



GEO Certified®

GEO Certified® Report

Real Club de Golf Sotogrande

Prepared by independent verifier Pablo Vega

Certified by GEO Foundation: 2025
Recertification due: 2028

“The Real Club de Golf Sotogrande demonstrates a mature, fully integrated sustainability strategy.

Biodiversity management is supported by a long-term wildlife monitoring programme, positioning the course as an ecological corridor guided by measurable outcomes.

Water stewardship is evidenced through the use of reclaimed water, climate-appropriate turfgrass selection, reduced irrigated surfaces, and the elimination of winter overseeding. In addition, a highly efficient, data-driven irrigation approach—supported by soil moisture monitoring and on-site weather stations—guides daily decision-making and helps reduce water use, energy consumption, and associated carbon inputs.

The Club continues to invest in renewable energy, electric machinery, and circular resource management, while ensuring full legal compliance, staff training, and responsible operational practices. Sustainability objectives are embedded in governance, tournament operations, and community engagement, reflecting strong alignment with GEO Certification principles and a commitment to continuous improvement.”

Pablo Vega

(GEO accredited independent verifier)



Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that Real Club de Golf Sotogrande has successfully achieved GEO Certified® status for its outstanding work to foster nature, conserve resources and support the community.

GEO Certified® is the most respected certification for golf, based on a credibly and transparently developed modern sustainability Standard of best practice.

Real Club de Golf Sotogrande has:

1. Met the required certification criteria for sustainable golf operations
2. Successfully completed the official third-party verification process
3. Successfully passed the final evaluation by GEO Certification Ltd. (autonomous subsidiary of GEO Foundation)

GEO agreed with the conclusions of the official verification report, that, having achieved all mandatory criteria; and with specific Continual Improvement Points (CIP) set for the future and Critical CIP's (CCIPs) to be reviewed at recertification, Real Club de Golf Sotogrande should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, Real Club de Golf Sotogrande can therefore claim a position as a leader in advancing sustainability in golf – making important contributions in protecting nature, conserving resources and strengthening communities.

The GEO Certified® Report that follows comments on the actions undertaken against the criteria, as observed by the independent verifier during the assurance process.

Certification is nearly always the result of a dedicated team effort resulting in many practical and valuable social and environmental results around the golf course, maintenance facility and clubhouse. These dedication and leadership qualities are an important part of ensuring the resilience of the golf facility and the golf industry into the future and also as part of society's wider effort to pull together for people and planet.

We congratulate all involved.

Jonathan Smith
Founder and Executive Director, GEO Foundation
GEO Certification Ltd. Board Member

Kelli Jerome
Executive Director, GEO Foundation

Carole Kerrey
Director, Certification and Credibility,
GEO Certification Ltd.



Verification and Certification

Verification

The official third-party audit was carried out by an independent verifier, accredited by GEO to undertake verifications of golf facilities applying for certification.

Verification involves reviewing practices and data, using the International Voluntary Standard for Sustainable Golf Operations as the guide to ensure comprehensive and consistent evaluation of performance. A detailed verification report is submitted for evaluation by GEO Certification Ltd, a subsidiary of GEO Foundation.

Certification

GEO Certification Ltd, an autonomous subsidiary of GEO Foundation [both not-for-profit entities], undertook a full review of all content submitted through the OnCourse® online platform and the report submitted by the verifier, ensuring:

- Comprehensiveness – activities undertaken touched on all elements of the Standard
- Consistency – that the verification approach was balanced, well weighted and with consistent depth of evaluation across each theme
- Accuracy - matching the verification report with evidence submitted by the golf facility to ensure statements and claims were accurate

GEO Foundation is an international not-for-profit founded to advocate, support and reward sustainability in and through golf. Over more than ten years, the group has worked collaboratively with dozens of golf industry associations and government and non-government organisations around the world, to help golf become a sustainability leader, striving for a net positive social and environmental impact. In addition to managing and assuring GEO Certified®, GEO Foundation also provides a suite of credible, practical programmes for golf facility management, new golf developments and golf tournaments called OnCourse®, often delivered in partnership with national golf bodies. Find out more at www.sustainable.golf

Credibility

GEO Certified® is part of the ISEAL Alliance, a group of the world's foremost credible certification systems including Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, Forest Stewardship Council, Marine Stewardship Council and many others. GEO Foundation earned and retains full membership of the ISEAL Alliance global association following a rigorous evaluation against the ISEAL Codes of Credibility in Sustainability Standards and Certification. The ISEAL Codes cover standard-setting, assurance, and monitoring and evaluation. Find out more at www.isealliance.org



Verifier's Report

The Sustainability Agenda for golf covers the following themes and action areas:

THEMES	ACTION AREAS
Nature	• Habitats & Biodiversity • Turfgrass management • Pollution prevention
Resources	• Water • Energy • Materials
Community	• Partnerships & Outreach • Golfing & Employment • Advocacy & Communications

Included below are the observations made by the Independent Verifier against each item in the Standard.

NATURE			
N1 Habitats and Biodiversity			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
N1.1 Understand the site and surroundings	N1.1.1 Sound understanding of the nature and landscape value of the site	General knowledge of the wildlife and habitats on the site	In 2024, the Club completed a comprehensive wildlife and avifauna survey across the entire golf course, establishing a robust, data-driven baseline for biodiversity management. The study identified up to 70 bird species belonging to 38 different families, with a total of 4,209 resident birds accurately recorded. This work supports the concept of the course as an ecological corridor and provides objective data to guide habitat management and conservation decisions. The survey was carried out by a highly reputable biologist with extensive experience in golf course ecosystems, Sergio Tirado from Golf & Birds. In addition to population counts, the study analysed habitat distribution and quality, confirming that wildlife is primarily established in inter-hole areas and around water bodies, particularly between holes 6 and 7. The project includes long-term monitoring through 2025 and 2026, ensuring continuous ecological oversight and adaptive management.
	N1.1.2 Knowledge of legal designations for protected areas, habitats and species	Identify rare, protected or endangered species found on the golf course; Understand legal responsibilities for landscape protection and special area designations, if applicable	Four protected species were identified, all of which are well known to the Club and already integrated into existing management practices. No legally designated protected environmental features are present within the property. Complementary biodiversity measures include the installation of 45 nesting boxes in cork oak areas and future plans to enhance habitats for reptiles and aquatic birds. The Club plans to install identification plaques for each tree next year and engage a specialist biologist to assist with tree management planning and preventive treatments.
	N1.1.3 Sound understanding and respect for cultural heritage	Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site, if applicable	Non applicable.

N1.2 Opportunities to naturalise the golf course	N1.2.1 Measures taken to identify and minimise the required area of managed turfgrass	Monitor patterns of play to identify underutilised areas of turfgrass	In 2016, a major irrigation system renovation was carried out. During this project, a clearly defined hard irrigation line was established, leaving up to 1.2 hectares of non-irrigated areas. At present, no further opportunities for additional naturalisation are available beyond those already implemented.
N1.3 Actively create and manage habitats for wildlife	N1.3.1 Projects to create and manage habitats in the best way for wildlife and golf	Prioritise native species of varying size and structure when planting Prioritise native trees and shrubs when planting Prioritise native aquatic species of varying size and structure when planting Establish mowing buffer zones next to water bodies and wetlands	Native species are prioritised in all landscaping activities. New plantings primarily include stone pine (<i>Pinus pinea</i>), mastic shrubs (<i>Pistacia lentiscus</i>), and cork oak (<i>Quercus suber</i>). The Club maintains a complete inventory of all trees on site and consistently prioritises native species in its tree management strategy. A two-metre buffer zone has been established throughout the course. Although this area is mown due to playability requirements and course design, it is excluded from fertiliser applications and other chemical treatments.
N1.4 Conserve key species	N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species	Follow local best practice to protect or attract endangered, protected or rare species found on site	The Club implements additional biodiversity enhancement practices, such as the installation of nesting boxes adapted to different bird species, including owls. Future plans include the establishment of new protected areas aimed at supporting reptiles and aquatic birds.
N2 Turfgrass			
N2.1 Maintain optimum turfgrass and soil health	N2.1.1 Appropriate turfgrass varieties adapted to climatic and other geomorphological factors	Select appropriate grass species for the climate	The golf course is predominantly established with Bermuda 419 turfgrass, which is well adapted to drought conditions, has very low water requirements, and shows good tolerance to salinity and traffic stress. Greens are planted with <i>Agrostis stolonifera</i> A4, a species noted for its resistance to disease, drought, winter stress, and shade. These turf species are considered optimal for the site conditions. It is important to note that the Club does not carry out winter overseeding on any Bermuda areas. This sustainable approach results in an estimated 25% reduction in CO₂ emissions and allows for significant annual savings in inputs such as water, fertilisers, and energy.
	N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition	No specific international requirement, however, identify course management and agronomic activities and look for continual improvements	The Club conducts between three and four foliar analyses per year, in addition to one annual soil analysis that includes nutrient levels, organic matter content, infiltration rates, and other relevant parameters.

			Humic and fulvic acids are continuously applied through the fertigation system using a dedicated tank. Seaweed extracts are also applied regularly across the course. The fertilisation plan is primarily based on an exhaustive daily analysis of clip yield data, which is used to precisely manage nitrogen applications. For the rest of the course, fertiliser rates are adjusted according to seasonal growth conditions. Applications via the fertigation system are modified based on plant stress levels, potential growth curves, analytical results, rainfall, solar exposure, and other agronomic factors.
	N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	Test and monitor soil pH; Follow legal requirements when timing fertiliser applications Ensure staff are fully qualified to use fertilisers Ensure staff use appropriate protective equipment Regularly calibrate and test applicators	All fertiliser applications comply with legal requirements and take weather forecasts into account. All staff involved in applications are properly trained and equipped, machinery is calibrated regularly, and unnecessary treatments are avoided. Equipment calibration is verified by observing and measuring consumption levels in the main storage tanks each night following fertigation events.
	N2.2 Prioritise mechanical maintenance	N2.2.1 Non-chemical pest, disease and weed management	Sharpen mowing blades; Remove surface moisture; Change hole locations frequently All cultural and mechanical practices are carried out in compliance with established protocols. Aeration includes solid tining, hollow coring, and venting operations as required. Rolling frequency is adjusted when green speed values are low, mowing frequencies are optimised, and an intensive blade sharpening programme is in place. Tees follow similar maintenance practices, including diamond-pattern mowing, which is particularly suitable for championship conditions such as those previously required for DP World Tour events. Annual hollow coring is performed. Fairways are hollow cored annually and sand topdressed once per year. Clippings are returned, mowing heights are adjusted, and fairways are maintained in firm and fast playing conditions.
N2.3 Use chemicals responsibly	N2.3.1 Application of chemicals only when necessary to prevent or cure defined / identified turf health issues	Identify and track pest and disease hotspots, including sensitive areas Scout the course daily for early signs and symptoms Accurately diagnose to determine the cause of weeds, pests and diseases	All machinery is cleaned and disinfected daily to prevent the spread of pests and diseases. Diseases are identified at hotspot level, and laboratory analyses are frequently used to accurately diagnose pathogens.

			The course is inspected daily for early detection of diseases and pests. Disease pressure is mainly observed during summer months, and key issues such as dollar spot were reviewed during the visit. A threshold-based disease management programme is in place, with treatments applied only when disease impact begins to affect playability for members.
	N2.3.2 Application of chemicals with full safety precautions	Use legally registered and approved products; Prefer products for the specific weed, pest or disease; Follow legal requirements; Ensure staff are fully qualified to use pesticides; Ensure staff use appropriate protective equipment; Regularly calibrate and test applicators; Dilute and dispose of leftover product on untreated areas of amenity turfgrass	All regulatory requirements are met. All applications comply with legal standards and are carried out before player arrival. Three dedicated spray units are available, and weather conditions are always considered to avoid windy periods. Spray skirts are used to reduce drift during applications. Calibration is performed frequently, shielded sprayers and anti-drift nozzles are used, and any remaining product is applied on the practice range.
N3 Pollution Prevention			
N3.1 Prevent pollution across the entire site	N3.1.1 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from golf course operations	Document procedures for emergency spill responses ; Retain no-spray/no-spread buffer areas next to water bodies and wetlands; Retain no-spray/no-spread buffer zones in and around ecologically sensitive areas	An emergency spill response plan is in place, and all fertiliser applications are diluted through the irrigation system.
	N3.1.2 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from clubhouse operations	Formal wastewater discharge agreement, if applicable	Fulfilled.

	N3.1.3 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from maintenance facility operations	Wash machinery over an impermeable, leak-free surface; Mix and load pesticides and fertilisers over an impermeable, leak-free surface; Triple rinse pesticide containers and applicators	Fulfilled.
N3.2 Safely manage hazardous substances	N3.2.1 Legal compliance in the storage, handling, application and safe disposal of all hazardous substances	List of hazardous substances, made available to authorised staff; Product and material data safety sheets; Well ventilated concrete or metal building; Impermeable, leak-free flooring; Sufficient storage capacity; Spill containment kits; Secondary containment e.g., bunds or drip trays; Emergency wash area, as per local requirements (body shower and / or eye wash station); Hazardous substances safely collected by a registered company or body ; Follow any additional legal requirements	All requirements are met except for the secondary containment system for certain storage areas. Material Safety Data Sheets are available, and hazardous substances are collected by Sifito, a registered waste management company.
	N3.2.2 Legal compliance in the storage and handling of fuels and gases	Tank secured to a horizontal, flat, non-combustible surface; Secondary containment of fuel in the event of spills e.g. bunds and drip trays; Inspection of storage tank(s) at least quarterly, if required; Fire extinguisher in the immediate area	Fuel tanks for diesel and petrol are buried outside the maintenance facility and comply with all legal requirements. Mandatory inspection documentation was reviewed during the visit. All requirements were met and verified on site.

N3.3 Responsibly manage waste / storm water	N3.3.1 Appropriate wastewater usage, treatment and discharge	Impermeable, leak-free surface; Treatment as per local requirements (oil, grease and / or clipping separation; Formal discharge agreement, if applicable	There is currently no oil and grease separator installed. Although washdown water is returned to the irrigation lake and reused, this improvement has been identified. CCIP: Please install a hydrocarbon and oil separator at the machinery washing pad.
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RESOURCES

R1 Water

Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
R1.1 Minimise water demand	R1.1.1 Measures to reduce the need to consume water	Select appropriate grass species for the climate e.g., drought and disease tolerance; Target irrigation to essential playing surfaces; Prioritise native, drought tolerant species for landscaping and planting	The irrigation project was designed to focus water application exclusively on playing areas, leaving non-play zones outside irrigation coverage where ball landing is unlikely. In non-irrigated areas and tree basins, alternatives such as pine bark mulch, leaf litter, and organic residues are used instead of turf. Bermuda 419, established across most of the course, is well suited to the local climate. The Club operates a highly efficient irrigation scheduling system that includes buried soil moisture sensors (Hydrogol) to monitor volumetric water content.
R1.2 Maximise water efficiency	R1.2.1 Practical measures to use water more efficiently on the golf course	Schedule irrigation based on informed assessment of soil moisture and weather forecasts; Evaluate new irrigation technologies e.g., central control, precision sprinklers etc.; Provide staff training on efficient irrigation practices; Adjust sprinklers to playing surfaces only	Daily monitoring of soil moisture is carried out both in the morning and afternoon using TDR sensors on greens. Two on-site weather stations provide evapotranspiration data, allowing irrigation to be adjusted based on daily ET values. The Club will shortly install the Cirrus Pro irrigation software, enabling irrigation adjustments by seconds rather than minutes. Two types of soil moisture buried sensors, Hydroball and Agrodiss, are currently being tested to monitor moisture dynamics, water suction, temperature, and salinity levels throughout the day. A SCADA system is also in place to monitor pressure and flow rates at the pumping station.

			The Club has recently invested in new satellite units and is upgrading older models still in use. An advanced irrigation optimisation programme is in place, with three dedicated irrigation technicians performing hand watering during peak heat periods, implementing preventive procedures year-round, and continuously adjusting sprinkler performance. All irrigation is carried out at night to avoid play disruption. Drainage systems are installed along the cartpaths, returning runoff water to the lakes for reuse.
	R1.2.2 Practical measures to use water more efficiently in buildings	Monitor and record water consumption (bills, flow meter etc.); Encourage water conservation practices amongst players and staff	Daily photographs of all meters are taken and recorded. Further efforts to promote water conservation among staff are ongoing.
R1.3 Source water responsibly	R1.3.1 Measures towards alternative, lower quality sources of water	Water abstraction permit, if required; Report water consumption to environment agency, if required	Water consumption is monitored and recorded daily. Only well water and reclaimed water are used, with no potable water used for irrigation. Two separate storage systems are available, one for each water source. The Club holds all required permits and licences for well abstraction and reclaimed water use.
R2 Energy			
R2.1 Reduce energy demand	R2.1.1 Measures to reduce the amount of energy consumed in golf course maintenance	Naturalise non-playing areas to reduce mowing and other energy intensive inputs	The Club has made a significant investment in electric machinery, including green mowers, blowers, floating mowers, trimmers, hedge cutters, and ten Toro GTX electric vehicles. In 2016, all feasible areas were naturalised.
R2.2 Maximise energy efficiency	R2.2.1 Measures to use energy and fuels more efficiently in buildings	Monitor and record energy consumption (bills, meters etc.)	LED lighting has been installed throughout the clubhouse. All costs are analysed, and the Club works with an external consultancy to secure optimal energy tariffs and renewable energy sources. All energy invoices and consumption data are monitored and reviewed.
R2.3 Source energy responsibly	R2.3.1 Measures to source alternative, renewable forms of energy	Understand the energy mix of your electricity supplier;	The Club has recently installed solar panels on the maintenance facility roof. These panels directly supply battery chargers for maintenance equipment, electric vehicles, and refrigeration units. During the visit, the correct operation of the system was verified, and it is already supplying

		Explore possible greener energy providers	energy to the facility. Additional solar installations are planned for the clubhouse parking area.
R3 Materials			
R3.1 Reduce materials demand	R3.1.1 Products and materials selection based on necessity, including opportunities for recycled, reused and locally sourced alternatives	No specific international requirement, however, identify activities to reduce the demand for materials and look for continual improvements	Single-use plastics have been eliminated, and only reusable or biodegradable tableware is used. Recycled materials are used for course signage. All pruning waste is chipped and returned to non-turf areas.
R3.2 Purchase responsibly	R3.2.1 Commit to sustainable purchasing practices	Favour responsible, lower impact products	Not in place. CCIP: Please develop a sustainable procurement policy.
R3.3 Reuse and recycle	R3.3.1 Waste stream separation for maximum recycling and re-use opportunity	Put in place a recycling separation system, according to local rules and availability; Clear, simple and visible bin signage; Monitor and record weight of waste for each stream e.g. invoices, bills etc.	Waste separation bins for paper, glass, organic waste, and plastics are available only in the clubhouse, not on the course. These bins are clearly visible.
R3.4 Demonstrate legal compliance	R3.4.1 Compliance with all local and regional waste management regulations	Authorised waste collector for general, hazardous, industrial and green waste, if required	The Club monitors and records all hazardous material use and disposal. Documentation was reviewed during the visit and is managed by EcoNatura, the authorised waste contractor. The Waste Management Plan was reviewed and is summarised in an annual folder covering the entire course, demonstrating compliance with all requirements.

COMMUNITY

C1 Health & Wellbeing			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
C1.1 Improve health and wellbeing	C1.1.1 Benefits to human physical and mental health from golf and facility activities	Plans in place to respond to incidents and emergencies	Documentation and training records for health and safety were verified, including specific training for pesticide applicators. Personal protective equipment is provided, and protocols exist for fire safety, first aid, and emergency response.
C1.2 Be open and inclusive	C1.2.1 Inclusivity and diversity in membership and visitor policies	Membership policies free from discrimination across age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnic background	Fulfilled. An equality and LGTBI inclusion plan is in place.
C1.3 Employ fairly, safely and provide career opportunities	C1.3.1 Ethical and legal employment, working conditions and professional development	Adopt an equal opportunity recruitment and hiring policy; Follow all relevant legislation and best practice for hiring and employment; Follow all relevant legislation and best practice for worker safety	A 50–50 gender equality policy is in place for recruitment. Employees are allowed to play golf and receive additional benefits such as shop discounts, Christmas dinners, and food baskets. Facilities are modern and include changing rooms, kitchens, and meeting rooms.
C2 Outreach & Inclusion			
C2.1 Diversify access and provide multifunctionality	C2.1.1 Social and recreational activities at the facility	No specific international requirement, however, identify multifunctional activities and look for continual improvements	The Club has recently constructed a new croquet pitch by the Clubhouse. Weddings can also be celebrated on the Club's facilities. Facilities are accessible for wheelchair users. Approximately 60% of players walk the course. Buggies must be rented separately. Free potable drinking water is available at four locations across the course.
C2.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	C2.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes	No specific international requirement, however, identify activities to support volunteering and charity and look for continual improvements	The Club organizes an annual charity tournament for Cáritas during peak season in August, including a “zero row” option for voluntary donations.
C2.3 Establish active community partnerships	C2.3.1 Positive and constructive engagement	No specific international requirement, however, identify	Machinery sharing is practised with neighbouring clubs and, in some cases, with members to optimise resource use.

	with neighbours, the local community and other groups	partnerships and community activities and look for continual improvements	The Club maintains communication with a medical helicopter service for emergencies. Defibrillators are available, Occupational risk prevention companies and Toro also provide safety training.
C3 Communications & Advocacy			
C3.1 Engage staff and golfers	C3.1.1 Communications activities that raise awareness and understanding amongst members and visitors	Involve staff and committees in sustainability efforts; Involve golfers in sustainability efforts; Post sustainability information in the clubhouse and / or on the golf course	The Head Greenkeeper is part of the Board of Directors and attends all meetings. Sustainability topics are addressed at every board meeting together with the Course Committee and the Managing Director. During past DP World Tour events, initiatives were organised where professional golfers and junior members collected plastic bottles from the beach as part of the Green Drive programme promoted by the DP World Tour. Sustainability initiatives have also been communicated through publications to inform the wider community. The Club has already published three sustainability highlights on its website and complies with this initiative. During the annual general assembly, sustainability objectives are presented in the President's report and subsequently integrated into the annual planning process and project agenda.
C3.2 Celebrate and promote sustainability	C3.2.1 Activities that raise awareness and engage people in the wider community	Share at least 3 Highlights on sustainable.golf	1. The club's bird census reinforces its environmental commitment. 2. The most recent course restoration confirmed a 20% reduction in water consumption, along with a 25% reduction in other indicators such as CO₂ emissions, non-hazardous waste generation and noise emissions, thanks to the measures implemented. The Club has launched a large-scale programme to install solar panels to generate energy and progressively replace traditional machinery with electric equipment powered by the energy produced onsite.
C3.3 Follow a journey of continuous improvement	C3.3.1 Measures to help track, review and improve sustainability and climate action	Put measures in place to ensure that OnCourse can be updated annually	Measures were discussed.

Golf and Sustainability

Among all sports, golf has a particularly close relationship with the environment and communities, golf facilities can bring many benefits to people and nature - from the protection of greenspace and conservation of biodiversity; healthy recreation for all ages; local supply chains; and jobs, tourism and other forms of economic value.

Adopting a more sustainable approach is also good for golf. It's about presenting a high-quality golf course and providing a memorable experience in natural surroundings. It's about being as efficient as possible. And it's about supporting the community in a range of ways that bring increased recognition, respect and contact.

At a broader level, it's important that golf credibly demonstrates its commitment, and its social and environmental value – strengthening the sport's image and reputation for the long term.

Golf facilities that participate in OnCourse®, an international sustainability initiative assured by the non-profit GEO Foundation, are taking a comprehensive approach and striving to be leaders in the community.

Find out more at www.sustainable.golf