

System Standard

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For Stakeholder
Consultation

Preferred
by Nature
Certification



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Introduction

This Standard forms part of the Preferred by Nature Certification Programme (PBNC) and is applicable to all organisations seeking certification. It sets out the essential requirements for establishing systems and procedures that enable consistent conformance with the PBNC criteria.

The Standard is performance-oriented and applies across both land-use operations and supply chain entities. It supports organisations of all sizes in demonstrating credible sustainability practices through robust management systems.

Preferred by Nature offers certification options designed to meet the needs of different organisational structures. Multi-site certification is available for large, single-owner operations with multiple locations, while group certification supports smaller organisations that collaborate to obtain certification. Both approaches are designed to ensure efficiency and credibility while maintaining consistent conformance across all sites or members.

Scope

This Standard applies to all organisations pursuing PBNC certification, whether land-use operations (e.g., farms, forests) or supply chain entities (e.g., processors, manufacturers, traders, retailers). It defines system-level requirements that complement the specific performance requirements in the Sustainability Framework (PBN-01) and other normative standards.

All parts of this document are normative unless otherwise stated. The most recent version of any referenced document applies unless explicitly specified. This Standard shall be used together with other normative documents of the PBNC programme. A list of related standards is provided in **Box 1**.

Detailed eligibility criteria and requirements for group and multi-site certification are provided in **Annex 1**.

Version history

Version 1.0 | 25 September 2020

Version 1.1 | 3 June 2021

Version 1.2 | 15 December 2021

Version 1.3 | 13 January 2023

Version 1.4 | 13 November 2023

Version 2.0 | This draft

Box 1.

Normative Documents for Preferred by Nature Certification

PBN-01. Sustainability Framework

Establishes the principles, criteria, and indicators that land-use managers must follow to demonstrate responsible, sustainable practices, as well as social requirements for supply chain entities.

PBN-02. System Standard

Sets out generic quality system requirements applicable to all Preferred by Nature certified operations.

PBN-03. Due Diligence Standard

Defines requirements for supplier collaboration, supply chain information, risk assessment, and mitigation for due diligence and includes a EUDR specific annex.

PBN-04. Seal Use Standard

Sets requirements and conditions for using the PBN Seal.

PBN-05. Chain of Custody Standard

Specifies requirements for chain of custody models and traceability systems used to manage claims and track products throughout the supply chain.

PBN-06. Terms and Definitions

Provides definitions and concepts used in the Preferred by Nature Certification programme.

PBN-07. Pesticides Policy

Defines PBN's policy on the use of pesticides.

PBN-08. GMO Policy

Defines PBN's policy on the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).

Terms and definitions

Group Manager

A clearly defined function, specifying the responsible positions, their authority, and role in ensuring that all members in a group certification, or all sites in a multi-site certification, comply with all applicable requirements.

Procedure

The established way of performing a series of actions. In the context of the Preferred by Nature Certification Programme, required procedures describe how systems are intended to operate.

Scope (of certification)

Defines the boundaries of the organisation's system in terms of traceability, models applied, areas under management, products included, crops/species/commodities handled, claims covered, and sites and production areas or facilities included in the certification.

Site

A single geographical location with clear boundaries within which products can be handled, produced, or processed.

System

A combination of defined processes, instructions, procedures (where used), software, data, communications, etc., that work towards meeting the Sustainability Framework and other applicable normative documents. Depending on the type of organisation being certified, the system may include the Due Diligence System (DDS), Chain of Custody (CoC) system, or land management system.

Requirements

#	Requirements	Guidance
1	Scope definition	
1.1	The scope of operations, including activities, products, sites, properties, and supply chains (if applicable) within the certification scope, is clearly defined and documented.	<p>The certification scope must include clearly defined attributes, defined by the different Certification Categories applied in the PBN Certification system:</p> <p>Land Use Certification scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entities: Properties, management units, group members, and subcontracted workers. • Area & location: Geospatial data for certified plots plus relevant nurseries, stores, or offices. • Commodities/species: Crops, livestock, or timber species carrying claims. • Products: Raw and semi-processed outputs leaving the certified area. • Exclusions: Plots/crops excluded and measures to ensure segregation. <p>Chain of Custody Certification scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entities: Legal entities and sites taking ownership of certified material, including subcontractors. • Location: Address of each site. • Model: Segregated or Mass Balance CoC. • Suppliers: Certified and non-certified input suppliers.

#	Requirements	Guidance
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Species/ingredients: Covered by Preferred by Nature claims. Inputs/outputs: Material categories and output claims. Production lines: Relevant equipment or line IDs. <p>Due Diligence System (DDS) Certification scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entities: All performing DDS functions. Supply chains: Sourcing areas, suppliers, and transport routes. Commodities/products: Included under the DDS. Volumes: Relevant volumes in scope. Methodology: DDS approach and risk mitigation. Claims: Sustainability/Regulatory Scope and origin sub-claims (Geolocation- or Source Preserved).
1.2	Land-use operations (farms and forests) shall have access to the geolocation of their operations and share this information with the Certification Body.	For land-use operations, the Certificate Holder must provide the geolocation of the land areas included in the scope of certification. The data must be submitted to the auditor and include the polygon(s) of the area. For farms or forests less than 4 ha in area, a point is sufficient.
1.3	Changes in operations that may impact the risks related to potential non-conformances, or the scope of certification (new sites, supply-chain areas, or farms) shall be documented and communicated to Preferred by Nature for approval prior to implementation. Records of changes shall be readily available for auditor review.	Changes to the certification scope that may impact the risks related to potential non-conformities, or otherwise affect the scope of certification (e.g. new sites, supply chain areas, or farms), must be documented and communicated to Preferred by Nature for approval prior to implementation.
1.4	If the scope covers multiple sites or a group, the Organisation shall ensure compliance with all applicable requirements in Annex 1.	Refer to Annex 1 for additional multi-site or group certification requirements.
2	Responsibilities and competence	
2.1	A position with overall responsibility for compliance with all applicable requirements is defined.	Assign a clearly defined position or individual with overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with certification requirements across the entire scope. This role must have sufficient authority within the Organisation.

#	Requirements	Guidance
2.2	The responsible person (and other designated staff) shall have sufficient authority and resources to ensure that requirements are met.	Relevant staff must have appropriate authority and adequate resources to ensure the consistent implementation, compliance, and effective management of required processes.
2.3	Individual responsibilities for relevant requirements are defined and communicated.	Responsibilities for all requirements are clearly assigned to designated personnel. Larger organisations are expected to have documented job descriptions outlining the required competencies and authority, supported by organisational charts for clarity.
2.4	Staff and workers, including contracted and seasonal staff, are aware of their roles and are competent to fulfil their responsibilities.	Relevant training is provided to all personnel involved, including contractors and seasonal workers, to ensure their competence and the consistent implementation of procedures.
3	Systems, procedures and records	
3.1	Systems or procedures are adequate, proportionate, and implemented to ensure continuous compliance with all applicable requirements.	Systems and procedures may include documented procedures, work instructions, necessary software, digital records, and communication processes appropriate to the organisation's size and complexity. For example, in small operations, written procedures may not be necessary. "Applicable requirements" include addressing non-conformities issued during audits.
		Procedures are expected to be at the level appropriate to the organisation's scale, ensuring coverage of all relevant requirements. Small operations may use simplified procedures, whereas larger organisations may require documented management systems to manage and track procedural changes effectively.
3.2	Evidence and records relevant to the certification requirements and the system's functioning shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.	Maintain comprehensive records for at least five years, ensuring they are readily accessible to auditors for verification of compliance and activities.
4	Accountability and transparency	
4.1	All information and claims provided externally to buyers and internally during audits are true, complete, current, and consistent, with no	Organisations should maintain clear records demonstrating authenticity and accuracy, which can be cross-checked against independent sources or supporting documentation during audits.

#	Requirements	Guidance
	material misstatements or omissions affecting origin, legality, deforestation/conversion status, claim type, species, volume, dates, or certification status.	
4.2	<p>Employees, workers, and other stakeholders shall be able to raise complaints related to the Organisation's operations, with confidentiality and protection against retaliation.</p> <p>NOTE: Conformance will be assessed relative to the Organisation's size, risk, and complexity, with expectations scaling according to the type of systems being implemented.</p>	<p>Clear channels (formal or informal, depending on organisational complexity) are established for employees and stakeholders to safely report concerns. Procedures should clearly define confidentiality, prevent retaliation, and specify roles for handling and resolving reported issues. Small organisations may implement simpler, direct communication channels, whereas larger organisations are expected to have structured, documented whistleblowing mechanisms.</p>
5	Ensuring performance	
5.1	The organisation continuously meets applicable requirements, knows its current conformance status, promptly corrects gaps to prevent recurrence, and maintains evidence proportionate to its scale and risk.	<p>The expectation is that organisations implement an appropriate system to ensure conformance with relevant requirements. The nature of such systems will depend on the scale, complexity, and intensity of the operations within the scope of certification. While large, complex operations may require a formal internal evaluation or monitoring system, such an approach may not be necessary for small, simple operations. The key requirement is that the organisation can demonstrate compliance with all applicable requirements.</p>
5.2	All NCRs issued by the Certification Body are addressed within the required timelines.	
5.3	Auditors shall have access to all relevant premises or sites, as well as to all information and evidence necessary for the certification decision.	
5.4	If a product or its associated information has been provided to another company and is found to be	Organisations must ensure procedures are in place for rapid response when non-conforming products or data are identified after transfer to other entities. These procedures are expected to clearly defined internal

#	Requirements	Guidance
	<p>non-conforming, the organisation shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Immediately halt further supply until the risks are mitigated and the information verified. (b) Promptly inform affected companies in writing, outlining the non-conformance and corrective actions. (c) Notify Preferred by Nature immediately, providing a summary of the issue, actions taken, and next steps for evaluation. 	<p>roles and responsibilities for managing such events, with staff trained to act swiftly and transparently. All communication and evidence related to the issue must be documented and made available for audit review.</p>

Annex A. Requirements for group and multi-site certification

Preferred by Nature Certification includes an option for group and multi-site certification.

Multi-site certification is meant for large operations with multiple sites under a single ownership.

Group certification is available for groups of smaller independent organisations that want to collaborate to gain certification.

To ensure compliance among all sites and group members, there must be a **centralised control function** responsible for enforcing and monitoring compliance. The term “Central Office” is used to refer to such central authority.

This Annex details eligibility for the group and multi-site options and specifies the associated certification requirements. Compliance with these requirements is mandatory, in addition to all other provisions of this Standard.

Eligibility for multi-site certification

Multiple sites may be included in the scope of a multi-site certificate if one of the conditions below is met for all participating sites:

- (a) All sites and central office are linked through common ownership or through a franchise model; or
- (b) All participating sites have a legal and/or contractual relationship with the central office and all sites are subject to a centrally administered and controlled management system with authority and responsibilities over at least one of the following elements:
 - Centralised purchase or sales function or
 - Common operational procedures (e.g. same production methods, same product) or
 - Operating under the same brand name.

Eligibility for group certification

Group certification is meant for small operations and all members must be below the eligible size criteria.

This Standard adopts the EU size classification as set out in Article 3 of [European Directive 2013/34/EU](#).

Micro-undertaking	Small undertaking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balance sheet total under EUR 350 000 and Net annual turnover under EUR 700 000 and Average number of employees during the financial year: 10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balance sheet total under EUR 4 000 000 and Net annual turnover under EUR 8 000 000 and Average number of employees during the financial year: 50

A 1	Requirements for Group and Multi-site Certification	Guidance
A 1.1	General requirements	
A 1.1.1	A Group Manager shall be defined and appointed to act on behalf of the multi-site or group members, with overall responsibility for enforcing and monitoring conformance with all applicable site or member requirements.	The Group Manager must oversee compliance and manage conformance across all sites or group members, acting as the central authority responsible for ensuring adherence to the standard.
A 1.1.2	The Group Manager shall have the competence and capacity to implement and oversee all applicable requirements of the group or multi-site organisation.	Group Manager staff must be appropriately skilled to ensure compliance at all sites, with thorough knowledge of applicable requirements and the necessary training capabilities.
A 1.1.3	The Group Manager shall have sufficient authority to ensure that each site or group member complies with all applicable requirements.	The Group Manager must have clearly defined authority, established through ownership structures or contractual agreements, enabling them to enforce compliance across all participating sites.
A 2.1	Requirements for Group Manager	
A 2.1.1	The Group Manager shall designate one person or position with overall responsibility for managing the participating group members or sites.	Clearly designate a Group Manager position or individual with overall responsibility for managing participating sites or group members to ensure consistent oversight and accountability.
A 2.1.2	The Group Manager shall have clear procedures and documented rules for the eligibility, inclusion, and removal of participating sites or group members.	Develop clear, written procedures for the eligibility, inclusion, and removal of sites or group members, and communicate them to ensure systematic and consistent group management.
A 2.1.3	The Group Manager shall maintain an up-to-date record of all participating sites or group members. For each site or group member, the Group Manager shall record the dates of entry to and exit from the scope of the group or multi-site organisation.	The Group Manager shall promptly inform the certification body whenever sites or group members are added or removed, allowing appropriate adjustments to the auditing plans.
A 2.1.4	The Group Manager shall have the authority to remove participating group members or sites if the requirements for participation are not met, or if any non-	The Group Manager must have explicit authority, documented in agreements, to remove any participant who fails to

A 1	Requirements for Group and Multi-site Certification	Guidance
	conformances identified by the Group Manager or the external verification body are not addressed.	effectively correct identified non-conformances.
A 2.1.5	The Group Manager shall have the authority to raise internal non-conformances against any site or group member and to ensure their correct implementation.	The Group Manager must have clear authority to issue and enforce corrective actions resulting from internal audits, ensuring that identified non-conformances are properly addressed.
A 2.1.6	Participating group members shall comply with relevant requirements.	Provide all required certification-related documents and clearly communicate procedures and expectations to each new site or member before inclusion, ensuring their full understanding of responsibilities.
A 2.1.7	The Group Manager shall carry out an initial audit of each applicant (site or group member) to ensure compliance with all relevant requirements of the applicable standard(s) and any additional requirements established by the Group Manager prior to their inclusion as a participating site or group member.	Conduct initial audits of prospective sites or group members to verify compliance with relevant requirements prior to formal inclusion, ensuring early identification and resolution of any potential issues.
A 2.1.8	<p>The Group Manager is accountable for the ongoing conformity of all group members and sites. Each calendar year, the Group Manager shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Review production, sales, complaints, and other relevant records from each participating site; and (b) Carry out on-site or remote audits of a risk-based sample, sufficient to provide confidence that non-conformities would be detected and corrected. 	Group Manager audits should preferably be conducted on-site, particularly for sites handling physical materials. Remote audits may be considered only for sites that do not physically handle certified materials.
A 3.1	Requirements for sites and group members	
A 3.1.1	<p>The Group Manager retains ultimate accountability for group-wide conformance, yet each group member still carries operational responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Members shall implement the required controls at their own sites. 	To meet the performance-based responsibility requirement, the Group Manager identifies an authorised representative for every site or member. Eligibility must be controlled through clearly published entry criteria and

A 1	Requirements for Group and Multi-site Certification	Guidance
	<p>(b) Supply timely and accurate data, and cooperate fully with audits and corrective actions.</p> <p>Relying on members' collaboration, the Group Manager shall ensure following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives are named for every member. • Eligibility is kept under continuous review. • Certification requirements are satisfied. • Instructions and corrective actions are completed within agreed deadlines. • Material changes are reported without delay. • All audits proceed smoothly and without obstruction. 	<p>systematic due-diligence checks. Any member that falls short is promptly suspended or removed, with the decision and its timing documented.</p> <p>Certification conformance is demonstrated for each indicator, with monitoring carried out through self-assessments, spot checks, data uploads, and trend analysis to trigger corrective actions when thresholds are missed. Implementation of corrective actions is tracked in a central log, ensuring findings are closed within agreed deadlines, while overdue items are escalated and explained.</p> <p>The Group Manager must also maintain an effective system for capturing material changes — such as ownership shifts or new processing lines — and record a risk review whenever such changes occur.</p> <p>Finally, smooth audit delivery is ensured by retaining an up-to-date audit-readiness file for each member, coordinating logistics and access for auditors, and documenting meetings, evidence, and responses.</p>

Preferred by Nature is an international non-profit organisation working to support better land management and business practices that benefit people, nature and the climate. We do this through a unique combination of sustainability certification services, projects supporting awareness raising, and capacity building.

For 30 years, we have worked to develop practical solutions to drive positive impacts in production landscapes and supply chains in 100+ countries. We focus on land use, primarily through forest, agriculture and climate impact commodities, and related sectors such as tourism and conservation.

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