



# ISEAL Complaints Procedure

Version 4, Effective 2 November 2020

## Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Scope and Purpose .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Roles and Responsibilities .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Concerned stakeholders .....	3
ISEAL Community Member .....	3
ISEAL Code Compliant members.....	3
ISEAL Accreditation Members .....	3
ISEAL Secretariat .....	3
Independent Evaluator .....	3
ISEAL Membership Committee.....	3
ISEAL Board.....	3
<b>Terms and Definitions .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Complaint .....	4
Day .....	4
Mediation .....	4
<b>Confidential disclosure .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Procedure.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Complaint submission.....	5
Determination of admissibility .....	5
Mediation .....	6
Formal investigation – Community Member Requirements.....	6
Formal investigation – Code Compliant Requirements and Accreditation Member Requirements .....	6
<b>Appeals .....</b>	<b>7</b>

## Introduction

ISEAL is an inclusive learning community with membership open to a wide range of sustainability standards and similar systems. All ISEAL Community Members meet the *ISEAL Community Member Requirements* and participate in ISEAL's learning, collaboration, and innovation activities.

ISEAL Community Members who are accreditation bodies must also meet the *ISEAL Accreditation Member Requirements*.

Otherwise, ISEAL Community Members can choose to meet the *ISEAL Code Compliant Requirements*, demonstrate a rigorous approach to improvement by implementing ISEAL's Standard-Setting, Impacts and Assurance Codes of Good Practice. Once assessed in accordance with the *Independent Evaluation Procedure*, these members are recognised as ISEAL Code Compliant and can use the associated ISEAL Code Compliant logo.

ISEAL monitors performance against the relevant requirements for all categories of membership.

Providing a space for stakeholders to report concerns about member action or inaction supports ISEAL in its work with members to improve their systems and create greater sustainability impacts.

## Scope and Purpose

The *ISEAL Complaints Procedure* outlines how stakeholders can report concerns about members' adherence to *ISEAL Community Member Requirements*, *ISEAL Code Compliant Requirements*, and *ISEAL Accreditation Member Requirements*, and how ISEAL will work with stakeholders and members to resolve complaints.

For a complaint to be accepted for formal investigation within the scope of this procedure, the stakeholder must have first sought to resolve the complaint directly with the member.

Specifically, this procedure serves to:

- › Support stakeholders in bringing concerns to the attention of ISEAL
- › Describe how ISEAL will work with members and stakeholders to address concerns
- › Describe the tools and approaches that ISEAL uses to resolve formal complaints
- › Describe what happens if members do not resolve formal complaints that are upheld following investigation

ISEAL's working language is English; therefore, we may require that complainants provide translations of evidence and/or we may require that complainants have access to qualified interpreters to support them in the complaints process.

Complaints by members relating to decisions about their ISEAL Community Member or ISEAL Code Compliant status are covered in the related procedures and are not included within the scope of this procedure.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Concerned stakeholders

Concerned stakeholders (hereafter ‘complainants’) are responsible for acting in good faith and working with ISEAL and the member to seek resolution.

### ISEAL Community Member

ISEAL Community Members (hereafter ‘members’) are responsible for meeting *ISEAL Community Member Requirements*. In relation to this procedure, they are responsible for acting in good faith and working with ISEAL and the complainant to seek resolution.

### ISEAL Code Compliant members

ISEAL Code Compliant members are responsible for meeting *ISEAL Community Member Requirements* and *ISEAL Code Compliant Requirements*. In relation to this procedure, they are responsible for acting in good faith and working with ISEAL and the complainant to seek resolution.

### ISEAL Accreditation Members

ISEAL Accreditation Members are responsible for meeting the *ISEAL Community Member Requirements* and *ISEAL Accreditation Member Requirements*. In relation to this procedure, they are responsible for acting in good faith and working with ISEAL and the complainant to seek resolution.

### ISEAL Secretariat

The ISEAL Secretariat (hereafter ‘secretariat’) is responsible for:

- › Verifying that members meet *ISEAL Community Member Requirements* in accordance with the *ISEAL Community Monitoring Procedure*
- › Coordinating independent evaluations in accordance with the *ISEAL Independent Evaluation Procedure* and the *ISEAL Accreditation Member Compliance Procedure*
- › Coordinating the handling of complaints in accordance with this procedure

### Independent Evaluator

Independent evaluators are responsible for:

- › Assessing evidence in relation to complaints of non-compliance with *ISEAL Code Compliant Requirements* or *ISEAL Accreditation Member Requirements*
- › Reviewing and deciding whether to accept member plans to address identified non-compliances
- › Reviewing how effectively implemented plans have addressed identified non-compliances

### ISEAL Membership Committee

The ISEAL Membership Committee is responsible for:

- › Hearing and deciding on appeals.

### ISEAL Board

The ISEAL Board is responsible for taking decisions to suspend or withdraw ISEAL Community Member status.

## Terms and Definitions

### Complaint

A formal expression of dissatisfaction.

### Day

A working day in the jurisdiction of the parties involved.

### Mediation

Mediation is a confidential and independent process led by a neutral third party, a mediator. The aim is to help those experiencing a conflict find a way forward that works for them. The mediators do not judge right and wrong or arbitrate a solution. Instead, they support both parties to find a solution that works for them.

Mediation is voluntary and is never imposed on any party. Any outcome or agreement is also voluntary, and each party retains control of whether they wish to agree to a resolution.

Mediation is **not**

- legally binding
- a process where mediators will advise or make decisions for you
- a process where mediators decide upon the merits of your case

## Confidential disclosure

A complainant raising a concern with the secretariat need not disclose their identity if they choose to maintain their anonymity and they may use a code name to facilitate further communications.

Where an individual raising a confidential concern identifies themselves, their identity will not be further disclosed to persons assessing the concern without the individual's consent.

While it should generally be possible for the secretariat to undertake a preliminary assessment of the admissibility of a confidential concern, the assessment of the merit of the concern under the formal complaints resolution process is likely to be hampered or incomplete if it is raised in this manner.

If concerns are raised confidentially, ISEAL will make every effort to keep the identity of those raising the concerns secret, and will only proceed to investigate the concern as a formal complaint under the ISEAL Complaints Procedure if the person raising the concern agrees to the matter being so disclosed. This does not apply if ISEAL believes there is a legal or regulatory obligation to disclose the concern.

## Procedure

ISEAL seeks to investigate complaints in a fair and balanced manner, resolving concerns efficiently and effectively. A key tenet underlying this procedure is to work with all parties to resolve complaints at the lowest and least formal levels, with the escalation to formal complaint investigation by ISEAL being the option of last resort. Stakeholders with concerns about a member's adherence to ISEAL requirements should contact the member and seek to resolve the matter with them directly either through dialogue or by making use of member's own complaints mechanisms.

Where complaints cannot be resolved directly with the member, stakeholders are encouraged to contact the secretariat in the first instance to highlight their concern either by email at [compliance@isealalliance.org](mailto:compliance@isealalliance.org) or by telephone on +44 (0) 20 3246 0066. The secretariat will treat such approaches in the strictest of confidence and seek to understand the nature of the complaint and outline the options available to seek resolution.

### Complaint submission

Complainants should clearly explain the nature of their complaint and the desired outcome they seek and include all documented evidence available to support the complaint.

- 1) Complainants should complete the [ISEAL Complaints Submission Form](#) and submit it to the secretariat by email ([compliance@isealalliance.org](mailto:compliance@isealalliance.org)) or mail (The Green House, 244-254 Cambridge Heath Road, London, E2 9DA).
- 2) The secretariat will acknowledge receipt of the complaint by notifying the complainant in writing within five days.

### Determination of admissibility

The secretariat will determine if a complaint is admissible under the scope of this procedure.

- 3) In support of and prior to any assessment, the secretariat will request a meeting with the complainant within 10 days of acknowledging receipt. The meeting will serve to:
  - a) Discuss the completeness of the submission and any clarification that may be required
  - b) Discuss the background, context and, reasons for the complaint
  - c) Discuss the admissibility of the complaint within the scope of this procedure
  - d) Discuss what effect any request for anonymity may have on the effectiveness of resolution and how the complainant wishes to proceed (see the Confidential Disclosure section above)
  - e) Support the complainant's understanding of possible resolution options such as:
    - i. Professional mediation, where the costs are split evenly between the complainant and member, or
    - ii. Formal investigation against the *ISEAL Community Member Requirements* by the secretariat, or
    - iii. Formal evaluation against the *ISEAL Code Compliant Requirements* or *ISEAL Accreditation Member Requirements* by an independent evaluator
- 4) Within 10 days of having met the complainant, the secretariat will contact the affected member to request a meeting between them and the secretariat to:
  - a) Discuss the background, context, and reasons for the complaint
  - b) Communicate the openness of the complainant to mediation and identify the member's openness to mediation where the costs are split equally between the complainant and member
- 5) The secretariat will provide full details of the complaint to the member within 5 days of the meeting and request a formal response within 10 days. In their response, the member will provide any evidence that demonstrates how the complaint is being or has already been addressed.

- 6) The secretariat will assess all the information and communicate its determination of admissibility, and a summary of the rationale, to the complainant and member within 15 days of the formal response from the member. Where a complaint has been determined to be admissible, the secretariat will also provide the complainant with information on next steps.

### Mediation

- 7) Where mediation is a suitable option and both member and complainant are willing to proceed, the secretariat will send a mediation questionnaire to both parties within 5 days. The member and the complainant will complete and return the questionnaire within 10 days.
- 8) The secretariat will review the responses to the mediation questionnaire, and if both parties agree to pursue mediation, will identify and appoint a suitably qualified independent mediator within 20 days. Both parties will review and sign an agreement to mediate. The secretariat will raise an invoice to each of the parties who will share equally the costs of the mediation. The secretariat will remit payment and submit all information to the mediator who will then work directly with both parties to seek resolution through mediation.
- 9) Should the complainant be dissatisfied with the outcomes of mediation and wish to proceed to formal complaint resolution, they will inform the secretariat in writing within 10 days of the mediation session.

### Formal investigation – Community Member Requirements

- 10) The secretariat will assess the information submitted by the complainant and the member and may contact either party for clarification. A decision on the merits of the complaint and a summary of the assessment will be sent to both parties within 20 days of initiating formal complaint resolution.
- 11) Where a complaint is upheld, members will develop a plan that addresses any identified breaches to the requirements and will participate in a review meeting with the secretariat to agree the plan within 20 days of the decision on the merits of the complaint.
- 12) Members will implement the plan and submit evidence of implementation to the secretariat within 30 days of agreeing the plan.
- 13) The secretariat will provide the member and complainant with a decision on how the complaint been addressed within 20 days of the review meeting.

A summary of improvements that have been made to member systems resulting from a complaint will be made available to all ISEAL Community Members and the complainant.

Members who fail to submit or implement adequate plans to address breaches to *the ISEAL Community Member Requirements* in accordance with the deadlines described above, will be suspended in accordance with the *ISEAL Community Member Monitoring Procedure*.

### Formal investigation – Code Compliant Requirements and Accreditation Member Requirements

Investigations of complaints against the *ISEAL Code Compliant Requirements* or *ISEAL Accreditation Member Requirements* will be conducted by independent evaluators assigned by the secretariat and will follow the procedures described in the *ISEAL Independent Evaluation Procedure* or *ISEAL Accreditation Member Compliance Procedure*.

- 14) The secretariat will identify and recruit a suitably qualified and neutral independent evaluator (hereafter 'evaluator') within 20 days of initiating formal complaint resolution.

- 15) The evaluator will assess the information submitted by the complainant and the member and decide on the merits of the complaint. The evaluator may contact (or request that the secretariat contact) the member or complainant for clarification. The decision and a summary of the assessment will be sent by the secretariat to the member and complainant within 50 days of recruiting the evaluator.
- 16) Where no non-compliances have been identified by the evaluator, the member will be determined to be compliant and the complaint is not upheld.
- 17) Where non-compliances have been identified and the complaint is upheld, members will have 45 days from the decision to submit and agree a plan with the evaluator that describes how and within what time-scale it will address any identified breaches to the requirements. The maximum time scale for addressing non-compliances are those allowed *ISEAL Independent Evaluation Procedure* or *ISEAL Accreditation Member Compliance Procedure*.
- 18) Upon agreement of the plan, the secretariat will request a meeting with the complainant to provide a summary of how the member plans to address any breaches to the requirements.
- 19) The member will submit to the secretariat the evidence that it has addressed any breaches to the requirements within the deadlines agreed in the plan. The evaluator will review the evidence and determine member compliance within 45 days of the submission.
- 20) A summary of improvements that have been made to member systems resulting from a complaint will be sent to the complainant and made publicly available.

Members who fail to submit or implement adequate plans to address identified breaches to the requirements within the deadlines described above will be suspended in accordance with *the ISEAL Independent Evaluation Procedure* or *ISEAL Accreditation Member Compliance Procedure*.

## Appeals

Where a member or complainant disagrees with the outcome of the investigation into a complaint, they may lodge a formal appeal to the ISEAL Membership Committee.

The ISEAL Membership Committee is responsible for hearing and deciding on appeals and their decision is final.

- 1) Appeals must be submitted to the secretariat within 30 days of the notification of the respective decision. Submissions should clearly state that a formal appeal is being lodged, explain the nature of the appeal, and include all documented evidence to support the appeal.
- 2) The secretariat will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 5 days.
- 3) The secretariat will notify the ISEAL Membership Committee and forward to the Committee all information received from the appellant within 15 days of acknowledging receipt.
- 4) The Committee will undertake the assessment of the submitted information within 40 days and determine whether to uphold or overturn the decision and will inform the secretariat.
- 5) The secretariat will contact the appellant within 10 days to inform them of the decision.