

# **A guide to making claims in relation to the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard<sup>1</sup>**

Version 2.0

September 2021

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<sup>1</sup> Developed in line with ISEAL's Version 1.0 May 2015 'Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide': <https://www.isealalliance.org/get-involved/resources/iseal-sustainability-claims-good-practice-guide>

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## Foreword

This document is intended to guide project teams that have used the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard (VSS) on the kinds of claims they can make about their project. By following this guide, a project team can confidentially and accurately communicate the achievements of their work. The type of claim able to be made is dependent on the way in which the project has chosen to use the VSS. Full details of the VSS and the ways in which it can be applied to a project can be found at <https://sustainable.golf/about/credibility/standards/development-standard/>

For any clarifications, the claim-makers are able to get in touch with:

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## A. Definitions<sup>2</sup>

### *Sustainable*

The word ‘sustainable’ (or sustainably, sustainability, etc.) on its own refers to all three of the generally accepted pillars of sustainability – environment, economic, social.

### *Good Practice*

The demonstration of fairly high level of performance is generally accepted as good practice.

### *Worst Practice*

The worst forms of practice such as child labour.

### *Certified*

Refers to the use of third-party audit that assess conformance and results. Typically, a certificate is issued.

### *Sustainability Claim*

A message used to set apart and promote a product, process, business or service with reference to the word ‘sustainable’.

### *Assured Claim*

An assured claim usually contains a combination of logo and text claim.

Typically, an assured claim will also include a web link to additional information. Any assured claim made should have a structure that includes the **subject of the claim**; the **traceability** information; the **achievement** and the **subject of the VSS**. For example:

*“Happy Valley Golf Facility has been awarded the GEO Certified® Development mark, which means, it has met the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard. View their achievements at [sustainable.golf/happyvalley](https://sustainable.golf/happyvalley)”*

See Figure 1 below for an example of a communication that could be used to support an assured claim.

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from ISEAL’s ‘Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide’ as referenced above.



Figure 1. Components of an assured claim communication

## B. Types of Claims

### Broad Landscape of General Sustainability Claims

Within the realm of sustainability claims there is a sub-set related directly to sustainability standards known as controlled claims. This guide focuses on controlled claims for users of the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard (VSS).

#### What is a Controlled Claim?

A claim that is directly linked to any kind of standards system and it requires some sort of approval for use. Controlled claims include 'assured claims' and 'marketing claims'. Refer to Figure 2 below.

**Assured Claim:** Results from an assured assessment<sup>3</sup> against a standard. It's used for claims regarding a certified product, process, business or service in compliance with a standard. A complete assured claim is typically considered as a combination of:

- Logo
- Text claim, and
- Access to further information

**Marketing Claim:** Used to promote an aspect of or relationship with a standards system. Can overlap with assured claim when it refers to certification.

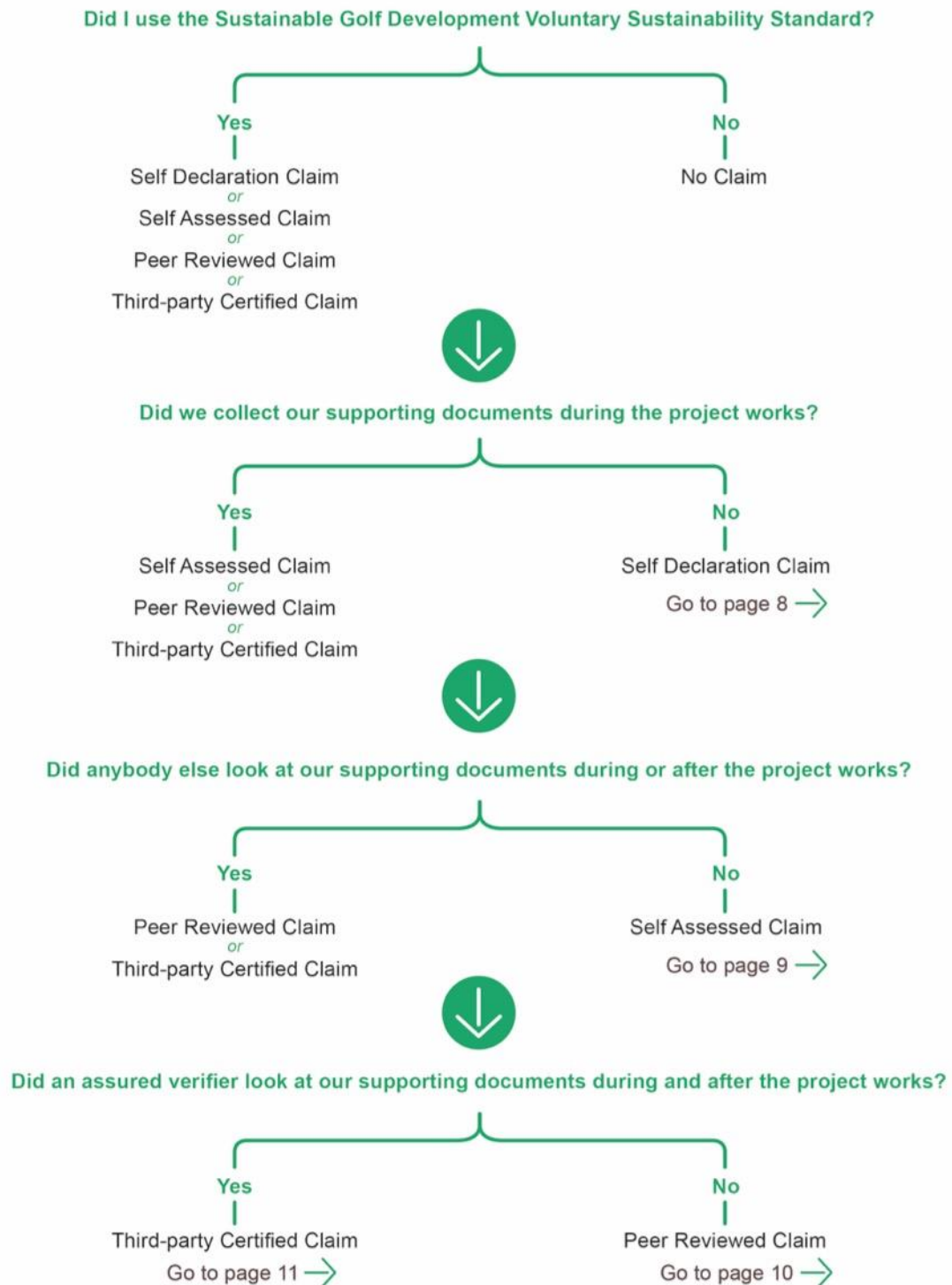


Figure 2. The Claims Landscape (Making Claims about Sustainability Standards Systems - 'Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide')

<sup>3</sup> A controlled process of independent verification, review and decision that stipulates specific requirements are fulfilled.

## Type of Claims – Decision Flow Chart

Use the flow chart below to decide which controlled claim applies to you and your project and where to find more information on the type of claim for you.



## A project that has used the Voluntary Sustainability Standard

For a project that uses the VSS without independent assessment there are three types of possible marketing claims 1. Self-Declared, 2. Self-Assessed and 3. Peer Reviewed.

### 1. Self-Declared model

#### *Characteristics*

Entitles a project to meet the baseline criteria of the VSS, but not to provide evidence.

#### *Recommended claims wording on business cards, websites, leaflets etc.*

#### **Pre-development**

“Happy Valley Ltd is committed to creating a golf course in line with the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard.”

#### **Post-development**

“Happy Valley Ltd are proud to have created a golf course in line with the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard.”

#### *Words allowed*

‘in-line with’

‘in accordance with’

‘following’

‘guided by’

#### *Words not allowed*

‘Independently verified’

‘Certified’

‘Meets requirements’ (vague)

‘Guarantees sustainable practices’



## 2. Self-Assessed model

### *Characteristics*

Entitles a project to provide their own evidence about how they meet the baseline criteria of the VSS.

### *Recommended claims wording on business cards, websites, leaflets etc.*

“Happy Valley Ltd demonstrated how they created a golf course in line with the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard through the support and reporting of their design team....” Ideally a web link to evidence is provided to support this claim.

### *Words allowed*

‘recorded’

‘reported’

‘followed’

### *Words not allowed*

‘Independently verified’

‘Certified’

‘Guarantees sustainable practices’

‘Assured’

### 3. Peer Reviewed model

#### *Characteristics*

Another golf facility, in development, reviews the project being assessed for compliance against the baseline criteria of the VSS.

To qualify as being a 'peer' the reviewing development must itself be able to theoretically be assessed against the VSS.

#### *Recommended claims wording on business cards, websites, leaflets etc.*

"Happy Valley Golf Facility has been assessed by its peers and found to meet the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard."

#### *Words allowed*

'reviewed'

'assessed'

'meets the'

#### *Words not allowed*

'Third-party certified'

'Guarantees sustainable practices'

## A project that has used the Voluntary Sustainability Standard and an GEO Certification Ltd. Assured Verifier

For a project that uses the VSS and a GEO Certification Ltd. assured verifier<sup>4</sup> to assess their project they can make an 'assured claim'<sup>6</sup> or '4.Third Party Certified' type claim.

### 4. Third-party certified model

#### *Characteristics*

An assessment carried out by a party that **is not** related to the golf facility being assessed.

#### *Recommended claims wording on business cards, websites, leaflets etc.*<sup>7</sup>

"Happy Valley Golf Facility has been independently assessed and found to meet the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard."

"Happy Valley Golf Facility has been certified against the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard by a third-party verifier."

*"Our golf facility is certified for responsible golf development practices"*

When writing an assured claim make sure it is as easy as possible to understand. If unsure contact GEO Certification Ltd. for clarification.

#### *Words allowed*

'Responsible'

'More sustainable'

'Well managed / designed / built'

'Independently verified'

'Assured'

#### *Words not allowed*

'Guarantees sustainable practices'

For further support and guidance feel free to consult the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance's 10 Credibility Principles, which can be found at <http://www.isealalliance.org/our-work/defining-credibility/credibility-principles>. A list of the 5 principles that apply to claims is annexed at the end of this document for convenience (See Annex A).

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<sup>4</sup> A full list of assured verifiers can be found at <https://sustainable.golf/partners/network/independent-verifiers>

<sup>6</sup> See "Section B: Types of Claims" for details.

<sup>7</sup> All claims made in association with the OnCourse Developments programme will be written and considered on a case-by-case basis.

## C. Rules for Applying Claims

Any golf facility that has used the VSS to inform their project has the ability to make a claim<sup>8</sup>.

Golf facilities that have sought assessment through a third-party verifier can make different claims from those who have opted not to seek independent assessment.

To be eligible to make an assured claim the golf facility must have met or are planning to meet the 'baseline' criteria of the VSS and be independently assessed.

The GEO Certified<sup>®</sup> 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<sup>®</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

## **D. Characteristics of the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard (VSS)<sup>9</sup>**

The VSS:

- Does not permit any of the generally accepted 'worst practices'.
- Requires a performance generally accepted as 'good practice'.
- Requires all the 'baseline' criteria to be met.

For the full version of the Sustainable Golf Development Voluntary Sustainability Standard and ways it can be applied to projects see:

<https://sustainable.golf/about/credibility/standards/development-standard/>

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<sup>9</sup> See Annex D of ISEAL's 'Sustainability Claims Good Practice Guide' as referenced above for further explanation of characteristics of a 'good practice' standard.

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

ISEAL Credibility Principle	Claims credentials
<b>7 - Transparency</b>	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 Section B of 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.