



Getting Started with SPOTT

*An introduction to assessments
for palm oil companies*

2021

ZSL | **LET'S WORK
FOR WILDLIFE**

What is ZSL?

ZSL (Zoological Society of London) is an international conservation charity working to create a world where wildlife thrives. From investigating the health threats facing animals to helping people and wildlife live alongside each other, ZSL is committed to bringing wildlife back from the brink of extinction. Our work is realised through our ground-breaking science, our field conservation around the world and engaging millions of people through our two zoos, ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo. SPOTT is a ZSL initiative supporting sustainability in forest-risk commodity production and trade.

What is SPOTT?

SPOTT (www.spott.org) assesses soft commodity producers, processors and traders on their public reporting on key environmental, social and governance issues. SPOTT scores palm oil companies annually against 182 sector-specific indicators to benchmark their progress over time. Investors, buyers and other key influencers can use SPOTT assessments to inform stakeholder engagement, manage ESG risk, and increase transparency across a sector.

How does the assessment work?

A key focus of SPOTT assessments is *public* reporting of company sustainability policies and practices, so they do not include information reported privately to ZSL. Instead, the SPOTT team conducts thorough reviews of a company's publicly available webpages, reports and publications, against 182 indicators across 10 categories. ZSL then contacts each company with its draft assessment for further discussion and clarification. This engagement process means that companies can provide feedback and make further public disclosures ahead of the final review and publication on the SPOTT website.

Permission is not needed to carry out an assessment of a company on SPOTT, as we only consider publicly available data. However, whenever valid contact details are available, SPOTT makes every company aware that they are being assessed each year and gives them ample opportunity to interact with the SPOTT team on their assessments.

The assessments are conducted on an annual cycle, with palm oil assessments usually beginning in July and final publication taking place in November.



Why should my company engage with the SPOTT assessment process?

SPOTT assessments are essentially a free evaluation of a company's sustainability disclosure – companies can use them to identify weaknesses in their policies and reporting on practices, and to prioritise next steps for improving their transparency and sustainability management. There are various operational, reputational, regulatory, financial and market-access risks associated with unsustainable production, and benefits for companies adopting better practices. SPOTT also provides an independent benchmark at sectoral level, helping companies compare their progress against others in the industry.

Key company stakeholders use SPOTT assessment data to make decisions about their involvement with companies. Institutional investors, banks, downstream buyers and retailers use the platform, as well as NGOs and researchers scrutinising company transparency. Users can draw on SPOTT data in their investment and lending decisions, or when looking into compliance in their supply chains with their own sustainability commitments.

Several stakeholders have publicly stated their support for SPOTT and its approach by joining our Supporter Network – see our website for a list of these Supporters:

<https://www.spott.org/supporter-network/>

How does my company get started?

Priority actions

For those companies just beginning to engage with SPOTT and improve their reporting on the sustainability of their palm oil operations, there are some key actions that should be taken as a first step.

Website



A company's website is the main place the SPOTT team looks for information. Your company's website should contain clear information specific to its palm oil operations and sustainability. This information should be openly accessible to anyone viewing the website, and all information should be clearly dated and kept up to date.

Key policies and organisational data



A company's website should contain all its key policies and essential data on its organisation. These should be either within dedicated webpages or in documents that are linked to, or downloadable from, the company website. We outline the key information and policies that we suggest companies put in place and disclose as a priority, in the section below on priority indicators. The draft assessment your company has been sent will show where the company can make progress on its disclosure.

Contact details



The SPOTT team makes every effort to inform companies they are being assessed, and to communicate with appropriate company representatives to provide support. It is therefore important to ensure that correct contact details for the person or team responsible for the company's sustainability reporting are clearly accessible from the company's website, or that these details are provided directly to us. You can get in touch with the SPOTT team at any time to provide these details, by emailing spott@zsl.org.

Scope Disclosure Form



Before the assessments begin each year, the SPOTT team sends all companies a Scope Disclosure Form to fill in, in which we clarify the scope of company operations and help the assessment team decide which indicators are relevant to assess the company against. It is optional to complete this form, but we encourage companies to do so when it is sent. Otherwise, if reporting is unclear, a company is assessed against all indicators, which can produce a lower and less accurate score.

Talk to us



We are available to talk to assessed companies at any time in the year, including outside of the SPOTT assessment cycle. We encourage companies to have an initial call with us so we can answer further questions, and to continue to engage with us through the assessment process. Users of the SPOTT website can see which companies have engaged with the SPOTT team on their assessments, and those companies which engage with us tend to have higher scores, partly as we have been able to help them improve their disclosure.

Priority indicators

Below is a list of 20 indicators from SPOTT that we suggest a company should aim for as a first priority. Complying with these indicators allows companies to demonstrate they have key sustainability policies and organisational data in place.

More detailed information on all indicators and scoring criteria can be found in the draft assessment shared with you during the assessment process.

Laying the basis for sustainable management

- Indicator 1: **Sustainable palm oil policy or commitment for all its operations**
- Indicator 3: **High-level position of responsibility for sustainability**
- Indicator 13: **Total land area managed/controlled for oil palm (ha)**
- Indicator 18: **Maps of estates/management units**
- Indicator 98: **Time-bound commitment to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions intensity**
- Indicator 160: **Commitment to support smallholders**
- Indicator 181: **Own grievance or complaints system open to all stakeholders**

Committing to NDPE

- Indicator 55: **Commitment to zero deforestation**
- Indicator 65: **Biodiversity policy**
- Indicator 86: **Commitment to no planting on peat of any depth**
- Indicator 93: **Commitment to zero burning**
- Indicator 125: **Commitment to human rights**
- Indicator 132: **Commitment to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)**
- Indicator 143: **Commitment to Fundamental ILO Conventions or Free and Fair Labour Principles**

Committing to best practices

Indicator 71: **Commitment to conduct High Conservation Value (HCV) assessments**

Indicator 79: **Commitment to the High Carbon Stock (HCS) Approach**

Indicator 83: **Commitment to conduct social and environmental impact assessments (SEIAs)**

Indicator 90: **Commitment to best management practices for soils and peat**

Indicator 111: **Commitment to protect natural waterways through buffer zones**

Indicator 113: **Commitment to minimise the use of chemicals, including pesticides and chemical fertilisers**

Tips to remember:

- SPOTT usually assesses at the level of the parent company, so if your operations are reported on a separate subsidiary website, ensure there is a link to this from the company website. Ensure that the full scope of your company's palm oil operations is clearly reported.
- Several indicators on SPOTT require information to have a date associated with it in order to score full points, so make sure key information and policies are clearly dated with the year they were updated.
- For key policies and commitments, SPOTT looks at whether these are also applied to a company's smallholders and suppliers, so ensure the scope of your commitment is clear.
- SPOTT does not accept reports through the CDP website, as access is limited. However, we do accept CDP reports made available on a company's own website. If you submit a report to CDP or another organisation, please upload a copy to your own website so that the team can include it in the assessment.
- Some indicators are awarded points automatically if the company is an RSPO member or has RSPO certification. However, if the company is certified under other certification schemes, uploading or linking to the audit reports on the company's website can provide additional externally verified information that could be considered for the assessment.

Get in touch with us!

To understand more about how your company is assessed on SPOTT and receive more detailed support please contact one of our regional representatives.

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