must look at the area where planting is planned and the surrounding area (or landscape). The assessment must consider the potential that any of the six HCVs could be present. Any areas of native forest, forest rubber plantations (e.g. tembawang in Kalimantan), or grasslands might be important for biodiversity or have other values. You should also consider areas that provide products and services or that protect downstream wetlands.

What you need to know

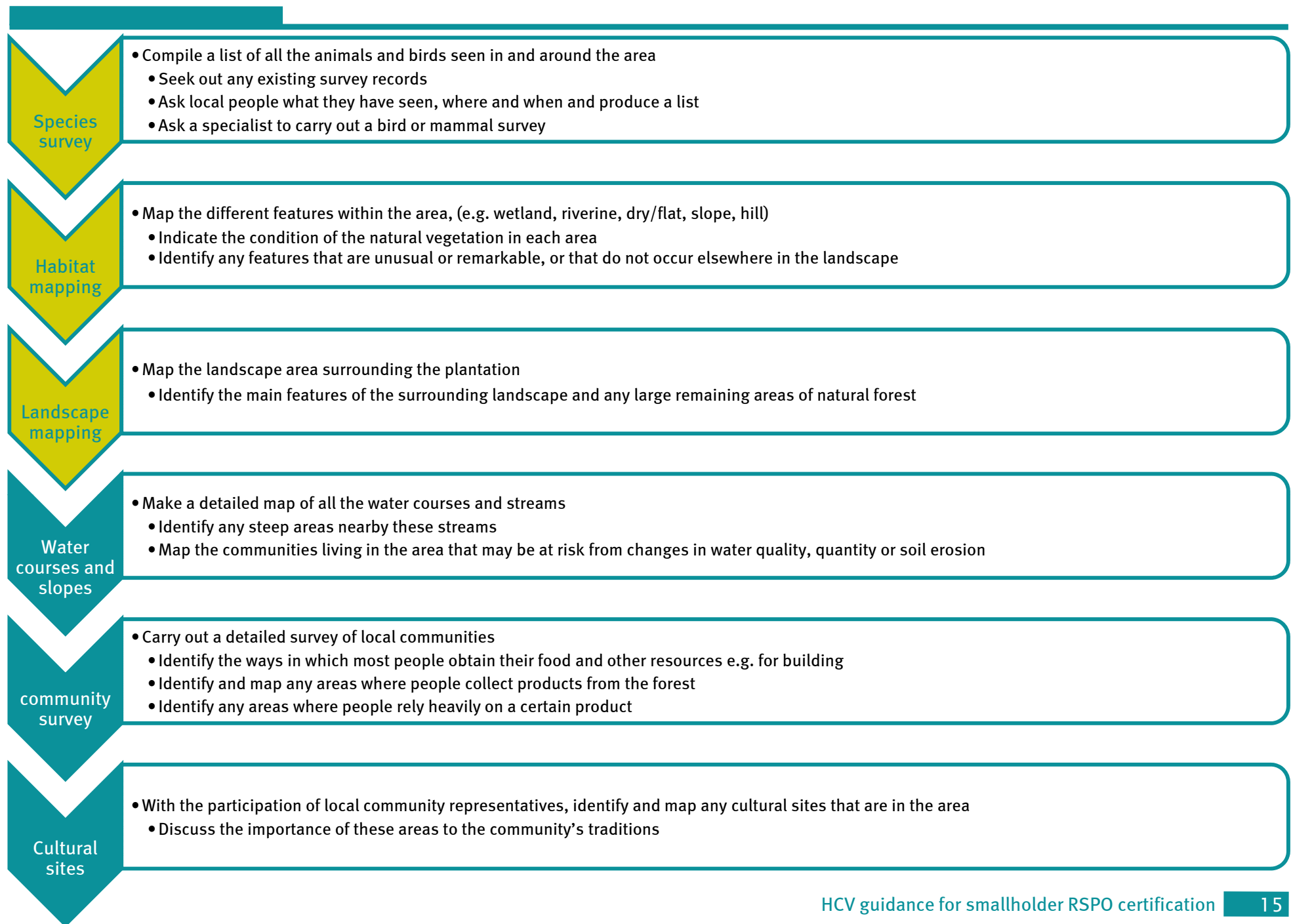
The first step is to be sure of what values exist in and around the planned plantation area, and where they are. If your country has an HCV Toolkit*, you should use it to help you decide whether the features might be HCVs. Otherwise, further guidance is available at www.hcvnetwork.org

You should never damage or convert areas which have such high importance.

You may find some values which are locally significant, but not important enough to be considered HCVs. New plantations in areas which don't have HCVs are allowed by RSPO, *but* Principle 7 does require you to take into account any social and environmental impacts, i.e. you should be sensitive to sites and features of local importance and plan to minimise your impact on these.

For new plantings, there are six aspects to investigate. It is very important to follow the six steps below, *before* any planting takes place.

* e.g. Indonesian HCV Toolkit 'PANDUAN IDENTIFIKASI Kawasan Bernilai Konservasi Tinggi Di Indonesia', June 2008: Available from www.hcvnetwork.org



Species Survey

Compile a list of all the animals and birds seen in and around the area.

To do this you should:

- Seek out any existing survey records.
- Ask local people what they have seen, where and when and produce a list.
- Ask a specialist to carry out a bird or mammal survey.

From the resulting species list, identify any that are protected species or that are known to be rare. Double-check which of these have definitely been seen recently in or around the area.

1

- Compile a list of all the animals and birds seen in and around the area
 - Seek out any existing survey records
 - Ask local people what they have seen, where and when and produce a list
 - Ask a specialist to carry out a bird or mammal survey

If one or more rare or protected species has been seen in the area, or the area contains a large number of mature specimens of endangered tree species, it may be considered an HCV



Note: Threatened tree species

In Indonesia and Malaysia, several of the native light hardwood tree species are listed as endangered species (e.g. *Shorea spp.* *Dryobalanops spp.*). If the area contains a large number of mature trees of these species, it may be a High Conservation Value area for the protection of these trees.

Note: Protected areas

Protected areas and their buffer zones will always be considered HCV areas. You will need to know what restrictions apply to activities in buffer zones before going any further.

Habitat Mapping

You will need to produce a map of the different habitat/ecosystem types within the proposed development area. This must include slope areas, riverine areas, waterlogged areas, etc.

Where such areas retain natural vegetation, you will need to assess how common or widespread they are in the wider landscape.

2

- Map the different features within the area, (e.g. wetland, riverine, dry/flat, slope, hill)
- Indicate the condition of the natural vegetation in each area
- Identify any features that are unusual, or that do not occur elsewhere in the landscape

Un-usual or remarkable features that retain natural vegetation may be considered an HCV

Landscape Mapping

Large areas of continuous forest can be very important for conserving biodiversity. They may be considered HCV areas. If the proposed area is part of a large forest block where these are rare in the region, it is likely to be an HCV Forest.

3

- Map the landscape area surrounding the plantation
- Identify the main features of the surrounding landscape and any large remaining areas of natural forest

If the area where you plan to plant is within a large area of natural forest, and these are rare or absent from the wider landscape, it may be considered an HCV area

Water courses and slopes

A detailed map of the water courses and drainage in the proposed area will need to be made. The map should include the locations of settlements with people that depend on the use of the water. If local people use the water, and the water quantity or quality could be affected by plantation operations, this needs to be investigated in detail.

4

- Make a detailed map of all the water courses and streams
- Identify any steep areas nearby these streams
- Map the communities living in the area that may be at risk from changes in water quality, quantity or soil erosion

If there are communities that depend on streams and water courses flowing through the area, these streams or nearby slopes may be HCV areas



Malaysian fisherman © Seb Ruiz

Basic needs

If there are settlements near the proposed development and it is possible that people collect products in the area, this will require a detailed survey.

5

- Carry out a detailed survey of local communities
 - Identify the ways in which most people obtain their food and other resource
 - Identify and map any areas where people collect products from the forest
 - Identify any areas where people rely heavily on a certain product

If there are any products or services that local people rely upon for an aspect of their livelihood, these may be HCVs

Mapping cultural sites

During the social survey, it will be necessary to ask if there are any cultural sites in the proposed development area. These could include for example: burial sites, sacred tree groves, ancestral holy sites or prayer grounds.

6

- In participation with local community representatives, identify and map any cultural sites that are in the area
 - Discuss the importance of these areas to the community's traditions

If there are any sites which the local community have used for several generations and form an important part of their cultural identity, these may be HCVs

Planting in areas with potential HCVs

If you have identified any areas where an HCV is potentially present, these areas ***cannot be converted*** to plantations until either you are certain that there is no HCV, or it is possible to adapt the plans so that the HCV is maintained. In any case, a detailed assessment of any HCVs that you have identified in Steps 1 to 6 will be required.

Conversion of areas that support HCVs ***will result in the loss of RSPO certification***.

In some special cases it may be possible to maintain or enhance the HCV while still carrying out planting in some areas. This will only be possible when:

- It can be shown in the management plan and through careful planning of operations that planting is compatible with the objective to maintain or enhance the High Conservation Value.
- The management plan has been consulted on with local communities and relevant experts (for example a specialist ecologist, if rare species are found), and that relevant concerns are taken into account *before* any vegetation is cleared.
- The planning process follows the five steps outlined in section 2 to show that threats can be reduced or eliminated, and measures can be effectively monitored.



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