

Voluntary Sustainability Standard – Claims Guide

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Foreword

This guide has been designed to help project teams that have used the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard (VSS) understand what claims can be made about the project. By following this guide your team will be able to accurately and clearly communicate what has been achieved and the credibility behind it.

The claims available to you will depend on how your project has used the VS. For full details on the VSS and how it can be used, please see <https://sustainable.golf/about/credibility/standards/development-standard/>

For any clarifications, the claim-makers can get in touch with:

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Version	Date	Author	Authorised
1.0	30/11/2016	Sam Thomas	Jonathan Smith – Founder
2.0	30/09/2021	Michael Williams	Sam Thomas – Director
3.0	21/09/2026	Tyler Annan	Sam Thomas – Director

Sustainability Claims

Sustainability claims generally refer to one or all the generally accepted pillars of sustainability – environmental, economic and social. However, with the recent introduction of legislation around the transparency and rigour of sustainability claims it is not recommended to use generic terms in claims unless there is strong scientific evidence backing those claims. This includes words and phrases such as ‘sustainable’, ‘ethical’, ‘environmentally friendly’, and ‘eco’.

There are multiple levels of claims that can be made around sustainability, each more credible than the last. General sustainability claims are the first layer and should be avoided. Within that sits claims related to sustainability standards, within that sits controlled claims and finally there are assured and marketing claims. Figure 1 below shows these categories of sustainability claims.

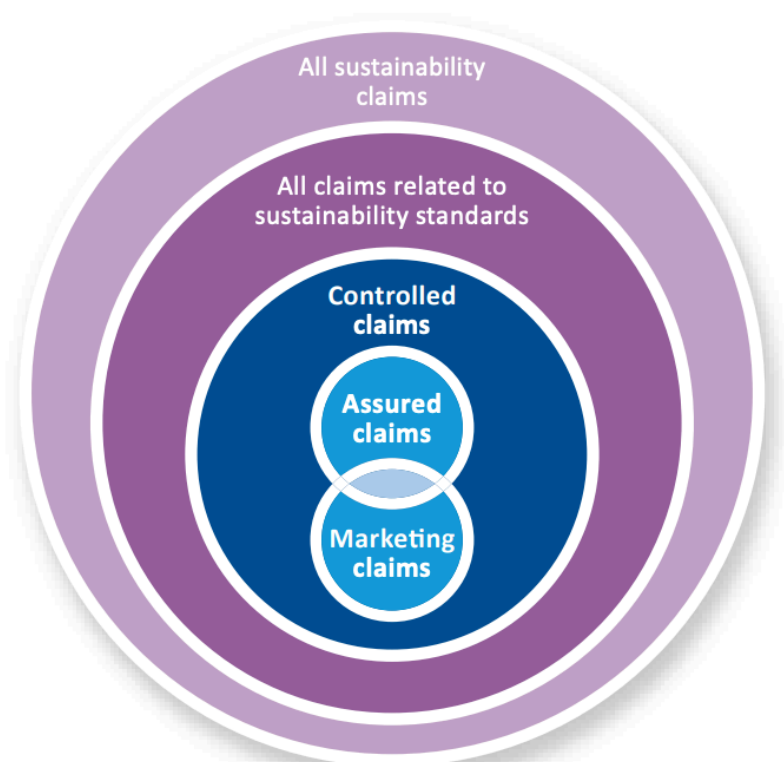


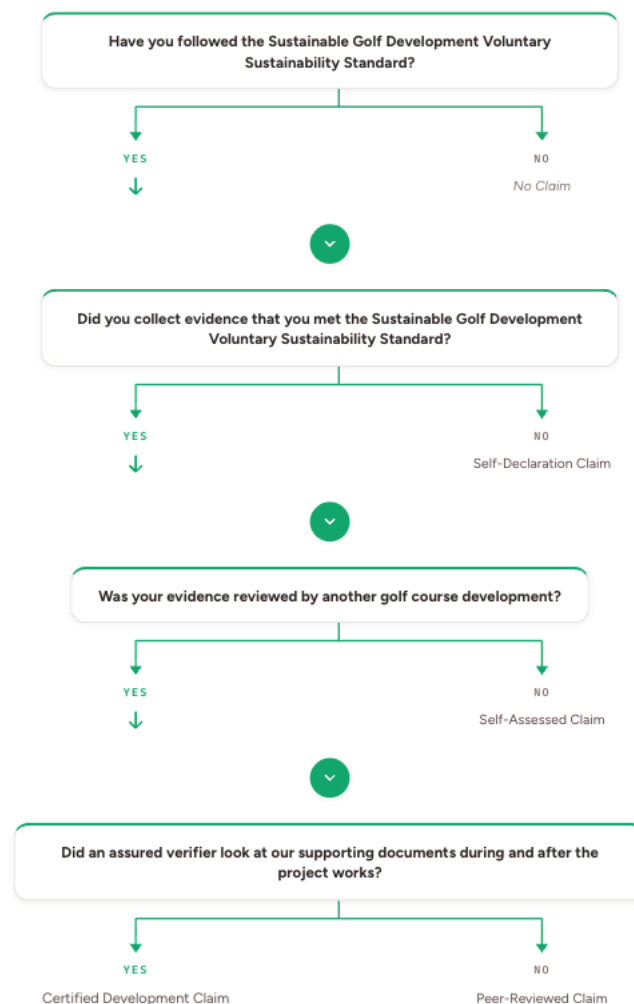
FIGURE 1 – CATEGORIES OF SUSTAINABILITY CLAIMS (SOURCE: ISEAL)

When to Use a Claim

Any golf development that has used the VSS to inform their project can make a claim.¹ Golf developments that have sought assessment through a third-party verifier can make different claims from those who have opted not to seek independent assessment.

The GEO Certified® status is a protected phrase and can only be used with the approval of GEO Certification Ltd.

GEO Certification Ltd. will be responsible for monitoring the use of all claims relating to the VSS and will investigate fraudulent use of the certified logo, associated claims to that logo or the phrase GEO Certified®.



¹ Claim maker can be those individuals or organizations that were involved in the creation of the golf project in question. If you are unsure if you are able to make a claim get in touch with GEO Certification Ltd. for clarification.

What Type of Claim to Make

Certified Development

These claims can be made by projects that have **achieved GEO Certified Development status**. This means they have met the baseline criteria outlines in the VSS and this has been verified by an independent third-part verifier assigned by GEO Certification Ltd. These claims can be specific in mention of certification and independent, third-party assurance.

Below are some examples of claims that can be made in this situation and words that can be used when making claims:

Words & Phrases to Include

- 'Independently verified'
- 'Third party assured'
- 'GEO Certified Development status'

Phrases to Avoid

- 'Guarantees sustainable practices'
- 'The most sustainable'

Example Claims Wording

"XX Golf Course has achieved GEO Certified Development status after independent verification."

"We are delighted to confirm that XX Golf Course has achieved GEO Certified Development status"

"The design and construction processes for XX Golf Course have been recognised as meeting the Voluntary Sustainability Standards. As a result, we have achieved the third-party assured GEO Sustainable Development status. "

"XX Golf Course is a GEO Certified Development"

Claims should be simple and easy to understand. If unsure on what claims to make or if a claim can be made, please contact GEO Certified Ltd. at hello@sustainable.golf

Non-certified Development

Peer Reviewed Claim

These claims can be made by projects that have followed the VSS, met the baseline criteria and have collected evidence to prove it. This evidence has then been shared with another golf facility or development. To qualify as being a 'peer' the reviewing development must itself be able to theoretically be assessed against the VSS.

A link to the evidence should be made available with each claim made.

Words & Phrases to Use

- 'Reviewed'
- 'Assessed'
- 'Meets the'

Words & Phrases to Avoid

- 'Third-party certified'
- 'Certified'
- 'GEO Certified Development Status'
- 'Guarantees sustainable practices'

Examples Claims Wording

"The design and build of XX Golf Course have been assessed by its peers and been found to meet the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard."

"A group of its peers has determined that XX Golf Course has followed the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard."

"We are delighted to confirm that a group of our peers have assessed our design and build and determined that we have met the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard."

Claims should be simple and easy to understand. If unsure on what claims to make or if a claim can be made, please contact GEO Certified Ltd. at hello@sustainable.golf

Self-Assessed Claim

These claims can be made by projects which have followed the VSS and have **collected their own evidence** to show that baseline criteria have been met. This evidence has not been reviewed by anyone outside of the club / project team. Ideally a web link to the evidence should be provided with each claim made.

Words & Phrases to Use

- 'Recorded'
- 'Reported'
- 'Followed'

Words & Phrases to Avoid

- 'Independently verified'
- 'Certified'
- 'GEO Certified Development Status'
- 'Guarantees sustainable practices'
- 'Assured'
- 'Third-party assured'

Example Claims Wording

"XX Golf Course was designed and built in line with the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard. The process was recorded by the project team throughout.

"After following the Sustainable Golf VSS and recording all progress towards baseline criteria we can now say that XX Golf Course was built in accordance with the VSS."

Claims should be simple and easy to understand. If unsure on what claims to make or if a claim can be made, please contact GEO Certified Ltd. at hello@sustainable.golf

Self-Declared Claim

This type of claim can be made by projects who have used and followed the VSS but have **not collected any evidence** of this.

Words & Phrases to Use

- 'In-line with'
- 'In accordance with'
- 'Following'
- 'Guided by'

Words & Phrases to Avoid

- 'Independently verified'
- 'Certified'
- 'GEO Certified Development Status'
- 'Meets requirements'
- 'Guarantees sustainable practices'

Example Claims Wording

Pre-development

"XX Golf Course / Development is committed to creating a golf course in-line with the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard."

"The development of XX Golf Course will be done following the principles of the Sustainable Golf Voluntary Sustainability Standards"

Post-development

"XX Golf Club are proud to have created a golf course in-line with the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard."

"The development of XX Golf Course was guided by the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard."

Claims should be simple and easy to understand. If unsure on what claims to make or if a claim can be made, please contact GEO Certified Ltd. at hello@sustainable.golf

Common Claim Definitions²

Sustainable

The word 'sustainable' (or sustainably, sustainability, etc.) on its own means being able to maintain or continue over time without depleting resources or costing lasting damage. It is generally accepted that it rests on the three pillars of environmental, economic and social.

Good Practice

This is a method or technique that is Widley tested and has been shown to produce reliable and effective results.

Best Practice

This is one step above good practice and implies the single most effective approach being taken.

Worst Practice

This is an approach or method known to produce poor, harmful or counterproductive results. The opposite of best practice.

Certified

Formal recognition that a certain set of standards have been met following an official verification process. In this case, the VSS have been met and verified by a third-party verifier.

Sustainability Claim

A message or statement used to assert a positive environmental, social and economic outcome.

Third-party Assured

Something that has been confirmed to be true by an independent person or organisation with no stake in the outcome and separate from the people making the claim and regulating it.

² Taken from ISEAL's 'Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide' as referenced above.

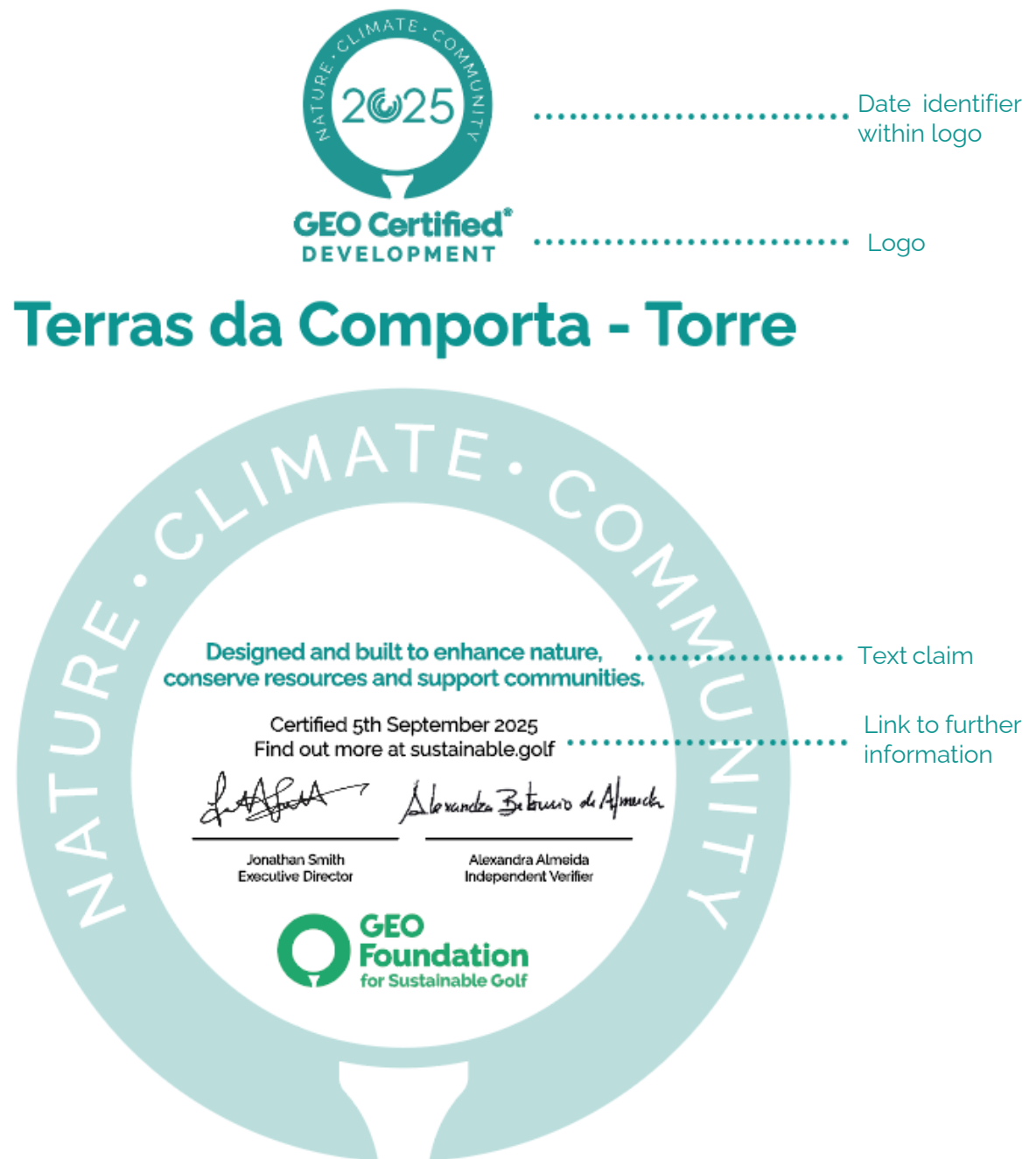


Figure 2. Example of evidence of that can go along with a controlled claim (Source: GEO)

Annex A

Associated to each of the 10 ISEAL Credibility Principle are claims credentials which are set out to contribute to promote positive social, environmental and economic impacts. Below is an example excerpt from the ISEAL Alliance's *"Principles for Credible and Effective Sustainability Standards Systems: ISEAL Credibility Principles"*. A copy of the original document containing the below content can be found online at:

https://www.isealalliance.org/sites/default/files/resource/2017-11/ISEAL_Credibility_Principles.pdf

ISEAL Credibility Principle	Claims credentials
7 - Transparency	Information that substantiates claims is made available to interested parties, including information about product-specific claims and the traceability systems that support these claims

Disclaimer

This document has focused on the aspects of controlled claims as defined in this document. GEO Certification Ltd reserves the right not to stand by claims made about the VSS that do not comply with this guidance document or have not sought approval from GEO Certification Ltd prior to publishing.

GEO Certification Ltd takes no responsibility for the legal implications of the use of this guide and does not claim that following this guide will result in legal compliance. The guidance given here is not intended as a substitute for legal advice.