

Complaints and appeals process

1 Scope and purpose

Parties that rely on certification expect to have complaints investigated and, if these are found to be valid, should have confidence that these complaints will be appropriately addressed and that a reasonable effort will be made by the certification body to resolve them. Effective responsiveness to complaints is an important means of protection for the certification body, its clients and other users of certification against errors, omissions or unreasonable behaviour. Confidence in certification activities is safeguarded when complaints are processed appropriately.

This document describes the process for handling complaints and appeals.

2 Terms and definitions

A complaint – Expression of dissatisfaction in relation to the auditing work, certification process, technical assessment or clients product/services. Complaints can be submitted by:

- BM Certification **client** or any third party involved regarding services provided by BM Certification;
- Any **third-party** regarding products or services provided by BM Certification client.

A complaint may be submitted orally or in writing. The complaint must contain the Complainant name and contact information. Complaint shall be accompanied with objective evidence to support each element or aspect of the complaint. Anonymous complaints will be reviewed but no feedback will be provided.

Complainant – person making a complaint

An appeal - A Clients request to reevaluate the auditor's conclusion/ recommendation/ nonconformity or BM Certification decision.

An appeal must be submitted in writing, identifying submitter and subject of the decision, clear description of the appeal and contact information. Appeal shall be accompanied with objective evidence to support each element or aspect of the appeal.

Appellant - person making an appeal

3 Complaints handling process

Complaint is assigned to relevant Certification manager and acknowledgement of receipt is sent within 1 working day. If the relevant Certification manager is involved in the complaint, it's assigned to another Certification manager or Executive director.

Once appeal is assigned, following steps must be taken by assignee:

- Register complaint in Complaint Register and notify Executive director;
- Decide whether the complaint relates to scope of BM Certification activities and, if so, proceed with following steps. If the scope does not relate to BM Certification activities, notify the Complainant.
- Acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint to the Complainant must be sent within 10 working days of receiving the complaint;

- BM Certification client in question should be asked to provide any comments on the issues identified in the Complaint and provide any relevant evidences;
- Investigate the issue and gather all required evidences. If necessary, organize an audit to verify the evidences or check the issue during the next planned audit;
- Review the evidences gathered and decide on necessary actions. If necessary, an independent committee may be organized for the review. Examination of the complaint shall consider the effectiveness of the certified management system;
- Keep the Complainant informed of the progress in evaluating the complaint, if the process is taking over 20 working days;
- Acknowledge in writing the Complainant when the complaint is deemed closed. Inform about the results of the process, where possible;
- Retain all evidences of actions performed and information received while handling the complaint and update Complaint register;
- Together with the certified client and the complainant (if applicable) determine, whether and, if so to what extent, the subject of the complaint and its resolution shall be made public.

Any complaint should be resolved within 3 (three) months.

Anonymity of the Complainant in relation to Client shall be retained, where possible. Confidentiality of the BM Certification client information must be preserved, where possible.

Person who has been involved in the consultation or auditing relevant BM Certification client shall not be involved in the complaint handling for three years after the consultation/audit.

3 Appeals handling process

Appeal is assigned to relevant Certification manager within 1 working day if the appeal is about auditors' conclusion/recommendation/nonconformity. Acknowledgement of receipt is sent within 1 working day. Appeal is assigned to another Certification manager or Executive director if the appeal is about Certification managers decision.

Once appeal is assigned, following steps must be followed:

- Register the appeal in Complaint Register and notify Executive director;
- Decide whether the appeal relates to scope of BM Certification activities and, if so, proceed with following steps. If the scope does not relate to BM Certification activities, notify the Appellant.
- Acknowledgement of receipt of the appeal to the Appellant must be sent within 2 working days of receiving the appeal;
- Auditor or Certification manager involved in the subject of the appeal should be asked to provide any comments on the appeal and provide any relevant evidences;
- Investigate the appeal and gather all the required evidences;
- Review the evidences gathered and decide on necessary actions. If necessary, an independent committee may be organized for the review. Make a decision to amend the auditors' conclusion/recommendation/nonconformity or Certification managers decision or to leave it unchanged. Decision must be made within 5 working days of receipt of the appeal;

- Notify the appellant on the results of the appeals process;
- Retain all evidences of actions performed and information received while handling the appeal and update Complaint register;

PEFC: if disputes relating to PEFC Forest Management and PEFC Chain of Custody of Forest-Based Products certification cannot be resolved between the certification applicant/holder of certificate and the certification organisation, information about it along with other relevant information shall be submitted to the Association "PEFC Latvian Council". The Chairman of the Board of the Association "PEFC Latvian Council" shall assign a dispute settlement committee of three persons, who shall adopt a decision suitable for all parties involved.

3 Results

If as a result of processing appeals or complaints, errors and mistakes in the actions of BM Certification are identified, without undue delay the causes of the detected non-conformities shall be investigated and necessary corrections and corrective actions shall be taken.

4 Final provisions

BM Certification when signing the contract on certification service provision, shall inform the Client in writing about the order of appeal submission and conflict resolution.

BM Certification shall ensure that decisions on complaints and appeals do not result in any discriminatory actions against the submitter. Moreover, BM Certification will retain the anonymity of the submitter in relation to the client, if this is requested by the complainant.