GEO Governance Bodies

GEO Governance Bodies shall be reviewed every 3 – 6 years

Official Language: English

[In case of inconsistency between translated versions, reference shall default to the official language version]

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Company Limited by Guarantee

Registered in Scotland SC278048
Overview

GEO is a not for profit organization - entirely dedicated to the promotion of sustainability in and through golf. GEO’s governance, strategy and day to day decision making are directed and informed by the following bodies:

- Board of Directors
- Advisory Council (with a Credibility Team)
- Expert Groups
- Stakeholder Forum

An experienced and qualified senior management team oversee the coordination and implementation of activities. Douglas Home & Co Chartered Accountants audits financial accounts annually.

In early 2015 a new organisation, GEO Certification LTD. (GEO Cert. Ltd) was created as a wholly owned, but autonomous subsidiary of GEO Ltd. There are separate Boards and articles of association; with GEO Ltd continuing to oversee all strategic, standard setting, impact assessment and programmatic activities, but GEO Cert. LTD. charged with certification decisions and assurance. GEO Cert. LTD.'s Board will report to the GEO Ltd Board, and members of GEO Ltd Board may be appointed to sit GEO Cert. LTD.'s Board.

Modelling on other ISEAL Members, by creating a split between standard setting and assurance / certification activities, greater compliance to an ISO-type model shall be created. GEO Cert. LTD.’s certification, auditing and assurance activities will be overseen by GEO Ltd – through oversight of peer-
reviews, measurement of certification KPI’s set by GEO Ltd and analysis of the consistency of audits carried out. There is also consideration towards an annual third party review and report of GEO Cert. LTD.'s activities.

The Advisory Council shall be constructed of members from across a balance of stakeholders. The Credibility Team within the new Advisory Council shall be constructed of minimum four members of the Advisory Council when special oversight or deliberation on an issue as required. The Credibility Team shall oversee standard setting processes, monitoring & evaluation, complaints and appeals and allow for alternative decision-making when the GEO Cert. LTD. and GEO Ltd Boards are unable to reach consensus. The Chairperson of the Advisory Council will also chair the Credibility Team.

Overseen by the Credibility Team, “Expert Groups” will be created when required, to act as working groups on specific areas of programme, standard setting or certification consultation activity. The members of the Expert Group could include members of the Advisory Council and/or Credibility Team, but will also include other experts required for the specific working topic and to ensure a balance of stakeholder representation inputting on the topic. During 2015 expert groups will start to be created for the new Tournaments Standard, the New Developments standard, and localised / regionalised expert groups for the various Regional Priority versions of the Operations certification standard (GEO Certified®) that are being developed.

All members of the Boards, Working Groups, Committees, Forums and Staff must adhere to GEO's policies on Confidentiality, Impartiality and act in a non-discriminatory, transparent manner (see Appendices at the end of this document). Additionally, all activities and actions should be conducted in full compliance to ISEAL codes of Standard Setting, Impacts and Assurance.

**Board of Directors- GEO Ltd.**

The GEO Ltd. Board of Directors ("GEO Ltd. Board") is responsible for all financial, legal and governance aspects of the organization, including accountability for performance, and final decision making authority on all aspects of strategy, programming and operations.

**Authority**

- Input into and approve the organization’s strategic, programme and operational plans;
- Approve budgets and financial statements;
- Agree timelines of practical operational activities in line with resource availability;
- Agree strategy for geographical expansion and partner relations, in conjunction with the Advisory Council;
- Consider feedback from other committees, management team, GEO Cert. Ltd. and other partners and programme participants in determining and prioritizing actions;
- Approve staffing plan, employment and remuneration.
• Final approval and adoption of GEO programme and ecolabel content, criteria, guidance and processes. This final approval shall ensure due process was enacted in the development of standards in accordance with the current ISEAL Code of Standard Setting (not the substantive content of criteria).

• Final approval of GEO’s official stance on Complaints and Appeals about procedural aspects of GEO standards criteria, about GEO Ltd and GEO Cert. LTD. staff or management procedures (as per A17 v2. GEO Public Complaints and Appeals Procedures).

• Oversight of GEO Cert. Ltd. Board.

Timeframes, Reporting and Deadlines
• Meet every 3 months

• Six monthly management team reports covering strategic, operational and financial matters

• Responsibility for drafting Annual Review for annual release in March (first report to be released Spring 2015)

Composition
• Appropriate mix of business, golfing, sustainability, non-profit and environmental experience.

• Time available to input regularly and consistently into organizational planning and development.

Support from GEO Staff
• Secretarial support from CEO/Secretary

• Logistical arrangements for travel

• On-going guidance on issues from appropriate members of management team

Specific Areas of Responsibility
• Financial probity - income generation, budgeting income and expenditure, creation of reserves, taxation, statutory and stakeholder reporting.

• Legal compliance - across all aspects of corporate governance.

• Professional indemnity - protecting the organization and staff from claims.

• Compiling and releasing Annual Review with the input of the Advisory Council for release in March each year.

• Programme content, criteria and process approval and adoption.

• Approval of Monitoring and Evaluation activities of programme's impacts.
• Cooperation with GEO Cert. LTD. as per any Memoranda of Understanding, to ensure alignment of both organisations activities and successful realisation of both organisations aims.

• Ensure a timely and effective communication of any new standards criteria, scientific notes and guidance to GEO Cert. Ltd.

• Oversight of GEO Cert. Ltd. including peer-reviews, measurement of certification KPI’s set by GEO Ltd and analysis of the consistency and quality of audits carried out.

Terms
• Board members sit for a period of three years, with potential to sit again for three further years.

• A second period of tenure is secured through consensus from the remainder of the Board.

• At least half of the existing Board must remain in office, for at least one year while new Board members are appointed and inducted, with a minimum of three members at any time.

• New Board members are appointed by the existing Board, based on nominations from Board and Advisory Council; review of options; and recommendations from CEO.

• The Board members shall appoint a Chairperson, who shall preside at every Board meeting. If there is no Board member holding that office, or if the person holding it is unwilling to preside or is not present within five minutes after the time appointed for the meeting, the Board members present shall appoint one of their number to chair the meeting.

• Decisions shall be made by consensus. Consensus is defined as the absence of sustained opposition. In the event of consensus not being reached, the following processes shall apply in the below situations:
  o For decisions on financial probity, legal compliance, operations and staffing, the GEO Ltd Board shall refer the issue to the Chairperson of the Credibility Team and a final decision shall be taken by supermajority vote (67%) from among the members of the Board and the Chairperson of the Credibility Team (who is also the Chairperson of the Advisory Council). The Chairperson of the GEO Ltd. Board has the deciding vote if there is a tie. A quorum on this vote shall be as per GEO Ltd.’s Articles of Association (and clause 40 Table A of 1985 Companies Act) two members of the Board, plus the Chairperson of the Credibility Team.
  o For decisions on processes and GEO CERT Ltd. oversight, if the Board cannot reach consensus (defined as the absence of sustained opposition), the Board shall refer the issue to the Credibility Team for further input and deliberation. If consensus among the Board can still not be reached following the Credibility Team recommendation, a final decision shall then be taken by super-majority vote (67%) from among the members of the GEO Ltd. Board and the Chairperson of the Advisory Council.
All issues, voting, decision-making and outcomes, shall be recorded in the minutes of meetings.

Current Members
Information about the current members of the Board of Directors can be found on GEO’s website by following the link: www.golfenvironment.org/about/geo/governance/Board_of_directors

Board of Directors - GEO Certification LTD.
The Board of Directors of GEO Certification LTD. ("GEO CERT. Ltd Board") is responsible for all financial, legal and governance aspects of the Certification and assurance activities of the organization, including accountability for performance, and final decision making authority on all aspects of strategy, programming and operations in relation to certifications.

Authority

- Input into and approve GEO CERT. Ltd.'s strategic, programme and operational plans;
- Ensure GEO Cert. Ltd.'s activities comply with ISEAL's Code of Assurance.
- Approve budgets and financial statements, before final approval by the GEO Ltd Board.
- Agree timelines of practical operational activities in line with resource availability;
- Agree strategy for geographical expansion and partner relations, in conjunction with the GEO Ltd. Board and the Chairperson of the Advisory Council;
- Consider feedback from other committees, management team and other partners and programme participants in determining and prioritizing actions;
- Approve staffing plan, employment and remuneration for GEO CERT. LTD.'s activities.
- Final approval of GEO Certified® certification and recertification decisions, guidance and processes.
- Responsibility for the assurance of GEO certification through recruitment, training, calibration and auditing competency, policies, processes and peer-reviews.
- Approval of GEO Cert. Ltd.'s official stance on complaints about certification decisions and leading a peer-review if a golf facility is appealing a certification decision (as per A17 v2. GEO Public Complaints and Appeals Procedures.

Timeframes, Reporting and Deadlines

- Meet every 3 months
- Six monthly management team reports covering strategic, operational and financial matters
- Responsibility for approving GEO CERT. Ltd Section of Annual Review for annual release in March (first report to be released Spring 2016)

Composition
• Appropriate mix of business, golfing, sustainability, non-profit and environmental experience, with at least one third of members from a sustainability, auditing or voluntary certification background (as opposed to business/golfing background).

• Time available to input regularly and consistently into organizational planning and development.

Support from GEO Staff
• Secretarial support from CEO/Secretary
• Logistical arrangements for travel
• On-going guidance on issues from appropriate members of management team

Specific Areas of Responsibility
• Financial probity - income generation, budgeting income and expenditure, creation of reserves, taxation, statutory and stakeholder reporting.

• Legal compliance - across all aspects of corporate governance
• Professional indemnity - protecting the organization and staff from claims.

• ASSURANCE: Oversight of the network of independent professionals working as Verifiers including:
  • Eligibility, selection and accreditation of Verifiers
  • Ongoing quality assurance, training, and relevant professional development
  • Develop manage and implement a contractual Code of Conduct for the Verifiers
  • Design and implement a disciplinary appeals and complaints procedure related to Verifier involvement and verification outcomes
  • Assuring adherence to ISEAL Assurance Code
  • Monitoring and reporting on annual trends in the Verifier network membership and activities
  • Development of other relevant related policies and procedures, documents and activities such as future remote verification.

CERTIFICATION
• Reviewing golf facility, golf development and golf tournament compliance with relevant international and regional priority Standards, the latest version of:
  • GEO Certified Evaluation Criteria
  • GEO Certified Recertification Criteria
• Evaluating Verifier reports and recommendations
• Appeals and complaints procedure for golf facilities, developments or tournaments related to the issue or non-issue of certification
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• Monitoring and reporting on annual trends on numbers and data of participants.

DEVELOPMENT

• Preparation testing and implementation of Key Performance Indicators for assurance and certification.
• Analysing trends in certification and assurance standards and recommending improvements in GEO assurance and certification processes
• Reviewing monitoring results and recommending any amendments to GEO Cert. Ltd.’s procedures processes and policies.

Terms

• GEO CERT. Ltd Board members sit for a period of three years, with potential to sit again for a further three years.

• A second period of tenure is secured through consensus from the remainder of the GEO CERT. Ltd. Board.

• At least half of the existing Board must remain in office, for at least one year while new Board members are appointed and inducted, with a minimum of three members at any time.

• New Board members are appointed by the existing Board, based on nominations from GEO CERT. Ltd Board and Advisory Council; review of options; and recommendations from CEO.

• The directors may appoint a Chairperson, who shall preside at every Board meeting. If there is no director holding that office, or if the director holding it is unwilling to preside or is not present within five minutes after the time appointed for the meeting, the directors present may appoint one of their number to chair the meeting.

• Decisions shall be made by consensus. Consensus is defined as the absence of sustained opposition. In the event of consensus not being reached, the Board shall refer to the Credibility Team and GEO Ltd Board for input and deliberation, and a final decision shall be taken by supermajority vote (67%) from among the members of the GEO CERT. Ltd Board, the Chairperson of the Board of GEO Ltd. and the Chairperson of the Credibility Team (who is also the Chairperson of the Advisory Council). A quorum on decision-making is as per GEO CERT. Ltd.'s Articles of Association.

Current Members

Information about the current members of the GEO CERT. Ltd.'s Board of Directors can be found on GEO’s website by following the link: www.golfenvironment.org/about/geo/governance/Board_of_directors

Advisory Council

The Advisory Council underpins the credibility of GEO’s work, by ensuring that all guidance, programme
content, processes and certification determinations incorporate the latest sustainability understanding, comprehensive content and appropriate processes and protocols. The Council ensures the integrity of the organisation's work, in that a broad spectrum of stakeholder views and needs (including marginalised and disadvantaged groups) are incorporated and involved in decision-making, and that GEO and partners achieve meaningful change in industry performance, for the tangible benefit of the environment and communities, through balanced stakeholder input. To facilitate decision-making, within the Advisory Council a Credibility Team of at least four members shall be created from among its members (with the Chairperson of the Advisory Council being the Chairperson on the Credibility Team).

Authority
The Advisory Council has no official legal authority within the organization, but serves with a high degree of influence and accountability within the organization as a whole.

The Advisory Council oversees the activities, processes, determinations and certifications developed by the Credibility Team, which shall be chosen from among its members, and also those of the expert working groups reporting into it (initially; New Developments, Tournaments and Regional Expert Groups). In this way the Advisory Council represents a broad range of stakeholder interests, expertise and involvement in all aspects of developing the standards and subsequent amendments, monitoring, evaluation and assurance.

Composition
To ensure a balance of stakeholder views and involvement, the Advisory Council shall be composed of a balance of the below group, with at least 8 members:

- Experienced practicing environmental and sustainability professionals;
- Experienced practitioners from different parts of the golf community;
- Academics, researchers and technical experts with relevant qualifications and experience;
- Experienced members of the VERIFIER Network, actively involved in programme delivery;
- Technological specialists and innovators may be invited to collaborate on specific issues as required;
- Expertise in standard setting; monitoring and evaluation and certification.

Overall the composition shall be balanced to represent a broad range of stakeholder groups (regional interests, topical interests, disadvantaged groups) and no one stakeholder type shall dominate.

Members of the Advisory Council shall:

- be able to be impartial in their facilitation of the standards development;
- have an understanding of the potential impacts of the standard on affected stakeholders (and take into consideration especially potentially affected marginal and disadvantaged groups);
- have a close understanding of and desire to advance sustainability in and through golf;
• Shall sit for a minimum of one year and a maximum of three years, with only two terms (maximum of six years) possible.

Individuals or groups can volunteer for membership to the Advisory Council and shall be assessed on their technical knowledge, experience and the balance of members to represent different stakeholders and opinions. The decision of GEO LTD's CEO for inclusion on the Advisory Council and Credibility Team within it shall be final. Any complaints can be made to the GEO Chief Executive Officer and may be resolved through referral to the GEO Ltd. Board.

A Chairperson shall be chosen by the members of the Advisory Council from among its members and approved by the GEO Ltd. Board of Directors. They will also chair the Credibility Team. The Chairperson shall hold the position for the remainder of their existing term (for a maximum of three years), after which a new Chairperson shall be chosen. This facilitation and chairing provision role shall include (but not be limited to):

• Ensuring that the Advisory Council operates responsibly and in accordance with these terms of reference and the applicable procedures.
• Ensuring that all members of the Advisory Council have the opportunity to express their opinions and concerns, and shall aim to find consensus in all recommendations.
• Ensuring that there is effective communication with the appointed member of Staff within the GEO.

Technical experts may be appointed to participate in Advisory Council and Credibility Team discussions, but shall have no formal role in its decision making process. These persons may be taken from existing Expert Group members, or from outside of any GEO governance organisation depending on the technical requirements.

The Credibility Team within the Advisory Council shall be composed of at least 4 members, shall be nominated by the CEO of GEO Ltd and shall sit for a minimum of one year and a maximum of three years. The aim is to ensure streamlined, effective action by the Advisory Council across standard setting, monitoring and evaluation, complaints and appeals and alternative decision-making.

**Timeframes, Reporting and Deadlines**

• The Advisory Council meets once every 12 months, with regular remote communications scheduled around consultations and deliberations on specific issues, including at least one conference call every 6 months.

• The Advisory Council shall sign off on key guidance notes, amendments to criteria and other technical documentation, before final Board approval.

• Council members can nominate in writing another council member as their proxy for a given meeting.

• If the Chairperson cannot be present, s/he shall indicate in advance of the meeting one of the other
Council members who shall assume the chair for that meeting.

- Decision-making shall be by consensus. Consensus for decision-making is defined as the absence of sustained opposition unless otherwise stated. When consensus is not obtained, the issue shall be opened to the GEO Ltd. Board and the Advisory Council for further deliberation. If there is continued opposition, a final decision shall be taken by super-majority vote (67%) from among the Advisory Council members. All issues, opinions, oppositions and votes shall be recorded in the minutes.

- Minutes of meetings (phone and physical) shall be taken at each meeting and kept on record by GEO for at least 7 years.

- All Advisory Council meetings are open to GEO Board members who wish to participate as non-voting observers.

**Support from GEO Staff**
- Secretarial support

  - Record of meeting key decisions and action items taken by appointed staff and approved by CEO

  - Allocation of staff time for coordination / delivery of specific actions arising between meetings

**Specific Areas of Responsibility**
- On-going guidance and feedback on:
  
  - Agenda of themes and sub issues that GEO promotes and integrates across programmes
  
  - Messages that GEO publicly presents and action GEO advocates
  
  - Reports and reviews prepared by management team (based on monitoring and evaluation activities)

- Consultation input on:
  
  - Programme content
  
  - Programme criteria
  
  - Programme and certification processes
  
  - Programme terms and conditions
  
  - Key guidance materials and policy for Verifier network, particularly in relation of verification function of network
  
  - Any technical education materials produced

- Certification determinations:
  
  - As necessary, referrals on individual certification decisions
  
  - As necessary, input into appeals on certification decisions and complaints as per A17. GEO
Complaints Procedure.

- Monitoring and evaluation of programmes in line with the ISEAL Code of Impacts, including measurement of impacts and link of activities with GEO's Theory of Change.

- Reporting of sustainability outcomes arising from GEO's work and programmes.

- Compliance with ISEAL requirements – oversee adherence of Expert Working Groups to GEO’s processes and compliance with ISEAL requirements, especially those relating to broad stakeholder representation (including a focus on the involvement of marginalised and disadvantaged groups) and ensure that all interested parties have an equal opportunity to be part of the discussions and consultations, with no significant interest group dominating these processes.

- Involvement in the resolution of Complaints and Appeals (as per A17 v.2. GEO Public Complaints and Appeals Procedures).

Terms
The Advisory Council is granted the following prior approval rights of decisions by Expert Groups before final GEO Ltd Board approval:

a. Approval of all standards and evolutions of programme content and criteria

b. Approval of all and any changes to GEO Cert. Ltd certification and verification decision-making process

c. Approval on all guidance that directly connects to and supports GEO programmes and criteria.

The members of the Advisory Council may sit for a minimum of one year and a maximum of a three-year period, based on approval by GEO LTD's CEO. Members have the potential for re-nomination for a further three years, based on recommendations from the CEO of GEO Ltd, the Council Chairperson and approval from the GEO Ltd Board of Directors. Nominations for the Chairperson come from the Council, subject to approval from the GEO Ltd Board of Directors. The Chairperson may sit for a maximum of three years.

Current Members
Information about the current members of the Advisory Council can be found on GEO’s website by following the link: [http://www.golfenvironment.org/about/geo/governance/advisory_council](http://www.golfenvironment.org/about/geo/governance/advisory_council)

Expert Groups
Expert Groups shall be created as required to develop and provide technical assistance to specific areas of GEO programming or certification systems as per their Terms of Reference.

Authority
The Expert Groups shall have no official legal authority within the organization, but serve with a high degree
of influence and accountability for the scope of work it has been created to address.

In the short term the Expert Groups that shall be established for New Developments Certification. In the medium term other groups shall be founded to create Regional Standards for golf and a Tournaments Certification.

Timeframes, Reporting and Deadlines

- The Expert Groups shall meet once every 12 months, with regular remote communications scheduled around consultations and deliberations on specific issues, including at least one conference call every 6 months.

- The Expert Groups shall sign off on key guidance notes, amendments to criteria and other technical documentation in relation to their scope, before approval by the Advisory Council and final Board approval.

- Decision-making shall be by Consensus. Consensus for decision-making is defined as the absence of sustained opposition unless otherwise stated. When consensus is not obtained, the opinions of the Chairpersons of the Advisory Council and Board GEO Ltd. shall be sought, and further deliberation held. If there continues to be sustained opposition, the opposition shall be noted and a decision made by super-majority vote (67%) between the members of the Expert Group, Chairperson of the Advisory Council and the GEO Ltd. Chairperson. If consensus cannot be reached during Standard Setting, alternative decision-making shall be upheld, as described in GEO's Standard Setting Procedure A5 v3.

Composition:
The Expert Groups shall each consist of at least 4 members chosen by GEO Ltd. from a broad range of stakeholders relevant to the area of the scope of work and approved by consensus among the GEO Ltd. Board, with input and consultation with the Advisory Council. The aim is to provide a balanced representation across stakeholder groups (including if possible, marginalised or disadvantaged groups) relevant to the scope of work.

Specific Areas of Responsibility

- Develop standards for their Region or scope of work in line with current approved GEO International Criteria (A12 and A13) and processes (A5) and in compliance with ISEAL Standard Setting Code.

- Represent a broad range of stakeholder interests (including marginalised groups), and involvement in developing the standard and subsequent amendments.

- Act as the technical committee for any issues, queries, complaints or clarification of the standard, standard implementation and impact assessment.

- Support Monitoring and Evaluation of programmes for their region or area of work (e.g. Tournaments, New Golf Developments or countries).

- Reporting sustainability outcomes arising from GEO’s work in their region or area of work.

- The Expert Group shall have consultation input on:
  - Programme content for their region/ scope of deliberation
- Programme criteria for their region / scope of deliberation
- Programme and certification processes
- Programme terms and conditions
- Key guidance materials and policy for Verifier network particularly in relation of verification function of the network
- Any technical education materials produced
- Certification determinations including referrals on individual certification decisions, and input on appeals on certification decisions, as per the GEO Complaints Procedures (A17 v.2.).

Terms
Terms of Reference shall be developed for each Expert Group and approved by the GEO Ltd Board of Directors, in consultation with the Advisory Council.

Current Members
Information about the current members of the Expert Groups can be found on GEO’s website by following the link: http://www.golfenvironment.org/about/standards_group

Stakeholder Network
The GEO Stakeholder Network is the mechanism through which GEO collectively represents and advances its relationships with national and international golfing, government, environmental and civic organizations. The Network’s core purpose is to ensure broad stakeholder involvement in GEO’s work. The network enables information exchange, supports in coordination and plans delivery of GEO programmes; and provide feedback to GEO to inform organisational strategic planning and programme development.

Authority
The GEO Stakeholder Network has no official legal authority or accountability within the organization. However its role, and the contribution of Stakeholder partners, plays a vital part in assuring that GEO’s work is relevant and useful to golf practitioners across geographical and political boundaries; representative of the needs and aspirations of diverse stakeholders; culminating into and expressed as a strong, unified and powerful force for progress around the world.

Timeframes, Reporting and Deadlines
Communication with the network is mainly through electronic forms, although groups and stakeholders shall meet face to face, as required or possible. Agendas are focused on attaining:

- Feedback from all national and international golf partners;
- Presenting updates on GEO progress;
- Presenting evolutions on critical GEO strategy, operations and programmes;
- Setting individual and collective goals and planning approaches to achievement;
- Facilitating valuable and unique networking and information exchange on sustainable golf matters.

Composition
The Network is made up of representatives of golfing and environmental organizations that partner with GEO.
Support from GEO Staff

- Secretarial support from Director of Programme Management – agenda and meeting paper presentation;
- Symposium reports prepared by Operations Manager, approved by CEO

Specific Areas of Responsibility
Act as the eyes and ears of GEO and constructively feed back positive and negative reaction to GEO's work;

- Help GEO to anticipate issues and identify solutions for different locations and circumstances;
- Provide financial support to enable GEO to facilitate international cooperation, eco-labelling and advocacy;
- Act as advocates for GEO's vision and mission and facilitate new partnerships or funding opportunities when possible
- Involvement in Public consultations on standard setting.

Terms
The individuals and organisations in the Stakeholder Network do not hold any direct voting rights. It provides only guidance and recommendations to the GEO Management Team, Board of Directors and Advisory Council. Stakeholder Network involvement evolves to include the most relevant people within stakeholder organisations.

For further information please see: http://www.golfenvironment.org/about
Appendix 1: Impartiality, transparency, non-discrimination and confidentiality

Impartiality

GEO works to ensure its activities are undertaken impartially in all aspects. As part of this, GEO works to ensure that commercial, financial, or other pressures do not compromise impartiality. GEO staff, members of Boards, committees, and working groups along with verifier network members are all required to undertake their responsibilities impartially. All GEO staff (including top management), Board members, committee members, working group members and verifier network members sign an impartiality agreement stating that they are undertaking all activities in relation to GEO’s work in an impartial matter and shall report any attempt by others to unduly influence GEO’s work through commercial, financial or other pressures. Board members, committee members, and working group members are not financially compensated for their work in GEO operations. verifier network members are not compensated by GEO for their work as verifiers.

GEO monitors impartiality in the certification process through scheduled and unscheduled reviews of certifications that have been awarded. Verifier network members are monitored for impartiality through peer reviews and spot checks conducted by the Chief Executive of GEO. If any verifier member is found to not be acting impartially, that member is dismissed. In addition, complaints and appeals can be submitted to GEO and shall be reviewed according to the established process. As part of being accepted to the verifier network, applicants are required to submit a profile with their CV and a list of all their associations. This information is used by GEO to assess potential impartiality risks of applicants. If an association is found that could lead to a failure to act impartially, GEO shall ask for additional information on the applicants’ involvement with the assessed potential influencer. Upon discussion on involvement and impartiality with the applicant, GEO shall determine if there is an unacceptable level of risk of the applicant not acting impartially in performing verifier duties (supporting and/or verifying facilities for certification).

Overall impartiality for GEO and its operations is monitored through yearly reviews of all management and staff as well as the publication of consultation documents for major decisions made in regards to standards for review and comment by the general public. Impartiality is also safeguarded through an impartiality clause that is included in all contracts signed by GEO staff, Board members, committee members, working group members, and verifier network members. If any complaints about impartiality are received at any time, the complaint is investigated and appropriate action up to and including dismissal from all involvement in GEO activities shall be taken within a reasonable timeframe.

GEO maintains the policy of only providing consultancy services to governmental bodies. Such consultancy work is only undertaken as requested by governmental bodies in order to assist the development of sustainable practices and policies as expert representatives only. GEO does not undertake consultancy with golf facilities in any manner.

Non-Discrimination, Transparency, and Confidentiality

GEO, its policies and procedures under which it operates, and the administration of its policies and procedures are non-discriminatory. Procedures shall not be used to impede or inhibit access by applicants, other than as provided for in the standard. The standard is open to all golf courses, which fulfil the criteria for certification and
recertification. GEO shall continue its requirements, evaluations, review, decision and surveillance of the golf facility to those matters specifically related to the scope of certification.

Transparency plays a vital role in the operation of GEO. The majority of information is collected and made available to the public. This information includes GEO’s work around standard setting, assurance, as well as monitoring and evaluation. In addition to this, GEO operates a certification that requires the public display of any certified golf facility’s application as well as the verification report for that facility. Golf facilities agree to these terms upon reading GEO OnCourse Terms and Conditions and agreeing to them when they create their account on GEO’s website. Within the application, facilities have the choice to maintain confidentiality on reports they have conducted as well as legal disputes. When a facility requests to maintain this confidentiality it is required of all consultants, GEO staff, and verifiers, that confidentiality is maintained and protected. Confidentiality is also maintained on complaints submitted to GEO.

Data collected via GEO’s website is stored on secure servers maintained and supported by the company responsible for the operation of the website. The company, tictoc, does not disclose any information stored on its servers to any other party unless directly requested by GEO to do so.

GEO also maintains a record of communications with golf facilities through an online customer relationship management programme. The main form of contact is via email with these communications being stored in the customer relationship management programme as a record of such communications. All communications are treated as confidential and shall only be disclosed if all parties involved in the communications agree with what, how, and to the overall use of the information to be disclosed. The confidentiality agreement concerning this information does not include the use of this information in any reviews of GEO’s operations and practices. The parties involved in these reviews shall be requested to sign a confidentiality agreement to secure this information.