

# Next steps for RSPO in relation to peatlands

The new RSPO (April 2013) Principles and Criteria (P&C) require the avoidance of new plantation developments on peatlands and provide important guidance for addressing the issues related to the production of palm oil on peat. The new P&C acknowledge that drainage of peatlands results in greenhouse gas emissions and peat soil subsidence, which in turn create flooding problems. The new requirements constitute a major step forward in the development of sustainable palm oil.

Wetlands International has developed further advice and recommendations for:

- 1) the appropriate implementation of the P&C by its members;
- 2) further improvement of the P&C related to peatlands, and
- 3) RSPO to establish a level playing field for achieving 100% sustainable palm oil in the sector.

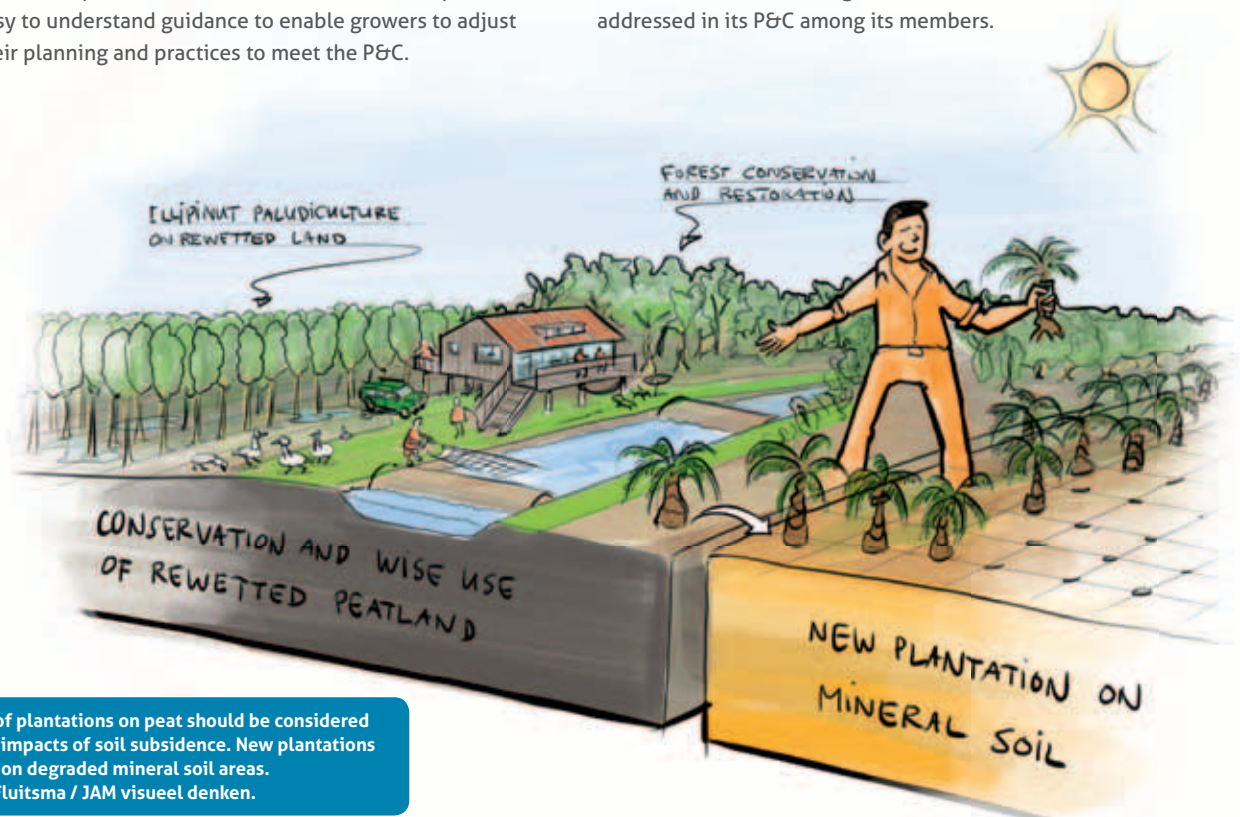
## 1. Enabling appropriate implementation of the P&C by RSPO members

The new RSPO P&C requirements regarding peatlands demand a high level of awareness and expertise of the issues that are being addressed. The capacity to implement, monitor and audit implementation of these new requirements is still limited. The RSPO has recognised this and has formed two working groups to facilitate implementation, in which Wetlands International participates:

- The Peat Expert Editorial Team (PEET), which will provide easy to understand guidance to enable growers to adjust their planning and practices to meet the P&C.

- An Emission Reduction Working Group (EWRG) including a special sub-group for new plantings, which will develop tools for monitoring and verification. These will help RSPO members to implement and monitor GHG emission reduction measures and results, monitor soil subsidence and drainability and provide full transparency through appropriate reporting.

In addition, RSPO is raising awareness of the issues that are addressed in its P&C among its members.



Gradual phasing out of plantations on peat should be considered to avoid the flooding impacts of soil subsidence. New plantations should be developed on degraded mineral soil areas.  
Illustration by Joost Fluitsma / JAM visueel denken.



Nursery for paludiculture (latex trees - Jelutung), Indonesia.  
Photo by Wim Giesen.

## 2. Further improving the Principles & Criteria

The RSPO P&C of 2013 constitute a major step forward in the development of sustainable palm oil, but there is significant scope for further improvement. Wetlands International recommends RSPO to:


- Work towards no peat clearance, meaning that all areas of undeveloped peatlands (peat of any depth) are protected and all drainage, fires or road building on peat soils is prohibited. The current P&C strongly encourage growers to establish new plantings on mineral soils, and require the 'avoidance of extensive new developments on peat'. The maximum limit for development on fragile soils, including peatlands is 100 ha, and for smallholders 20% of their land area.
- Adopt an indicator to define a maximum to GHG emissions for palm oil production. This would stimulate further reduction of impacts on high carbon areas and encourage rehabilitation of degraded peatlands.
- Advocate a phasing-out of drainage-based plantations from peat, with preference for replanting on mineral soils, involving 'land swaps'.
- Promote strategies to progressively restore peatland ecosystems, and support replacement with socially and economically viable sustainable peatland uses. Examples are paludicultures: land management techniques that cultivate commercially interesting crops, such as Illipe nut, on rewetted peatlands.



### 3. Towards 100% sustainable palm oil

With 1500 members together encompassing 60% of the world palm oil production, RSPO is becoming mainstream. However, RSPO's vision is to reach 100% sustainable palm oil from the sector as a whole, not only within its membership. As long as this is not achieved, non-RSPO members can still continue with business as usual and could even purchase peat-based land holdings from RSPO members. RSPO's success thus depends on creating a level playing field for achieving 100% sustainable palm oil. What can RSPO do to achieve this?

- RSPO should advocate its Principles and Criteria strongly to transform the sector as a whole;
- RSPO should not rely on NGOs only to address the irresponsible part of the sector, but should as a multi-stakeholder platform hold industry and government accountable;
- RSPO should demand from government the adoption of legislation that will hold the entire sector to at least the same principles and criteria that the RSPO stands for;
- Blow the whistle on irresponsible industry, including by public disapproval.



RSPO requires that new developments do not replace primary forests and avoid peatlands. Photo by Wetlands International.

## 2013 RSPO adopted Principles, Criteria and key Indicators relevant to peat:

- Indicator 4.3.4: Subsidence on peat shall be minimised and monitored.
- Indicator 4.3.5: Drainability assessments shall be required prior to replanting on peat to determine the long-term viability of the necessary drainage for palm oil growing.
- Indicator 5.2.2: Appropriate measures that are expected to maintain and/or enhance HCVs shall be implemented through a management plan.
- Indicator 5.5.1: There shall be no land preparation by burning other than in specific situations as identified in the 'Guidelines for the Implementation of the ASEAN Policy on Zero Burning'.
- Indicator 5.6.2: Significant pollutants and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions shall be identified, and plans to reduce or minimise them implemented.
- Indicator 7.1.2: Appropriate management planning and operation procedures shall be developed and implemented to avoid or mitigate identified potential negative impacts.
- Criterion 7.3: New plantings since November 2005 have not replaced primary forest or any area required to maintain or enhance one or more High Conservation Values.
- Criterion 7.4: Extensive planting on steep terrain, and/or marginal and fragile soils, including peat, is avoided.
- Criterion 7.8: New plantation developments are designed to minimise net greenhouse gas emissions.

Download our publication 'Practical guidance for implementing RSPO Principles and Criteria in relation to peatlands' from [www.wetlands.org](http://www.wetlands.org).

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For more information:

[www.wetlands.org](http://www.wetlands.org)

Global: Marcel Silvius, [marcel.silvius@wetlands.org](mailto:marcel.silvius@wetlands.org)

Indonesia: Nyoman Suryadiputra, [nyoman@wetlands.or.id](mailto:nyoman@wetlands.or.id)

Malaysia: Lee Shin Shin: [shin@wetlands.org.my](mailto:shin@wetlands.org.my)

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