



NOTES ON CERTIFICATION BY AUS-QUAL

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NOTES ON CERTIFICATION

1. General

AUS-QUAL provides a range of Certification Services against many Standards of importance to industry, in particular the Agricultural and Horticultural Sector and the downstream Food Production and Processing Industries.

In order to progress and maintain certification against a chosen Standard or Standards, AUS-QUAL certified enterprises need to be aware of the requirements for Certification and to stay abreast of changes to these requirements.

These notes on Certification by AUS-QUAL summarise the main issues that need to be understood and adequately addressed in order to gain and maintain Certification by AUS-QUAL.

This document is available either electronically or in hard copy from AUS-QUAL, or by direct download from the AUS-QUAL website: www.ausqual.com.au

2. Certification Standards

Certification Standards come in two distinct types:

- (a) System Certification Standards
- (b) Product Certification Standards

System Certification Standards against which services are supplied by AUS-QUAL include:

Quality Management Systems	ISO 9001:2000;
Food Safety Management Systems	ISO 22000:2005;
	Codex HACCP; and
Environmental Management Systems	ISO 14001:2004.

Product Certification Programs under which services are supplied by AUS-QUAL include:

GlobalGAP (formerly EurepGAP) Integrated farm Assurance
BRC Global Standard for Food Safety
Safe Quality Food – SQF 2000 and SQF 1000
Australian Wood Packaging Certification Scheme for Export

The requirements of these Standards and Certification Programs are set out in the Standards themselves and in accompanying 'Guidance' documents in many cases.

3. Proposal – Quotation

The first step in the Certification process is the Proposal, or Quotation provided by AUS-QUAL following receipt of an enquiry about Certification Services.

Interest from potential clients in the provision of certification services by AUS-QUAL may arise out of many different circumstances and the manner in which any initial submission is progressed will vary accordingly.

A Client Manager will generally be appointed to progress contact with potential clients. The initial and subsequent submissions to a potential client may be progressed under any (or all) of three main mechanisms defined as:

- Proposal
- Full Quotation
- Formal Proposal

4. Application for Certification

All clients must apply for certification using the AUS-QUAL Application for Certification. An application form may include an annex/s to address Program specific conditions.

A client manager ensures a client file is established. Client data is then entered into a Program database by AUS-QUAL administration. Contract review is undertaken and the client may be called to address specific issues to ensure a full and complete understanding of the application is obtained. The application is reviewed to establish the audit type; special requirements are considered such as physical location of the audit site. Resource requirements are considered to ensure competencies of the auditor/audit team and certification review committee are in line with the certification thereby assessing AUS-QUAL capability to meet client needs.

Initial and ongoing costs are assessed to consider expected pre-audit, desk audit and site audit duration, frequency and travel requirements. The estimation process should also consider the size of the client's operations, the number of site locations, the number of programs involved (e.g. ISO 9001, BRC, etc), and the guidance for determining assessment times provided in AUS-QUAL procedures.

A Services and License Agreement is then prepared which includes a schedule of fees. AUS-QUAL requires a signed contract on the client file prior to audit.

5. Initial Audit

The Initial Audit process may, depending on the Program / Standard concerned, and the complexity of the Audit, comprises:

- (a) A single Stage II Audit – Site Audit, or
- (b) A Stage I Audit – Desk Audit and a Stage II Audit – Site Audit

6. Surveillance and Reassessment Audits

The frequency of surveillance and/or recertification audits may be prescribed by a Program Owner / Standard Owner, or it may be set at the discretion of the Program Manager. Where the audit frequency is discretionary, surveillance audits will be scheduled taking into account the client organisation's internal audit program, the reliability that can be attributed to it, and any particular requirements of the relevant certification program. The audit frequency shall be sufficient to ensure the ongoing compliance of the system with certification requirements and may be determined on a "case by case" basis.

The interval between audits will not exceed 12 months. Under 'System Certification' programs it will usually commence at six (6) months. Where appropriate, the Program Manager shall determine the audit frequency and advise the Client Manager or Audit Team Leader accordingly.

The dates associated with the certification cycle under a Product Certification Program will generally be prescribed by a Program Owner / Standard Owner. The dates associated with the certification cycle under a System Certification Program will be programmed from the date of the initial audit, irrespective of the finalization date of the certification.

Reassessment audits will be conducted at defined intervals based on dates determined by individual program requirements as set out above. In the case of System Certification programs, the effectiveness of the complete management system will be determined on the basis of regular assessment at a frequency sufficient to maintain the necessary level of confidence.

The Audit Team Leader shall be responsible for agreeing with the client organisation, a schedule of dates for the audit process.

7. Short Notice Audits

From time to time, it may be necessary to conduct an audit at short notice. The circumstances for a Short Notice Audit may arise as a result of issues associated with (for example): Customer Complaints; Changes to the Certification Program or Standard; Follow-up on a Suspended Certification; etc.

Where a Short Notice Audit is considered necessary, additional measures will be taken to ensure that both the Audit Team and the manner in which the Audit is conducted, meet all reasonable expectations.

8. Audit Conduct

The success or otherwise of an Audit, will depend very much on the degree of preparedness of the enterprise and the cooperation and assistance provided to the Auditor.

The Auditor will want to see (a) the enterprise functioning in a normal manner, (b) records of process monitoring and other operational records, and (c) the documentation, eg procedures and work instructions, that are used to ensure that everything is done correctly.

Witness Audits

On occasions, an Auditor may be accompanied by another Auditor, either from AUS-QUAL or from the body (JAS-ANZ) that accredits many of AUS-QUAL's Programs. Advice will be given well in advance if a 'Witness' Auditor is to be present. This 'Witness' Auditor will take no part in the Audit itself; rather their role is to assess the performance of the AUS-QUAL Auditor.

9. Granting, Maintaining, Modifying Certification

Granting Certification

Prior to certification being granted the Certification Committee shall review all aspects of the certification to ensure the certification recommendation is consistent with the application, Contract Review Record and Service and License Agreement. The Committee then assesses the audit report to ensure it covers the scope of the certification; confirms that all Non-conformances are closed out and that Action Points are addressed as necessary.

Certificates are issued according to the relevant AUS-QUAL procedures and the details of each certificate are entered on to the Certificate Register. Certificates and associated certification documentation are dated from the date of the formal decision by the certification committee, unless otherwise specified under individual programs.

When certification details have been completed and the certificate issued, the details on the AUS-QUAL Client Information Database is updated accordingly.

Maintaining Certification

A client organisation that is currently certified by AUS-QUAL will be reviewed on a programmed basis in order to determine whether or not the certification should be maintained. Client organisations will therefore routinely undergo surveillance audits in line with program and AUS-QUAL requirements; comprehensive reassessment. After outcomes of surveillance audits and reassessments are addressed a new certificate is issued with instruction to destroy the old certificate.

Extending or Reducing Certification

A client organisation that is currently certified by AUS-QUAL may from time to time wish to expand the scope of their certification. Alternatively, a client organisation may wish to reduce the scope of their certification or may be required to reduce the scope of their certification as a result of changed circumstances within the organisation or as a result of the outcome of a surveillance or reassessment audit.

In all cases, changes to the scope of client organisation's certification will be based on objective evidence demonstrated at audit and will be reviewed by the Certification Committee. If the timing of the next routine surveillance or reassessment audit is not convenient, a specific purpose audit will be scheduled as soon as practical to assess the need for a change of scope.

All recommendations to reduce the scope of a client organisation's certification will be discussed fully with the client and shall be supported by a detailed explanation of the reasons in writing. The written explanation will include a detailed summary of the audit findings that resulted in the recommendation to reduce the scope.

Following confirmation by the Certification Committee that a change in scope is justified and / or warranted, the Program Manager or nominee shall issue a new Certification Certificate to the client organisation (together with instructions to either destroy the old certificate or mark it obsolete as of the date of expiration of the former certification).

When all certification, recertification, extension or reduction formalities have been completed, the details of the certification is entered / updated on to the JAS-ANZ Register.

If the client organisation and the auditor cannot agree on a matter, the auditor shall advise the client organisation of the details of the AUS-QUAL complaint procedure and recommend to them that they proceed by contacting AUS-QUAL in writing.

10. Suspending, Withdrawing Certification

Under certain circumstances it may be necessary for AUS-QUAL to suspend or withdraw a client organisation's certification. The circumstances under which certification may be suspended or withdrawn would include a serious breakdown of the system and/or breach of the conditions of certification.

If the client organisation and the auditor cannot agree on an issue that has led to a recommendation being made in respect of suspension, withdrawal or reinstatement of certification, the auditor shall advise the client organisation of the details of the AUS-QUAL complaint procedure and recommend that they proceed by initially contacting AUS-QUAL in writing.

11. Fees

AUS-QUAL Schedule of fees is available on request and is published with each Proposal/Quotation. The schedule includes all Program fees and would also indicate other travel and related costs that would be incurred by the Client.

12. The Rights and Duties of Certified Enterprises

The rights and duties of certified enterprises are included within the Services and License Agreement (the Agreement) entered into between the two parties. The Agreement clearly illustrates the responsibilities of both parties to the agreement.

13. Complaints and Appeals

AUS-QUAL will ensure business relationships with client organisations are supported by fair and effective methods of handling complaints and appeals. Maintenance of the integrity and credibility of the certification program shall be the primary objective when dealing with complaints and any subsequent appeals. Also, the independence and impartiality of those involved in dealing with complaints and appeals shall be maintained at all times.

Complaints should be lodged with AUS-QUAL in writing and will be brought to the attention of the Managing Director. The complaint will be duly investigated. Where

resolution is not reached to the satisfaction of the person or organisation raising the complaint, the Managing Director will appoint an impartial person to further investigate the issues associated with the complaint. If necessary the Managing Director will appoint an independent third party to advise on the issues concerned.

The Managing Director will consider the outcome of all investigations related to the complaint and will advise the person or organisation who raised the issue, of the outcome in writing.

AUS-QUAL views complaints and appeals as an important source of information about possible nonconformity. Accordingly, as part of AUS-QUAL's commitment to continuous improvement, Management Review meetings shall consider the outcome from all complaints investigations.