



Biodiversity
Programme



Rules of Procedure of the Independent Experts Panel



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Biodiversity: no one should be left behind.

Version
1.0

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Acronyms and abbreviations

BCP	Biodiversity Crediting Project
CBCP	Cercarbono's Biodiversity Certification Programme
IEP	Independent Experts Panel
iVBC	Innovation Voluntary Biodiversity Credit
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
PMP	Project Management Plan
VBC	Voluntary Biodiversity Credit

Terms and definitions

Terms and definitions guiding the understanding of these IEP's rules have been deposited in the document *Terms and Definitions of the Cercarbono's Biodiversity Certification Programme*, available at www.cercarbono.com.

Foreword

The Rules of Procedure of the Independent Experts Panel (IEP) within the Cercarbono's Biodiversity Certification Programme (CBCP) are foundational to the effective functioning and oversight of biodiversity conservation initiatives. The comprehensive framework outlined in this document encompasses vital aspects of the Panel's operations, including membership criteria, methodology evaluation, validation procedures, and appeals management. By adhering to these rules, the IEP upholds principles of transparency, fairness, and accountability in certifying Biodiversity Crediting Projects (BCP).

This document has been endorsed by both the Cercarbono Chairman and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

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1 Introduction

The 'Rules of Procedure of the Independent Experts Panel' within the CBCP form a comprehensive framework encompassing crucial aspects of the Panel's operations. This document covers membership criteria, eligibility requirements, expertise prerequisites, selection procedures, code of conduct, operational framework, functions, and more, serving as a detailed roadmap for the effective functioning of the IEP. It outlines the composition of the IEP, the process for selecting experts, establishes operational protocols, and delineates the core functions of the Panel.

This foundational document offers clear guidance for the Panel's activities, ensuring a systematic approach to evaluating a diverse range of eligible projects. By strictly adhering to these procedural guidelines, the Panel upholds principles of transparency, fairness, and a steadfast commitment to advancing environmental conservation efforts. The IEP guarantees transparency, consistency, and maintains high standards in validating and verifying BCP and methodologies within the CBCP. Through these procedures, the Panel underscores its dedication to upholding integrity, fostering expertise, and promoting excellence in furthering environmental conservation initiatives and sustainable practices.

2 Scope and objective

2.1 Scope

The IEP within the CBCP is responsible for overseeing the validation and verification of BCPs, as well as reviewing innovative methodologies that fall under the certification programme's scope. As the governing body, the IEP ensures that projects and methodologies adhere to programme criteria and internationally recognized biodiversity standards. This includes comprehensive assessments of all eligible activities within the CBCP. Through meticulous scrutiny and adherence to the guidelines set forth in the Rules of Procedure, the IEP upholds transparency, fairness, and maintains the highest standards in certifying biodiversity credits to support global environmental preservation efforts.

2.2 Objective

The IEP is committed to serving as an independent, centralized, credible, and transparent authority for validating and verifying BCPs and reviewing new methodologies within the CBCP. Its goals are broad and centered on advancing excellence in biodiversity conservation practices.

- Upholding and championing high standards of scientific rigor, ethical integrity, and efficacy in biodiversity conservation efforts.
- Impartially evaluating BCP to ensure they meet strict criteria for positive ecological impact, financial viability, and social inclusivity to qualify for biodiversity credit certification.
- Reviewing new methodologies that foster innovation and advancement in biodiversity conservation, ensuring they are robust, repeatable, relevant, and in alignment with the CBCP Protocol.

- Facilitating stakeholder engagement and public participation in decision-making processes to bolster transparency and accountability.
- Constantly monitoring and evaluating the performance of approved projects and methodologies, offering recommendations for enhancements or discontinuation as needed.

Through these objectives, the IEP is committed to promoting responsible biodiversity management and conservation practices, making strides towards broader environmental sustainability objectives.

3 Advantages of an IEP in certifying Biodiversity Credits

The presence of a specialized IEP for certifying biodiversity credits provides several advantages for the CBCP. The following points outline the benefits of integrating an expert Panel into the certification process:

- **Comprehensive expertise:** by assembling a diverse group of experts with in-depth knowledge in various biodiversity-related fields, such as ecology, conservation biology, indigenous knowledge, and ecosystem management, an expert Panel ensures a comprehensive evaluation of projects.
- **Holistic assessment:** biodiversity conservation involves complex considerations spanning ecological, social, and cultural aspects. An expert Panel can assess projects holistically, taking into account ecological factors, the well-being of local communities, and the preservation of cultural heritage.
- **Interdisciplinary approach:** given that biodiversity conservation projects often intersect with various disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and economics, an expert Panel can integrate interdisciplinary insights to better understand the multifaceted impacts of projects.
- **Independent oversight:** while third-party bodies may provide independence, involving an expert Panel directly in the certification process offers additional oversight and accountability. The Panel's dedicated involvement ensures a thorough review of projects.
- **Continuous engagement:** an expert Panel can maintain ongoing engagement with certified projects, providing guidance and recommendations to improve project outcomes over time. This continuous involvement promotes adaptive management practices and enhances long-term results.
- **Customized criteria:** expert panels have the capability to develop customized evaluation criteria tailored to specific regional contexts, ecosystems, and conservation goals. This customization ensures that projects are assessed based on their unique characteristics.
- **Stakeholder representation:** by including representatives from local communities, indigenous groups, NGOs, and other stakeholders, an expert Panel ensures that diverse perspectives and voices are considered during the certification process, leading to more inclusive decision-making.
- **Scientific integrity:** the participation of renowned experts enhances the scientific rigor and credibility of the certification process. Their assessments bolster the credibility of the certified projects and the overall certification programme.

- **Capacity building:** expert panels can contribute to capacity-building by offering training, mentorship, and knowledge transfer to local practitioners, thereby strengthening conservation efforts at the grassroots level and building local expertise.
- **Adaptive learning:** biodiversity conservation is a dynamic field with evolving challenges. An expert panel can facilitate knowledge sharing, collaborative learning, and the adoption of best practices among certified projects, promoting continuous improvement and adaptation to changing circumstances.

By incorporating an IEP into the certification process, organisations and initiatives can benefit from a more robust, comprehensive, and effective approach to certifying biodiversity credits, ultimately contributing to more successful biodiversity conservation outcomes.

4 Membership

The CBCP is dedicated to establishing a robust and versatile group of independent experts who can be called upon for BCP validation and/or verification, as well as for evaluating new methodologies as part of the IEP. This dynamic approach provides the flexibility to engage experts based on specific project requirements and ensures a comprehensive representation of diverse fields within biodiversity conservation.

Experts will be carefully selected based on their proficiency across a broad spectrum of disciplines, encompassing ecology, conservation biology, indigenous knowledge, ecosystem management, social implications, species survival, environmental law, protected areas, climate change, and considerations of local and farming communities. Drawing on the collective expertise of these individuals, the IEP will play a pivotal role in assessing and validating biodiversity conservation projects within the CBCP framework, while also evaluating innovative methodologies aimed at advancing conservation practices.

This section not only elucidates the eligibility criteria for expert selection but also delves into the requisite expertise, the rigorous selection process, and the terms governing the service, renewal, and potential removal of Panel members. The inclusion of a diverse and knowledgeable group of experts is crucial for incorporating a wide range of perspectives and insights that drive the success of the CBCP's conservation endeavors, bolstering the integrity and effectiveness of the evaluation processes. By leveraging the expertise of these individuals, the CBCP can ensure that its conservation initiatives are comprehensive, impactful, and aligned with best practices in the field.

Furthermore, in addition to their roles in BCP validation and verification, experts within the IEP will carry the crucial responsibility of reviewing new methodologies. This entails evaluating innovative approaches and solutions intended to enhance biodiversity conservation efforts, fostering advancement and excellence within the CBCP framework.

By cultivating a diverse group of experts with extensive knowledge and experience, the IEP will be well-prepared to navigate the intricate landscape of biodiversity conservation. Their valuable contributions will be instrumental in upholding the standards and

objectives of the CBCP, ultimately leading to significant and sustainable conservation outcomes that benefit biodiversity and the environment as a whole.

4.1 Eligibility criteria

Academic qualifications

Experts are required to hold a minimum of a master's degree in fields such as Conservation Biology, Ecology, Environmental Science, Forestry, Social Sciences, Economics, or related disciplines. Additionally, possessing expertise in areas such as Indigenous knowledge, ecosystem management, social implications, species survival, environmental law, protected areas, and climate change is deemed beneficial.

Professional experience

The following stringent minimum experience requirements are essential for consideration:

- A minimum of ten years of professional experience.
- Highly coveted experience in project evaluation, validation, and verification.
- Membership in one of the [IUCN Commissions](#) is highly sought after.
- A robust track record of publications in reputable peer-reviewed journals, not limited to just scientific fields, is advantageous.

Skills and competencies

- Demonstrated expertise in research methods, data analysis, and interpretation.
- Proficiency in project management, including budgeting and timeline management.
- Strong communication skills, both written and verbal.
- Proficiency in Spanish and English is required. Proficiency in French and Portuguese is desirable.

Ethical standards

- No history of professional misconduct.
- Must be willing to sign a code of conduct, a non-disclosure agreement, and a conflict of interest declaration.

Thematic and geographic representation

The IEP shall comprise experts with diverse thematic backgrounds and from geographical locations to ensure a broad range of perspectives and expertise. The CBCP shall seek a balanced Panel composition, ideally with experts in environmental law, governance, ecosystems, species, protected areas, and climate change.

Diversity and inclusion

The IEP shall aim for a balanced representation of genders, ethnicities, and other demographic factors to promote diversity and inclusion.

Additional criteria

- Willingness to undergo regular training and updates on emerging biodiversity conservation issues.

Overall, the criteria outlined are stringent and aim to ensure that the IEP maintains high levels of expertise and credibility in its operations. By adhering to these criteria, the IEP can be assured of having qualified and experienced professionals contributing to its activities.

4.2 Expertise requirements

Biodiversity is a multi-layered concept that extends from genetic variety within species to the array of ecosystems like forests, rivers, wetlands, and oceans. It's a biological issue and deeply interwoven with social and economic dimensions. Protected areas, community-owned territories, and heritage sites add another layer of complexity, as they often involve unique biodiversity and cultural value. Given this intricate landscape, an independent Panel overseeing BCP must be as diverse as the subject it tackles. IEP members should bring a wide range of expertise to navigate the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in biodiversity conservation. Therefore, the expertise requirements for IEP members shall be outlined in broad terms initially and specifically for the replacement of each Panel member when required to ensure its diversity. This ensures that IEP members have the necessary qualifications and experience to address the complex issues related to biodiversity conservation effectively.

4.3 Selection process

The selection process for the experts in the IEP is carefully crafted to guarantee a high level of expertise, dedication, and diversity among Panel members through a thorough multi-stage procedure:

Stage 1: Open call for nominations

The CBCP will announce an open call for nominations on various platforms, including social media, industry newsletters, and other ecology, conservation, and environmental policy channels. Interested individuals will be required to submit their CVs, cover letters, and relevant documents to demonstrate their eligibility.

Stage 2: Initial screening

Following the submission of documents, the CBCP will verify academic and professional qualifications, ethical standards, and other criteria to shortlist candidates who meet the eligibility requirements.

Stage 3: Interview and assessment

A selection committee composed of the CBCP Director, senior scientists, and key stakeholders will interview shortlisted candidates to evaluate their expertise, communication skills, and commitment. Additional assessments or presentations may be requested if necessary to ensure a thorough evaluation of each candidate's qualifications.

Stage 4: Reference checks and verification

Professional references for each shortlisted candidate will be contacted to verify academic qualifications and previous experience.

Stage 5: Final selection

The committee will review all information gathered and make the final selection, which will then be presented to the Cercarbono CEO for approval.

Stage 6: Onboarding

Selected candidates will receive notification from Cercarbono. Subsequently, the CBCP will arrange an orientation session and provide essential training to ensure that candidates are well-prepared for their roles.

Stage 7: Public announcement

CBCP will publicly announce the newly selected Panel member(s) and their credentials to uphold transparency and accountability in the selection process.

Through this comprehensive selection process, CBCP strives to establish a diverse and skilled group of experts for its IEP to efficiently oversee BCPs and evaluate new methodologies.

4.4 Terms of service, renewal, and removal conditions

Terms of service, renewal, and removal conditions are essential aspects of ensuring the effective functioning and integrity of the IEP. The following provisions outline the framework for the panelists' engagement, potential renewal, and the criteria for removal.

4.4.1 Terms of service

The initial group of experts for CBCP will be established with a staggered duration of one to three years for its members. This staggered approach ensures continuity within the Panel by allowing for the gradual replacement or renewal of members without disrupting its operations. To maintain transparency and uphold ethical standards, members must disclose any conflicts of interest and abstain from participating in relevant deliberations or decisions. Additionally, all panelists are required to sign a non-disclosure agreement to safeguard sensitive project information.

4.4.2 Renewal conditions

As the term approaches its conclusion, an oversight committee will conduct a performance review to assess each member's contributions and effectiveness. Based on this review, members may be nominated for a second term. However, panelists are limited to serving a maximum of two consecutive terms but may be eligible for re-nomination after a one-term hiatus. Those initially appointed for less than three years have the option to renew for a full three-year term.

4.4.3 Removal conditions

The criteria for removing members of the IEP expert group are essential for preserving the integrity and efficiency of the Panel's functions. Adhering to the highest levels of professionalism and ethical behavior is fundamental to maintaining the credibility and reliability of the Panel members. In the event of the following circumstances, a member may face potential removal from the Panel:

- **Breach of obligations:** any failure to uphold the agreed commitments, including maintaining confidentiality agreements and adhering to conflict of interest policies, will prompt immediate action to protect the integrity of the Panel's work.
- **Professional misconduct:** instances of professional misconduct will be treated with the utmost seriousness, and swift action will be taken to address any unethical behavior that jeopardizes the Panel's reputation.
- **Non-performance:** Panel members are expected to deliver consistent and high-quality contributions to the Panel's activities. In cases where performance falls below the expected standards, as identified through regular reviews, measures will be taken to address the issue and may lead to early termination.
- **Resignation:** members have the option to resign from their position before the completion of their term by providing advance written notice. This ensures a smooth transition and allows for the timely replacement of the vacated position.

It is imperative that these removal conditions are clearly outlined and communicated to all Panel members. By enforcing these standards, the IEP maintains its commitment to excellence, professionalism, and ethical conduct in all its endeavors.

5 Ethical standards

At Cercarbono, ethical standards serve as the cornerstone of our commitment to excellence and integrity in all our endeavors. Upholding the highest ethical principles and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability are foundational elements that guide our actions and decisions. In this section, we delve into the ethical standards that govern the operations of the IEP, outlining the principles of integrity, professionalism, transparency, and respect that form the bedrock of our organization. Through a comprehensive 'Code of Conduct', rigorous conflict of interest guidelines, and unwavering dedication to transparency, we strive to ensure that every aspect of our work upholds the highest standards of ethical conduct and governance.

5.1 Code of conduct

In the context of the CBCP, panel experts are guided by a set of ideals or 'Code of Conduct' that prioritize integrity, professionalism, and ethical behavior in their roles. These guiding principles exemplify Cercarbono's dedication to upholding ethical standards and fostering excellence within the programme.

Integrity and professionalism

Panel members are expected to embody principles of integrity and professionalism in their actions. Upholding the highest ethical standards is a core aspect of their

responsibility within the CBCP. Continuous enhancement of knowledge and skills ensures a forward-thinking approach to addressing biodiversity conservation challenges.

Accountability and transparency

Cercarbono places a strong emphasis on accountability and transparency in decision-making processes. Panel members base their actions on evidence-based analysis, aligning decisions with programme objectives. The balance between confidentiality and transparency is maintained to cultivate trust and confidence in the programme's operations.

Confidentiality

Panel members are entrusted with safeguarding sensitive information through a commitment to strict confidentiality standards. The disclosure of conflicts of interest is mandatory and managed transparently, reinforcing the integrity of the programme's processes.

Respect and fairness

The culture at Cercarbono promotes inclusivity, respect for diversity, and fairness in all interactions. Mutual respect and understanding are fundamental values that guide the organization, ensuring that all individuals are treated with dignity and equality. Discriminatory practices and harassment are not tolerated, as Cercarbono values respect and fairness as the foundation of every engagement.

Compliance and reporting

Adherence to ethical standards and principles is fundamental within the CBCP. Panel members are expected to uphold the highest standards of conduct and integrity. A robust reporting system is in place to address any instances of misconduct or breaches of ethical behavior. By fostering a culture of accountability and ethical responsibility, Cercarbono ensures the integrity and credibility of its operations.

Communication

Effective communication within the programme is a strategic process that ensures public statements related to the Panel's work are reviewed and approved by designated authorities. This meticulous oversight guarantees consistency in messaging and upholds the organization's reputation and credibility.

Review and amendments

Regular reviews of the ethical standards that govern the behaviour of panel experts are conducted to align with evolving ethical norms within the CBCP. This review process allows for necessary enhancements to maintain the highest ethical standards within the organization. Panel members affirm their commitment to these ideals upon appointment and any violations are met with disciplinary action to reinforce the non-negotiable nature of ethical compliance within Cercarbono.

5.2 Conflict of interest

Appropriate management of conflicts of interest within the IEP under the CBCP is crucial to preserving the impartiality and integrity of our certification assessments. Acknowledging the significance of addressing conflicts of interest in decision-making processes, CBCP has established rigorous guidelines within the Rules of Procedure of the IEP to effectively address and mitigate such conflicts within the certification programme's operational framework.

Prior to commencing the evaluation of new methodologies and the validation and/or verification of BCPs, all IEP members are mandated to sign a 'Conflict of Interest' form. This proactive measure is designed to enhance transparency and integrity in certification assessments by disclosing any potential conflicts that could impact the objectivity of the decision-making process.

Transparency and accountability are core principles within CBCP Conflict of Interest policy. Panel members are required to promptly disclose any conflicts of interest to the CBCP Director before participating in discussions or decisions related to certification assessments. This proactive approach underscores the critical importance of transparency and trust in upholding the credibility of the CBCP.

In cases where conflicts of interest are identified, the CBCP Director will promptly remove the expert in question from the IEP and appoint a replacement. If undisclosed conflicts come to light during the review of new methodologies or the validation and verification of a BCP, the CBCP Director will have the authority to reject the methodology or BCP. It is imperative that any conflicts of interest be reported transparently and failure to do so may result in immediate exclusion of the expert from the group of eligible experts.

Potential conflicts that could be identified include those stemming from IEP members' involvement in the development of methodologies or BCP. For example, if an IEP member has contributed to formulating a methodology under evaluation, their objectivity may be compromised. Conflicts of interest may also arise if IEP members have direct relationships with organisations presenting methodologies or formulating BCPs, such as serving as collaborators, external reviewers, providing previous guidance, or being part of the board of directors or other organisational bodies. Additionally, familial relationships with individuals within presenting organisations could create conflicts of interest within the decision-making process.

Failure to effectively manage conflicts arising from these relationships could undermine the credibility of the certification programme. Stakeholders may question the fairness and integrity of the assessments if biases exist due to personal or professional connections. Remedial actions, such as recusal, may be necessary to address these conflicts and uphold the programme's standards of transparency and accountability.

By adhering to the established 'Conflict of Interest' guidelines and signing the 'Conflict of Interest' form before initiating the evaluation and approval of new methodologies and the validation and/or verification of BCPs, the IEP reaffirms its commitment to making certification decisions with impartiality and integrity. Upholding transparency, accountability, and ethical responsibility through these measures strengthens CBCP

dedication to upholding the highest ethical standards and governance practices within the programme, ensuring a fair and unbiased assessment process from the outset.

5.3 Transparency

Transparency is the bedrock of integrity and accountability within the operations of the IEP in the CBCP. Upholding the highest standards of transparency is paramount to fostering public trust and confidence in the decisions and processes guiding the certification of biodiversity initiatives. At the core of the Panel's practices are robust principles and stringent measures that epitomize openness, accessibility, and ethical governance at every juncture of the certification journey.

Meetings, serving as the crucible of deliberation and decision-making, are meticulously recorded to preserve the intricate tapestry of discussions, resolutions, and rationales that shape the certification outcomes. This commitment to transparent record-keeping extends beyond closed doors, as all non-confidential documents - encompassing agendas, research findings, and recommendations - are proactively disclosed for scrutiny and examination by stakeholders and the wider public. Through this lens of transparency, the IEP endeavors to establish a culture of trust, understanding, and accountability in its operations.

Decisive actions taken by the IEP are not enveloped in secrecy but are instead revealed promptly and precisely. Final decisions regarding project validation are swiftly communicated to the public within a 5-business day window following the determination. These decisions are supported by a comprehensive rationale that emphasizes the evidence-based approach guiding the resolutions of the IEP. Each decision is accompanied by a detailed explanation that outlines the reasoning and evidence behind the outcome, ensuring transparency in the decision-making process.

Public consultation holds a paramount role in the IEP's commitment to inclusivity and engagement. Stakeholder input is actively sought during significant decisions regarding new projects and methodologies, fostering a culture of public involvement and feedback. Summary reports of these consultations are released to the public, highlighting the impact of public input on shaping the Panel's decisions and further promoting transparency and accountability.

Conflicts of interest are addressed with utmost transparency and diligence. Panel members are required to disclose any conflicts of interest related to agenda items before each meeting, with these disclosures and meeting minutes recorded and made publicly available. This robust practice ensures that all potential conflicts are openly acknowledged and managed, reinforcing the IEP's commitment to impartiality and ethical conduct.

On the front of data and methodology, the IEP upholds a commitment to openness and accessibility. Non-sensitive data used in decision-making is made public to provide transparency and facilitate informed engagement. Additionally, the methodologies reviewed or validated are made public alongside the reasons for the decisions, demonstrating accountability and reinforcing the credibility of the certification process.

Enforcement of transparency standards is integral to upholding the Panel's ethical values. Regular compliance checks are conducted to ensure adherence to transparency guidelines, with strict consequences for any breaches. Failure to comply with these rules may result in disciplinary action, ranging from warnings to potential removal from the Panel for severe violations. This stringent approach underscores the Panel's unwavering commitment to transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct in all its activities, setting a gold standard for integrity and governance in biodiversity certification.

In reaffirming its commitment to maintaining public trust through transparency and open governance, the Panel leads by example, demonstrating excellence in transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making within the biodiversity certification landscape.

6 Project validation and verification

This section outlines the structured approach followed by the IEP to evaluate and confirm the compliance, effectiveness, and success of proposed BCPs. The meticulous review process, guided by specified criteria, ensures alignment with biodiversity conservation objectives and program standards. Ultimately, this methodical approach fosters transparency, scientific rigor, stakeholder engagement, and ethical considerations vital for environmental conservation initiatives.

6.1 Panel structure

The IEP will consist of a minimum of four members, each bringing specialized expertise to the team. The Panel will include a biodiversity specialist, a social impact advisor, a legal and compliance expert, and a community ownership and governance expert.

The biodiversity specialist will assess the project's impact on local flora and fauna, providing guidance on biodiversity credits. The social impact advisor will evaluate the socio-economic implications of the project, with a focus on community engagement. The legal and compliance expert will verify the project's adherence to local, national, and international regulations, conducting thorough assessments of land rights. The community ownership and governance expert will offer detailed support regarding territory ownership, governance structures, legal representation issues, and contractual agreements between communities and project developers.

While all Panel members, such as the biodiversity specialist and social impact advisor, are ready to participate in field visits to gain a comprehensive understanding of the project from diverse critical perspectives, the community ownership and governance expert should consistently be included in these field visits due to their specialised knowledge and expertise in this area.

By ensuring the commitment of all Panel members to participate in field visits when required, the validation and verification processes can be carried out effectively. Through the establishment of a well-structured Panel with diverse expertise, the appointment of a dedicated chairperson, and consistent communication through meetings, the validation and verification processes will be conducted promptly and

effectively. This approach will lead to thorough project assessments and impactful evaluations.

The CBCP Director will prepare a shortlist from the eligible group of experts, which will be sent to the BCP developer for them to select the four experts who will comprise the IEP. The BCP developer will directly contact and contract the experts. Once the BCP developer notifies the CBCP Director and provides proof of the experts' contracts, the CBCP Director will designate a chairperson from among them. The appointed chairperson will lead meetings, set agendas, and oversee all panel activities to ensure smooth coordination and effective decision-making within the panel.

Additionally, the CBCP Director will select a member of the CBCP technical team to be part of the IEP. This team member will be responsible for guiding and clarifying any queries related to the CBCP standard, as well as assisting with meeting agendas, organising meetings, taking minutes, and having a voice within the IEP, albeit without voting rights.

During the 'Innovation Phase', if the CBCP has not defined and integrated the eligible group of experts, the BCP developers will have the opportunity to submit three CVs for each of the four IEP members to the CBCP Director. The CBCP Director will then select the IEP members based on the evaluation of these CVs. To ensure the independence and transparency of the validation and verification process, it is crucial that these experts have no connection with the BCP developer, nor have they participated in the development of the project. Furthermore, they must not have any vested interest or affiliation that could present a conflict of interest. If it is discovered that an expert has an undisclosed relationship with the BCP developer or has contributed to the project's development, the BCP will not be validated or verified, as applicable. This measure is essential to maintain the integrity and impartiality of the evaluation process.

6.2 Frequency and location of meetings

Meetings of the IEP may be conducted through various channels such as videoconference, teleconference, or net-meeting. Regular meetings will be scheduled to ensure the validation and verification processes are carried out efficiently. Each meeting will confirm the date and duration of the subsequent meeting to maintain a consistent schedule and ensure efficient communication.

6.3 Agenda

The chairperson will prepare and distribute the provisional agenda at least five days before each meeting. The IEP will formally adopt the agenda at the commencement of every meeting.

6.4 Decision-making

In the decision-making process for BCP validation and verification, all members of the IEP will participate in voting on various issues, providing specialized input based on their area of expertise. The assessment and voting process include validating and verifying BCPs.

Decisions are made by a simple majority vote, and the outcomes of the decisions are accurately documented in the meeting minutes for transparency and record-keeping purposes. This collaborative decision-making process ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to informed and well-supported decisions regarding BCPs.

6.5 Project validation procedures

The evaluation of the Project Management Plan (PMP) is overseen by the IEP chair, who delegates the review to Panel experts specializing in biodiversity, social impact, legal compliance, and community governance. PMPs are formally submitted via the EcoRegistry Platform and meticulously assessed to validate their alignment with CBCP principles, methodologies, project objectives, and constraints.

Key aspects examined encompass justification, policy framework, project benefits, description of the project, land and resource tenure, drivers of biodiversity loss, safeguards, stakeholder engagement, risk assessment, methodology, monitoring and verification procedures, implementation and financing plans, benefit-sharing agreements, among other critical components.

In the subsequent sections, the detailed step-by-step procedures outline how the IEP is required to adhere to these processes to ensure a comprehensive and precise validation of BCP, in accordance with the overarching guidelines and principles established by the CBCP.

Step 1: Conflict of interest form signing

Prior to commencing the validation process, all members of the IEP are required to sign a 'Conflict of Interest' form to ensure transparency and impartiality throughout the assessment.

Step 2: Documentation review

The IEP will conduct a thorough review of all project documentation, including the PMP, objectives, methodology, governance documents (if applicable), and ancillary tools. This review aims to verify the completeness and accuracy of the submitted materials.

Step 3: Compliance assessment

The IEP will evaluate the project's compliance with the *CBCP Protocol*. Additionally, the IEP will analyze the additionality of the projects in alignment with section *Additionality* of the *CBCP Protocol*, with consideration of any supplementary conditions set by the methodology, while also ensuring adherence to the *Safeguarding Principles and Procedures of Cercarbono's Certification Programme*, available at www.cercarbono.com.

Step 4: Laws and regulations compliance check

Verification of compliance with relevant laws and regulations essential for the successful implementation of the project will be conducted by the IEP. This check ensures that the BCP aligns with legal requirements and regulatory frameworks governing biodiversity conservation and sustainable development initiatives.

Step 5: Key biodiversity metrics evaluation

The IEP will carefully evaluate the key biodiversity metrics and indicators utilized to measure the project's impact on biodiversity. This assessment ensures that the metrics effectively capture the project's contributions to biodiversity conservation.

Step 6: Biodiversity baseline assessment

If applicable, the IEP will assess the suitability of the baseline scenario for the BCP activities and reference period. The evaluation will focus on ensuring that the baseline was developed using robust and repeatable processes to accurately measure project impacts.

Step 7: Threats and risks analysis

Identifying and analyzing potential threats and risks to the project's success is crucial. The IEP will develop mitigation strategies to address these challenges and safeguard the project's objectives effectively.

Step 8: Budget and resource planning review

The IEP will review the budget allocation to confirm that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively towards achieving the BCP's objectives. This review emphasizes compliance with *Principle 6* of the *CBCP Protocol* and ensures responsible utilization of financial resources.

Step 9: Public consultation

In cases where the BCP's activities may impact the environment or local communities, a public consultation with relevant stakeholders is mandatory. The IEP will oversee this process to guarantee stakeholder engagement, transparency, and equitable decision-making.

Step 10: Assessment of the approach to public comments

The IEP chair will designate Panel members to assess how effectively the project team addressed the questions and incorporated the comments into the PMP.

Step 11: Validation report

Following the review and assessment, the IEP will furnish thorough feedback, recommend adjustments or enhancements, and outline actions to be taken during the validation stage or subsequent verification procedures. This report consolidates the results and conclusions of the validation process. *Validation Report* template can be accessed at www.cercarbono.com.

Step 12: Validation statement

Concluding the process, the IEP will issue the validation statement following a comprehensive assessment of the project. Templates for *Validation Statement* can be found at www.cercarbono.com.

These refined procedures enhance the validation process carried out by the IEP, ensuring a rigorous and thorough evaluation of BCPs in alignment with the CBCP guidelines and principles. By following these detailed steps, the IEP can uphold the integrity and credibility of biodiversity crediting projects while promoting sustainable conservation and development practices.

6.6 Project verification procedures

The verification stage in the assessment process of BCP plays a pivotal role in ensuring the integrity, effectiveness, and compliance of conservation initiatives. As part of the IEP, the verification procedures are meticulously designed to assess the implementation of biodiversity conservation measures, stakeholder engagement practices, and overall project compliance with the standards set forth by the CBCP guidelines.

In this section, we delve into the detailed verification procedures that the IEP follows to verify BCPs. From planning and document review to on-site verification, benefit-sharing agreement assessment, compliance checks, and stakeholder engagement evaluation, each step is meticulously crafted to uphold the transparency, accuracy, and credibility of biodiversity conservation efforts. The verification process ensures that projects not only meet regulatory requirements but also make a tangible positive impact on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development goals.

Through systematic data verification, monitoring, evaluation, and decision-making, the IEP assures a comprehensive assessment of BCP, providing valuable insights and recommendations for project enhancement and sustainability.

Step 1: Conflict of interest and expertise balance

Considerations during verification include conflict of interest checks, expertise balance on the Panel, and adherence to principles of accuracy, conservativeness, relevance, completeness, cost-effectiveness, and transparency. All members of the IEP are required to sign a 'Conflict of Interest' form.

Step 2: Verification planning

The IEP, under the guidance of the chair, establishes a detailed verification plan that outlines the scope, objectives, methodologies, and timeline for the verification process. The plan considers project complexity, risks, and compliance requirements identified during the validation stage.

Step 3: Document review

The IEP conducts a meticulous review of all project documentation, including the PMP, monitoring reports, verification data, and stakeholder engagement records. This review ensures consistency with validation outcomes, adherence to CBCP standards, and accurate reporting of BCP activities.

Step 4: On-site verification

As required, the IEP arranges on-site visits to project locations for physical verification of biodiversity conservation measures, stakeholder engagement practices, and

environmental compliance. It is expected that the community ownership and governance expert attends these visits, with a recommendation for the biodiversity specialist and social impact advisor to also participate. Detailed reports are then generated based on on-site observations and assessments.

Step 5: Benefit-sharing agreement verification

The IEP verifies the implementation of benefit-sharing agreements as outlined in the PMP, ensuring equity in benefits distribution among stakeholders and the fulfillment of agreed-upon terms and conditions.

Step 6: Monitoring and evaluation

The IEP monitors project progress, evaluates biodiversity outcomes, and verifies the effectiveness of activities and measures put in place. Through data analysis and impact assessments, the IEP ensures that conservation efforts are yielding positive results in biodiversity conservation.

Step 7: Compliance assessment

A thorough compliance check is conducted to verify that the project remains in adherence to all relevant laws, regulations, and CBCP standards. Any instances of non-compliance are identified and addressed during the verification process to ensure project integrity.

Step 8: Stakeholder engagement evaluation

The IEP assesses the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement processes to ascertain the level of stakeholder involvement in decision-making and benefit-sharing mechanisms. This evaluation ensures that local communities and stakeholders are adequately engaged and empowered throughout the BCP lifecycle.

Step 9: Data verification

The IEP validates project data and metrics to confirm accuracy and reliability. By ensuring data consistency and verifiability, the IEP upholds the credibility of reported information and supports the transparency of biodiversity crediting claims.

Step 10: Decision-making process

Based on the findings and outcomes of the verification process, the IEP members engage in informed decision-making by deliberating on the project's compliance, progress, and impact on biodiversity conservation. Decisions are made through a simple majority vote and meticulously recorded in the meeting minutes for documentation and transparency.

Step 11: Verification report preparation

In the validation stage, the IEP diligently prepares the Validation Report to oversee the progress of the BCP. This process involves assessing the project's adherence to its predetermined objectives and implementing any provided recommendations. The Validation Report acts as a comprehensive evaluation tool to monitor project performance,

pinpoint areas for enhancement, and uphold transparency and accountability in biodiversity conservation endeavours. The template for the *Validation Report* can be accessed at www.cercarbono.com.

Step 12: Verification statement

To conclude the process, the IEP will issue the verification statement based on the comprehensive assessment of the BCP. The *Verification Statement* template is available at www.cercarbono.com.

By adhering to these verification procedures, the IEP ensures a meticulous and standardized evaluation of BCP, aligning with CBCP guidelines and principles to uphold the integrity and effectiveness of biodiversity conservation initiatives.

6.7 Requests for methodological deviation

To ensure the integrity and effectiveness of biodiversity conservation projects in the CBCP, the process for addressing methodological deviations must be systematic and transparent. The IEP plays a crucial role in assessing and evaluating these deviations. Below are the guidelines and step-by-step procedures for the IEP in handling methodological deviations within the CBCP framework:

Step 1: Deviation request procedure

Methodological deviations should be requested for registered BCPs with a complete version of a PMP. The request must clearly define the sections and concepts to which the deviation applies, detail potential impacts on the BCP results, and explain how the methodology's integrity will be maintained.

Step 2: Assessment of deviation

If minor deviations are necessary for a project activity due to specific circumstances, the BCP holder may seek approval for a deviation from the IEP. The IEP will assess the deviation's alignment with CBCP principles and validation and verification standards. If deemed acceptable, the IEP may proceed with a detailed evaluation, including methodological adjustments, after obtaining prior communication and approval from the CBCP Director. Requests should be submitted using the designated methodological deviation request form provided by the CBCP.

Step 3: Direct submission of request

For methodological deviations that are unrelated to a project activity or require further review, the BCP holder must submit the request directly to the CBCP Director following the specified format. If a methodological deviation is identified during validation or verification that was not previously requested or reported, the IEP will halt the process and promptly inform the CBCP. The BCP will need to complete the methodological deviation request form for further evaluation and validation.

The thorough assessment and approval of methodological deviations by the IEP are essential to maintaining adherence to CBCP standards and ensuring the integrity of the BCP. Transparent communication, adherence to established formats, and cooperation

with CBCP management are critical elements in effectively managing methodological deviations within the CBCP framework.

7 Approval of new methodologies

In the CBCP framework, the evaluation of new methodologies is a vital process overseen by the IEP. This scrutiny ensures that proposed methodologies align with the core principles and guidelines of the CBCP. The IEP conducts a thorough assessment to determine the suitability, effectiveness, and compliance of the methodologies with biodiversity conservation CBCP standards.

7.1 Panel structure

The IEP responsible for evaluating CBCP methodologies consists of at least two experts in the relevant eligible CBCP activity, appointed by the CBCP Director, with support from CBCP technical staff. Panel members must possess extensive knowledge and experience in structuring biodiversity methodologies to ensure competency and eliminate conflicts of interest.

7.2 Evaluation guidelines

During this stage, the IEP evaluates the appropriateness, relevance, and alignment of methodologies with CBCP standards and principles. Criteria include applicability, determination of BCP boundaries, additionality assessment, stakeholder engagement, risk management, as well as clarity, transparency, and cost-effectiveness.

The IEP conducts a meticulous and rigorous review of proposed methodologies within approximately twenty business days, adjusting as needed based on complexity. Feedback and recommendations are provided to methodology developers within a 15-day period to facilitate the approval process. The IEP follows specific guidelines to evaluate new methodologies for CBCP, ensuring robust assessment and alignment with CBCP goals, including principles, scientific rigor, stakeholder engagement, additionality, risk management, transparency, and sustainability, among others.

Upon reviewing the methodology, the IEP presents suggested results to the CBCP Director as follows:

- **Approved for public consultation:** methodology meets all criteria and is eligible for public input.
- **Approved with request for modifications:** involves non-compliance with at least one criterion, requiring adjustments.
- **Rejected:** non-compliance with critical criteria or legal, ethical, or commercial concerns, rendering methodology unfit for CBCP use.

The IEP delivers a comprehensive report to the CBCP Director, detailing the methodology review process, assessment outcomes, and any recommendations. The evaluation results are meticulously documented in meeting minutes and signed by the IEP members. Subsequently, the CBCP Director reviews the evaluation results, determines if the methodology is approved, and communicates the decision to the methodology proponent, ensuring transparency and accountability.

By following these rules and guidelines, the IEP ensures a comprehensive and standardized review of methodologies, promoting transparency, scientific rigor, stakeholder engagement, and ethical considerations that contribute to biodiversity conservation objectives.

7.3 Review procedures

The review of new methodologies is a foundational process within the CBCP framework, overseen by the IEP. In this section, we delineate a step-by-step procedure that the IEP follows to rigorously assess and ascertain the suitability, effectiveness, and compliance of proposed methodologies with the principles and guidelines of the CBCP. Through a meticulous evaluation process guided by specified criteria, the IEP plays a crucial role in ensuring that methodologies align with biodiversity conservation objectives and adhere to the standards established by the programme.

Step 1: Conflict of interest and expertise balance

Considerations during verification include conflict of interest checks, expertise balance on the Panel, and adherence to principles of accuracy, conservativeness, relevance, completeness, cost-effectiveness, and transparency. All members of the IEP are required to sign a 'Conflict of Interest' form.

Step 2: Evaluation initiation

The IEP initiates a meticulous review of the proposed methodology, focusing on assessing alignment with CBCP standards, methodological effectiveness, and suitability for biodiversity conservation objectives.

Step 3: Review period

The IEP undertakes a comprehensive review of the methodology within a predefined timeframe allowing for in-depth analysis and feedback generation.

Step 4: Criteria assessment

Evaluation criteria considered by the IEP include methodology applicability, determination of BCP boundaries, additionality assessment, stakeholder engagement strategies, transparency, risk management approaches, and cost-effectiveness, among others.

Step 5: Feedback and recommendation

Following the methodology review, the IEP provides constructive feedback and recommendations to the methodology developers within a designated timeframe to address any identified areas for improvement.

Step 6: Reporting and communication

The IEP compiles a comprehensive report that outlines the methodology review process, assessment results, and recommendations. The evaluation findings are documented in meeting minutes, signed by Panel members, and communicated to the

methodology proponent to ensure transparency and accountability in the approval process.

8 Document management

Effective document management is paramount for handling sensitive information, including intellectual property, data protection, and confidentiality within the IEP. By adhering to robust procedures, the Panel can responsibly manage sensitive information while upholding integrity and trust. The following best practices outline guidelines for document management:

- **Non-disclosure agreements (NDAs):** every Panel member must sign NDAs to legally enforce confidentiality, as detailed in the Code of Conduct (*Section 5.1*). This measure ensures that sensitive information is protected and prohibits its unauthorized disclosure.
- **Document classification:** documents should be appropriately labeled, such as 'Confidential', 'Internal Use', etc., to indicate the level of sensitivity. This classification helps in identifying and handling sensitive information according to its security level.
- **Data encryption:** the CBCP should provide secure methods for storing all sensitive data in encrypted format on protected servers with limited access. Data encryption enhances security and prevents unauthorized access to sensitive information.
- **Access control:** role-based access controls should be implemented to ensure that only authorized personnel can access sensitive information. Restricting access based on roles helps in maintaining confidentiality and preventing unauthorized disclosures.
- **Data retention policy:** contracts between the CBCP and Panel members should establish a clear time frame for retaining sensitive data and outline protocols for securely disposing of information when no longer needed. A well-defined data retention policy ensures that sensitive information is retained only for necessary periods and is then securely destroyed.
- **Review and update policies:** regularly reviewing and updating document management policies to adapt to new technologies or legal changes is imperative. Keeping policies current ensures that sensitive information is consistently protected and managed in line with the latest standards and requirements.

By following these document management best practices, the IEP can effectively safeguard sensitive information, maintain confidentiality, and uphold the trust and integrity of the CBCP process.

9 Appeals and complaints

Given the critical role of the IEP in overseeing the CBCP, it is paramount to establish effective procedures for managing appeals and complaints. The IEP's handling of grievances, both internally and from external stakeholders, plays a key role in upholding fairness, accountability, and transparency within the certification process.

To bolster the IEP's appeals and complaints management processes, the following enhancements should be considered:

- **Transparent communication channels:** maintain transparent communication channels to facilitate the submission of appeals and complaints by internal and external stakeholders. Clearly communicate the processes for lodging grievances and establish channels for stakeholders to provide feedback throughout the resolution process.
- **Objective evaluation mechanisms:** establish impartial review mechanisms within the IEP to conduct fair and unbiased assessments of appeals and complaints. Designate a dedicated team or committee responsible for objectively evaluating grievances and reaching informed decisions based on evidence.
- **Timely resolution framework:** implement frameworks for the timely resolution of appeals and complaints within stipulated timelines. Adhering to predefined timelines for addressing grievances demonstrates the IEP's commitment to swift and effective resolution, thereby enhancing stakeholder trust and satisfaction.
- **Comprehensive documentation practices:** ensure thorough documentation of all appeals and complaints received, actions taken, and outcomes achieved. Maintaining detailed records allows for accountability, trend analysis, and continuous improvement in the IEP's grievance resolution processes.
- **Continuous assessment and improvement:** regularly evaluate and enhance the appeals and complaints management procedures based on feedback received and lessons learned from past cases. By embracing a culture of continuous improvement, the IEP can refine its processes to better address grievances and enhance stakeholder engagement.
- **Stakeholder engagement framework:** foster stakeholder engagement throughout the appeals and complaints resolution process to solicit feedback, provide updates, and promote collaboration in addressing grievances. Involving stakeholders in the resolution process enhances transparency, accountability, and trust within the CBCP framework.

By incorporating these enhancements into the appeals and complaints management procedures of the IEP, the Panel can reinforce its commitment to fairness, transparency, and stakeholder satisfaction. A robust and effective grievance resolution process within the IEP contributes to the credibility and integrity of the CBCP.

10 Monitoring and evaluation

In the pursuit of continuous improvement and accountability, a comprehensive set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) has been proposed to guide the monitoring and evaluation efforts of the IEP within the CBCP. These KPIs are intricately designed to assess the performance of the IEP in crucial areas such as efficiency, quality, stakeholder engagement, adherence, impact, reliability, consistency, and continuous enhancement.

For efficient operations and quality assurance

- Monitor the percentage of assessments completed within specified timeframes to ensure timely reviews of biodiversity conservation projects.
- Track the average time required for comprehensive evaluations to streamline assessment processes.

- Evaluate the percentage of assessments meeting or exceeding CBCP quality standards to maintain excellence in reviews.
- Use stakeholder feedback ratings on assessment quality and depth to drive continuous improvement and uphold high standards.

Engaging stakeholders and ensuring compliance

- Monitor the number of annual stakeholder engagement activities to gather valuable input into assessment processes.
- Leverage stakeholder feedback on communication clarity and transparency to enhance engagement efforts.
- Ensure adherence to CBCP guidelines and standards in all assessments, promoting consistency and compliance.

Tracking and impact assessment

- Monitor the resolution of non-compliance issues within specified timelines to uphold programme integrity.
- Evaluate the number of certified BCP resulting from IEP assessments to gauge programme impact and effectiveness.
- Assess the positive impact on biodiversity conservation outcomes to underscore efficiency and tangible results.

Reliability, consistency, and continuous improvement

- Monitor alignment with established criteria to ensure decision-making processes are reliable.
- Review cases to maintain accuracy and consistency in assessments, fostering trust and credibility.
- Implement improvement initiatives based on feedback to drive ongoing enhancement.
- Measure the increase in assessment efficiency over time to optimize performance and outcomes.

These proposed KPIs are designed to elevate the effectiveness, transparency, and impact of the IEP within the CBCP. Through meticulous monitoring and evaluation aligned with these metrics, the goal is to ensure accountability, uphold quality standards, and enhance stakeholder engagement in the conservation of biodiversity.

To further strengthen the monitoring and evaluation practices within the IEP, the following initiatives will be implemented:

- **Regular performance reviews:** conduct periodic performance reviews to assess the IEP's effectiveness in meeting its objectives and achieving set KPIs. These reviews should be structured and systematic, focusing on the Panel's overall efficiency, impact, and compliance with established protocols.
- **Data collection and analysis:** implement robust data collection mechanisms to gather relevant information for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Analyze the collected data to measure the IEP's performance against KPIs, identify trends, and derive actionable insights for continuous improvement.

- **Stakeholder feedback mechanisms:** engage with stakeholders, both internal and external, to gather feedback on the IEP's performance and effectiveness. Incorporating stakeholder perspectives into the monitoring and evaluation process provides valuable insights and ensures alignment with stakeholder expectations.
- **Continuous improvement strategies:** use the results of monitoring and evaluation activities to inform continuous improvement strategies within the IEP. Identify areas of strength and opportunities for enhancement, and proactively implement changes to optimize the Panel's performance and impact.
- **Periodic reporting:** develop a systematic reporting framework to communicate the results of the monitoring and evaluation activities. Regularly report on the IEP's performance against KPIs, highlight achievements, address challenges, and outline action plans for improvement.
- **Feedback loop implementation:** establish a feedback loop within the IEP to incorporate lessons learned from monitoring and evaluation activities into ongoing operations. Encouraging a culture of learning and adaptation based on feedback will drive continuous improvement and excellence within the Panel.

By aligning these monitoring and evaluation initiatives with the proposed KPIs, the IEP can proactively assess its performance, drive continuous improvement, and strengthen its oversight of the CBCP certification process. This focus on accountability, transparency, and performance enhancement will lead to increased success in achieving the objectives of the CBCP.

11 Compliance and enforcement

Ensuring compliance with the 'Rules of Procedure of the Independent Experts Panel' is fundamental to upholding the integrity and effectiveness of the CBCP. The IEP is committed to implementing robust compliance and enforcement measures to maintain transparency, fairness, and accountability in its operations.

11.1 Compliance assurance mechanisms

To uphold adherence to the guidelines and procedures outlined in the Rules of Procedure, the IEP employs a set of compliance assurance mechanisms. These mechanisms include:

- **Regular audits:** conducting periodic audits of the IEP's activities to assess compliance with established protocols.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** implementing systems to monitor and evaluate the Panel's performance against KPIs to ensure alignment with set standards.
- **Documentation reviews:** conducting thorough reviews of all documentation and decisions made by the IEP to verify compliance with procedures and guidelines.
- **Training and awareness:** providing ongoing training and awareness programmes to Panel members to ensure understanding of and adherence to compliance requirements.

11.2 Enforcement procedures

In instances of non-compliance or violations of the Rules of Procedure, the IEP follows a structured enforcement procedure to address and rectify issues promptly. The enforcement procedures include:

- **Issue resolution:** establishing a formal process for addressing issues and resolving conflicts arising from non-compliance, including identifying the root cause, developing corrective action plans, and implementing solutions.
- **Disciplinary actions:** implementing disciplinary actions, such as warnings, suspensions, or removal from the Panel, for repeated or severe violations of compliance standards.
- **Reporting mechanisms:** providing channels for reporting violations or concerns related to compliance, ensuring that all incidents are documented and addressed accordingly.
- **Transparency:** maintaining transparency in enforcement actions taken by the IEP, including communicating outcomes to stakeholders and documenting resolutions for accountability.

11.3 Continuous improvement

The IEP is committed to continuous improvement in its compliance and enforcement processes to enhance effectiveness and maintain high standards of governance within the CBCP. This includes:

- **Regular review:** conducting periodic reviews of compliance and enforcement procedures to identify areas for enhancement and implement necessary changes.
- **Stakeholder feedback:** soliciting feedback from internal and external stakeholders on compliance processes to drive improvement initiatives and address any gaps or concerns.
- **Training and development:** providing ongoing training and professional development opportunities for Panel members to enhance understanding of compliance requirements and promote a culture of compliance within the IEP.

By prioritizing compliance assurance, enforcing established procedures, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, the IEP is dedicated to upholding the principles of integrity, transparency, and accountability within the CBCP. Through these measures, the Panel aims to ensure the effective functioning of the certification programme and promote environmental conservation efforts in a responsible and ethical manner.

12 Financial aspects

Ensuring transparency and fairness, the costs associated with the services provided by the IEP will be directly covered by the BCPs undergoing validation or verification within the CBCP, or by the third party proposing a new methodology. This approach upholds the principle of equitable financial responsibility among entities seeking certification.

While it is encouraged that IEP experts offer their services pro bono to advance scientific progress and biodiversity conservation, there may be instances where fair compensation is deemed appropriate.

In such cases, the remuneration for experts serving on the IEP will be determined in consultation with the BCP or methodology proponent. This fee should accurately reflect the high level of expertise and dedication required for the evaluation and validation processes within the CBCP. By providing clear and transparent information on remuneration, the programme maintains integrity and accountability in compensating individuals who play a crucial role in the certification process.

BCP proponents will bear the responsibility for covering travel expenses and related costs during the BCP's validation or verification process, ensuring a comprehensive and unbiased assessment procedure.

13 Training

CBCP recognizes the importance of continuous learning and professional development for its IEP members. The provision for ongoing training and capacity-building initiatives is essential to ensure that Panel members remain current on biodiversity conservation practices, regulatory updates, and best practices in environmental stewardship.

13.1 Training programmes

The CBCP is committed to offering regular training programmes tailored to the evolving needs of panel members. These training initiatives will focus on enhancing expertise, improving decision-making skills, and staying abreast of emerging trends in biodiversity conservation. Training programmes will cover a wide range of topics, including:

- Updates on biodiversity conservation policies and regulations.
- Advancements in conservation science and methodologies.
- Stakeholder engagement and community involvement best practices.
- Ethical standards and professional conduct guidelines.
- Conflict resolution and effective communication strategies.
- Data management and analysis techniques.
- Risk assessment and management protocols.

13.2 Professional development opportunities

In addition to structured training programmes, the CBCP will provide opportunities for professional development to Panel members. This may include:

- Participation in relevant conferences, workshops, and seminars to stay informed of the latest developments in biodiversity conservation.
- Access to online courses, resources, and publications to deepen knowledge in specific areas of expertise.
- Mentoring and peer support programmes to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration within the Panel.
- Networking events and partnerships with other organizations working in the field of biodiversity conservation.

- Collaborative research projects and opportunities for publishing in scientific journals to showcase expertise and contribute to the advancement of conservation science.

13.3 Implementation of training initiatives

The implementation of training and professional development initiatives will be overseen by the CBCP Director in coordination with the Training and Development Committee of the IEP. The committee will be responsible for:

- Identifying training needs and developing a comprehensive training plan.
- Collaborating with external experts and organizations to deliver specialized training sessions.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of training programmes and gathering feedback from Panel members for continuous improvement.
- Evaluating the impact of training initiatives on Panel member performance and decision-making processes.

13.4 Evaluation and feedback

Panel members will have the opportunity to provide feedback on training programmes, suggest topics for future training sessions, and evaluate the relevance and impact of the training they receive. Regular assessments will be conducted to ensure that training initiatives align with the evolving needs of Panel members and contribute to their professional growth and development.

By prioritizing ongoing training and professional development for Panel members, the CBCP aims to enhance expertise, foster a culture of continuous learning, and uphold high standards of knowledge and skills within the programme. These initiatives will not only benefit individual Panel members but also contribute to the overall effectiveness and success of biodiversity conservation efforts led by the Panel.

14 Communication

Effective communication is essential for the successful operation of the IEP within the CBCP. Clear and transparent communication channels, both internally and externally, are critical for ensuring alignment, fostering collaboration, and maintaining accountability within the Panel. Additionally, establishing protocols for emergency response communication is essential for addressing urgent situations or crises that may arise.

14.1 Internal communication

Internal communication within the IEP will be guided by the following protocols:

- **Communication channels:** utilization of digital platforms and email for sharing important information, updates, and documents among Panel members. All communication will be documented for reference and transparency.
- **Decision-making processes:** clear communication of decision-making procedures and timelines to ensure all Panel members are informed and involved in the process.

Decisions will be communicated promptly to maintain transparency and accountability.

14.2 External communication

External communication protocols for the IEP will include:

- **Stakeholder engagement:** proactive engagement with stakeholders, including project proponents, community members, and regulatory bodies, to gather feedback, share information, and promote collaboration. Stakeholder input will be valued and integrated into decision-making processes.
- **Public announcements:** timely and accurate public announcements regarding the certification status of projects, methodology approvals, and other relevant updates. Information will be shared through designated channels to ensure transparency and accessibility.
- **Media relations:** coordination with media outlets for the dissemination of key messages, project updates, and conservation success stories. Media communications will be handled according to established protocols to maintain consistency and accuracy.

14.3 Emergency response protocols

In the event of an emergency or crisis situation, the IEP will follow defined protocols for communication and response. These protocols will include:

- **Designation of emergency contacts:** identification of designated emergency contacts within the Panel who will be responsible for initiating communication and coordinating response efforts.
- **Communication chain:** establishment of a clear communication chain to ensure timely and accurate information sharing during emergencies. Contact information for all Panel members will be readily available for quick access.
- **Crisis communication plan:** development of a crisis communication plan outlining key messaging, escalation procedures, and responsibilities in the event of an emergency. This plan will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure effectiveness.
- **Training and preparedness:** training sessions and drills will be conducted to prepare Panel members for emergency response scenarios. This will include mock exercises, scenario-based training, and role-playing to enhance readiness and effectiveness in handling emergencies.

14.4 Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement in communication protocols, both internal and external, including emergency response procedures, will be a priority for the IEP. This will involve:

- **Regular evaluation:** conducting periodic reviews and assessments of communication practices to identify areas for enhancement and refinement.
- **Feedback mechanisms:** soliciting feedback from Panel members, stakeholders, and external partners to assess the effectiveness of communication protocols and address any gaps or challenges.

- **Training and development:** providing ongoing training and support to improve communication skills, crisis response capabilities, and stakeholder engagement practices.
- **Technology integration:** exploring opportunities to leverage technology for streamlined communication, such as digital collaboration tools, emergency notification systems, and secure messaging platforms.

By following established communication protocols, implementing effective emergency response procedures, and prioritizing continuous improvement, the IEP aims to enhance collaboration, transparency, and efficiency in its operations. These efforts will contribute to the overall success and impact of the CBCP in advancing biodiversity conservation initiatives and promoting environmental sustainability.

15 Amendment procedures

The 'Rules of Procedure of the Independent Experts Panel' within the CBCP are designed to be dynamic and responsive to changes in environmental conservation practices, regulatory requirements, and technological advancements. The procedures for modifying rules and guidelines are outlined to ensure ongoing relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with evolving standards and best practices.

15.1 Initial review

Following the 'Innovation Phase' of the CBCP, the Rules of Procedure document will undergo an initial review to address any immediate issues or gaps identified during the programme implementation. This review will prioritize the identification of areas for improvement, clarification, or enhancement to optimize the functioning of the IEP.

15.2 Regular revisions

Subsequent to the initial review, regular revisions of the Rules of Procedure will be conducted at least once every three years to ensure their ongoing relevance and effectiveness. These revisions will encompass updates based on feedback, performance evaluations, and changing needs within the CBCP framework. This periodic review will be instrumental in maintaining alignment with the programme's objectives and operational requirements.

15.3 Ad Hoc reviews

In addition to scheduled regular revisions, ad hoc reviews may be triggered by significant changes in legal regulations, scientific understanding, or technological advancements that necessitate immediate updates to the Rules of Procedure. Ad hoc reviews will be conducted promptly to address emerging issues, incorporate new knowledge, and adapt to evolving environmental conservation practices.

15.4 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders play a crucial role in the review and modification of rules and guidelines within the CBCP. Project developers, environmental experts, community representatives, and other relevant stakeholders will be invited to contribute to the review

process. Their insights, feedback, and recommendations will be considered in decision-making related to rule modifications and enhancements.

15.5 Communication of updates

Any updates, modifications, or revisions to the Rules of Procedure will be communicated clearly to all parties involved in the CBCP. Changes will be documented in subsequent versions of the CBCP documentation, ensuring transparency, accountability, and alignment with the most current standards and practices in biodiversity conservation.

By establishing robust procedures for modifying rules and guidelines, engaging stakeholders in the review process, and ensuring clear communication of updates, the IEP aims to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the CBCP. These procedures will support continuous improvement, adaptation to changing dynamics, and the advancement of biodiversity conservation initiatives in a dynamic and evolving environmental landscape.

16 Document history

Version	Date	Comments or changes
1.0	04.06.2024	Initial version.