FAQs: ISEAL's new membership structure

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Motivation for restructuring the ISEAL membership

- **Why did ISEAL decide to restructure its membership?**

We decided to open ISEAL to a wider range of sustainability systems to enhance learning and collaboration amongst these systems — better equipping them to innovate, scale and demonstrate impact. At the same time, we will be able to provide more sustainability systems with targeted expertise to support the improvement of their practices. These changes will help to ensure that standards and similar systems continue to play a leading role in the sustainability movement.

- **How will broadening the ISEAL membership help to strengthen sustainability standards and similar systems?**

Welcoming new and different types of approaches into the ISEAL community will unlock further opportunities for collaboration and innovation. A wider membership means we can focus on strengthening practices in those critical areas where sustainability standards and similar systems can deliver the greatest impact.

- **What process underpinned ISEAL's decision to change its membership structure?**

ISEAL's new membership structure is the result of over two years of strategic planning and member discussion, through several rounds of consultation with a broad range of stakeholders. ISEAL members collectively voted to approve the new approach. Stakeholders consulted throughout the process also broadly supported for the proposed changes.

Sustainability standards and similar systems

- **What are sustainability systems?**

Sustainability systems include **standards** and **similar systems**.

A **sustainability standard** provides rules, guidelines or characteristics for products or related processes and production methods. Standards systems are the collective of organisations responsible for the activities involved in the implementation of a standard, including standard-setting, capacity building, assurance, labelling and monitoring and evaluation.

When ISEAL refers to **similar systems**, we are talking about standards-like initiatives that:

- ➢ define sustainability performance levels or improvement pathways;
- ➢ measure, monitor or verify performance or progress; and
- ➢ allow for claims to be made.

Sustainability systems could include international and national standards, data-driven approaches, landscape initiatives and a diverse range of other sustainability tools that are emerging in response to the scale and ambition needed to address the world's most critical sustainability issues.

Membership benefits and requirements

- **What are the benefits of ISEAL membership?**

All ISEAL Community Members benefit from:

- ➢ opportunities to test and explore new ideas through ISEAL's innovation and scaling activities;

- ➢ sharing experiences and collaborating to advance better sustainability solutions;

- ➢ learning and discovering new ideas through access to a wealth of resources and guidance, including the Communities of Practice that support systems in implementing the ISEAL Codes of Good Practice.

Community Members can also choose to participate in the Code compliance programme to strengthen their systems and publicly demonstrate their rigorous approach towards improvement. Once systems have been independently evaluated against all three of ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice, they are recognised as ISEAL Code Compliant and can make related claims.

To discuss how ISEAL membership could benefit your organisation, please contact membership@isealalliance.org.

- **What are the requirements to become an ISEAL member?**

ISEAL now has three membership options with varying requirements noted below. All ISEAL members should adhere to the ISEAL Community Code of Conduct and will be periodically reviewed according to the ISEAL Community Member Monitoring Procedure.

- ➢ **ISEAL Community Member:** This category is open to sustainability systems that demonstrate transparency and continuous improvement. Community Members share experiences and learning to build a community of trust and collaboration. All ISEAL members belong to this category and are not required to participate in ISEAL's compliance programme. For more information, please review the ISEAL Community Member requirements.

- ➢ **ISEAL Code Compliant:** Community Members who adhere to all three of ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice by meeting independent evaluation requirements also belong to this category. It is similar to what was formerly known as 'full membership'. For more information, please review the ISEAL Code Compliant requirements.

- ➢ **ISEAL Accreditation Member:** This category is for Community Members who are accreditation bodies and demonstrate compliance with ISO/IEC 17011:2017 in accordance with the ISEAL Accreditation Member Compliance Procedure. For more information, please review the ISEAL Accreditation Member requirements.

Claims and credibility

- **What types of claims can ISEAL members make about their relationship with ISEAL?**

In addition to providing general resources on truthful and accurate sustainability claims, we define how members can communicate about their relationship with ISEAL. All ISEAL members must follow the ISEAL Member Claims Guidelines. Permissible claims are contingent on membership status and are monitored by the ISEAL Secretariat. If you have any concerns regarding claims about ISEAL, please contact compliance@isealalliance.org.

ISEAL Community Members can make claims about working to continually improve their systems by taking part in ISEAL's learning, collaboration, and innovation activities. Community Members cannot make claims about ISEAL Code compliance or make use of the ISEAL Code Compliant logo or ISEAL organisational logo in their promotional or communications materials.

ISEAL Code Compliant Members can make additional claims about adhering to [ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice](#) through an independent evaluation. They can also make use of the ISEAL Code Compliant logo.

- **How does ISEAL define 'credibility'?**

Through a global consultation, ISEAL developed the [Credibility Principles](#) in 2013, and they have since provided an international reference for defining the foundations of credible practices for sustainability standards. They represent the values and concepts that are embraced by the sustainability standards systems that are most likely to achieve positive social, environmental and economic impacts, while decreasing negative impacts.

ISEAL is currently [revising the Credibility Principles](#), expanding their scope beyond sustainability standards, and ensuring they reflect current and future trends affecting standards and similar systems. We continue to believe that sustainability systems who actively seek to integrate ISEAL's Credibility Principles are more likely to be effective tools for delivering positive sustainability impacts.

Applying for ISEAL membership

- **What is the procedure for applying for ISEAL membership?**

Organisations who are interested in applying to become ISEAL Community Members can find more information [on our website](#) and are strongly encouraged to contact membership@isealalliance.org before initiating the application procedure.

Details on how the application will be evaluated and the subsequent steps required to make a final decision on the outcome of the application can be found in [ISEAL's Community Member Application Procedure](#).

- **How much does membership cost?**

The [ISEAL Member Fee and Application Schedule 2021](#) document outlines the 2021 fees for ISEAL membership and Code compliance assessments. ISEAL membership fees are reviewed on an annual basis.

- **When can I apply to become an ISEAL Community Member under the new membership structure?**

ISEAL has opened applications under the new membership structure. The first application deadline is 7 December 2020. Please contact membership@isealalliance.org if you are interested in applying to become an ISEAL Community Member.

- **How long is the application process to become an ISEAL Community Member?**

The application process to become an ISEAL Community Members takes approximately six months from intake to final decision, though this can vary depending on the circumstances of each individual organisation.

- **If my organisation is not eligible to become an ISEAL Community Member, how can I engage with ISEAL?**

ISEAL offers additional products and services for organisations and individuals who want to engage with our work and community, and gain access to technical resources. ISEAL Insight offers a helpful package of information, resources and events to keep you in the loop. ISEAL also offers tailored services and workshops. You can learn more about these products and services [on our website](#).

Additional questions

- **Will you have associate and full membership in the new structure?**

We have removed full and associate member designations from ISEAL's new membership structure. The new membership categories are ISEAL Community Member, ISEAL Code Compliant and ISEAL Accreditation Member.

- **What do the changes in ISEAL's membership structure mean for existing members?**

All existing ISEAL members (formerly associate and full members) meet the [ISEAL Community Member requirements](). Many of these Community Members are also ISEAL Code Compliant. From mid-November, each member's status will be available on our website. Further details on the compliance status of each ISEAL Code Compliant member will be published in January 2021.

- **What do the changes in ISEAL's membership structure mean for existing members who are accreditation bodies?**

ISEAL's accreditation body members are still evaluated against ISO/IEC 17011:2017. For more information, please review the [ISEAL Accreditation Member requirements]().

- **What do the changes in ISEAL's membership structure mean for ISEAL subscribers?**

ISEAL's previous subscriber offer is being relaunched as ISEAL Insight. ISEAL Insight will continue to offer a helpful package of information, resources and events on an improved online platform.

One of the reasons for this change is to reduce stakeholder confusion. The consultation on the membership strategy made apparent that ISEAL subscriber as a 'category' of engagement caused uncertainty about the nature of ISEAL membership and compliance. This change aims to address any ambiguity on these topics.

We continue to encourage organisations interested in sustainability systems and ISEAL membership to subscribe to ISEAL Insight.