SOLAR STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

Solar Stewardship Initiative

Recognition Process

v.1.0 | November 2023

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Introduction

A core principle of the Solar Stewardship Initiative is to recognise as "equivalent" other sustainability systems, good practice frameworks and certifications where they are materially comparable in scope and intent to the Solar Stewardship Initiative Standard, Assurance Process and Governance.

The Solar Stewardship Initiative (SSI) is committed to recognise equivalent voluntary standards and assurance systems to achieve the following objectives:

→ Avoid redundancy of assurance and reporting initiatives.

→ Encourage the use of existing systems currently implemented by Sites.

→ Ensure acceptance of SSI by customers and investors.

This document outlines the SSI's approach and process for recognition as well as the decision-making processes related to recognition.

1. Definitions

Recognition	The acceptance of an external set of requirements, their implementation and their verification in lieu of the SSI's own requirements.
Systems	Systems are defined as standards and assurance requirements as well as governance structures. These may include sustainability systems, certifications or externally assured management systems.

2. Scope of recognition

The SSI considers that recognition must include several elements in order to achieve positive impact. Not only should the main Standard be considered and reviewed but the Standard also needs to be supported by an assurance programme that ensures that audits/assessments are delivered consistently and reach the right conclusions. It also needs to be embedded in governance structures that help achieve the vision, mission and strategy, and it must be supported by effective operational practices.

The SSI recognition process therefore covers the following elements:

Table 1: Scope of Recognition

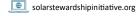|	
Governance	The way a system is governed and managed, and mechanisms for stakeholders to participate in key decision-making and standard setting.
Standard	All the criteria in the SSI Standard serve as the default basis for recognition. Criteria that are not addressed do not contribute to the recognition, but entities participating in the respective System would be expected to fill this gap by applying the relevant criteria of the other recognised System.
Assurance	SSI will evaluate how audits/assessments are conducted, how stakeholders may engage in the process, how decisions on compliance are taken, how non-conformities are addressed, what happens after the audit, how compliance results are communicated to the outside world and how competence of auditors and assurance providers is ensured. Where assurance mechanisms are very loosely defined or through non-binding guidance only, the respective system cannot be recognised.
Claims and Logos	Claims and - where offered – logos should be truthful and justified and used in an appropriate manner. Permitted claims must be aligned with the provided performance level.

3. Applying for recognition and steps

Generally, only Systems that are operational and that include third-party assessments to a defined audit/assurance manual or protocol can apply for recognition by SSI.

3.1 Application

SSI members may request the SSI Secretariat to conduct a review for recognition of equivalency of a System and any stakeholder of the SSI may also identify and propose Systems for review. The following should be provided:

→ A copy of / link to the Standard to be reviewed.

→ A copy of / link to the Assurance Process to be reviewed.

→ A copy of/link to the Governance structure.

→ A copy of / link to supporting documentation such as guidance materials, implementation procedures, etc.

→ The name and information of the main point of contact of the System owner.

The SSI accepts requests to conduct a review for recognition at any time. SSI will review the proposed System to determine if it is relevant and within the scope of recognition.

3.2　Recognition process steps

Once an application for recognition is received:

→ A reviewer from the SSI Secretariat, or appointed agent, conducts a review of the System's documentation.

→ The reviewer provides a recommendation on the degree of recognition in a report which is shared with the System owner being assessed.

→ The reviewer and System owner discuss open questions and the results of the review.

→ The draft recommendation is revised based on feedback received if applicable.

→ The recommendation is sent to the SSI Board for final approval and the System owner is informed of the decision.

→ Following approval, the System is added to the equivalence matrix published on the SSI website.

→ The recognition is revised if and when the System changes materially or if the SSI methodology changes considerably.

The recognition may be applied only once it has been reviewed and accepted by the SSI, even if the updated matrix has not yet been published. SSI members should work directly with SSI to understand all potentially applicable Systems before completing the Self-Assessment.

4. Recognition Methodology

The SSI uses a Matrix tool to assess each System's criteria covering each element in the Scope of Recognition. Each individual criterion / requirement of the System is benchmarked against the SSI Standard, Assurance and Governance system. The assessment of each criterion leads to one of the following results:

Table 2: Criteria results
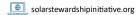
Equivalent	Where the scope and intent (and therefore likely outcomes) of the requirements are the same, even if there are minor differences in the details of the requirements and/or the language used.
Not fully equivalent	Where the scope and intent (and therefore the likely outcomes) of the requirement are not the same.
Not applicable	Requirements that are beyond the scope of the system because the system was not designed requirements covering specific issues in mind, or those issues that are specific to a type of material or type of production process not included in the scope of the System are considered not applicable.

5. Recognition of Sites' claim of equivalency

Sites are expected to seek equivalency for Systems prior to their Assessment.

Sites should check whether independent assessments have been conducted at the Site and whether those assessments cover any SSI requirements. For any independent assessments conducted, Sites may check whether the System is included in the Equivalency Matrix (to be developed).

→ For Systems that are not included in the Equivalency Matrix: Submit a request to the SSI Secretariat for an equivalency review.

→ For Systems included in the Equivalency Matrix the site should decide if they intend to claim an equivalent certification or independently verified system and provide the following evidence of verification:

- o Name of the certification or verification system.
- o Certificate.
- o Name of the independent verifier/certification body.
- o Dates of the verification.
- o Scope of the verification (operations; issue areas; criteria; etc.).
- o Expiration of the certification.

o The results of the verification (verification report, continuous improvement plan if applicable.)

The assigned Assessors are responsible for reviewing the evidence regarding the recognized System submitted by the Site and determining whether they meet the following requirements:

→ The assurance or certificate is in effect or valid at the time of submission.

→ The assurance or certificate is no more than twenty-four (24) months old or plans for re-assessment or re-certification are underway and communicated to the SSI.

→ The assurance or certificate is valid for at least twelve (12) additional months following submission or plans for reassessment or recertification are underway and communicated to the SSI.

→ The assurance or certificate covers the same scope as the Site participating in the SSI certification assessment, including operations, locations, and materials.

→ Improvement plans are in place to close any gaps within the next twelve (12) months.

Based on the review, Assessors are responsible for determining which SSI Standard requirements are applicable in the onsite certification assessment.

6. Recognition of SSI by other systems

SSI may seek recognition by other Systems. SSI will prioritise Systems already used by SSI current and potential member Sites and which can impact the ability of SSI to achieve its vision and mission.

Once an external recognition has been prioritised, the SSI Secretariat will work

with the owner of the System to complete the benchmarking or recognition assessment process.

Once the external benchmarking and recognition process is complete, the SSI Secretariat will inform the SSI Board and will communicate the results on the SSI website. The external System will communicate the results of the recognition according to their own processes and procedures.