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**The Palm Oil Innovation Group welcomes improvements in the RSPO Standard – Strengthening of underlying systems and robust implementation still needed**

Kota Kinabalu – The members of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) today adopted a newly revised version of production requirements for sustainable palm oil, known as the RSPO Principles & Criteria (P&C). The new P&C is welcomed by the Palm Oil Innovation Group (POIG) as it presents a number of substantive improvements to the certification standard.

In particular, POIG welcomes new and stronger “No Deforestation, No development on Peatlands and No Exploitation” restrictions by the RSPO to prohibit the clearance of forests, including incorporation of the High Carbon Stock Approach (HCSA)<sup>1</sup>, no new development on peatlands, and clearer safeguards for workers, including more rigorous requirements addressing child labour and forced labour, including restrictions on recruitment fees and retention of passports. Provisions have also been strengthened to improve Free, Prior and Informed Consent procedures and to enhance local food security.

The new standard represents a welcome step by the RSPO to move toward alignment with the best practices already established by POIG, a group of progressive producers, NGOs and buyers that has already demonstrated the viability of producing and independently verifying palm oil grown without deforestation, development on peatlands, human rights violations or exploitation of workers.

While POIG recognises the new RSPO P&C as a major step forward, it acknowledges that some but not all of its criticisms of the scheme have been addressed. Namely there are still weaknesses related to:

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<sup>1</sup> The High Carbon Stock Approach is a global methodology for putting no deforestation commitments into practices. For more information visit [www.highcarbonstock.org](http://www.highcarbonstock.org)



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- allowing the use of highly toxic, bio-accumulative and persistent pesticides;
- not prohibiting Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs);
- the lack of strict standards on working hours and overtime, a cap on precarious labour, and a clear methodology to define a decent living wage, and;
- allowing indirect sourcing of illegally produced oil palm fruit for a full three years.

Additional work is also needed by the newly created No Deforestation Joint Working Group between RSPO and HCSA to define the application of the HCSA in High Forest Cover Landscapes within High Forest Cover Countries.

Meanwhile critical flaws remain in the standard's assurance systems and complaints mechanism. POIG calls on the RSPO to urgently strengthen its auditing systems and processes so its claims of "certified sustainable palm oil" can be trusted by consumers across the globe. This includes the development of tools and methodologies to ensure the P&C's robust implementation, such as those related to assessing and managing peatlands, restoring critical peatlands, assessments, audits and complaints, protections for human rights defenders and monitoring of impacts.

Moving forward, POIG will continue to provide independently verified responsible palm oil to the international market, and strengthen its own quality assurance mechanisms by ensuring that third-party auditors are conducting verification assessments to evaluate POIG producer member compliance with the POIG Verification Audit Requirements (VAR) released in July 2018. POIG will develop and test innovations related to implementing the new RSPO P&C, as well as work on innovations that go beyond the new P&C on crucial issues such as the restoration of critical peatlands, and overcoming bottlenecks to the sourcing of POIG verified oil. POIG's members hope to work in partnership with the RSPO to implement improvements to its audit requirements, including limits to successive audits, the trialing of non-scheduled audits, as well as requirements for strengthened stakeholder interviews and audit team composition and competencies.

POIG calls on all companies involved in the palm oil sector to urgently increase their efforts to honour their commitments to source responsibly produced palm oil using POIG, RSPO and other complementary tools and approaches that provide assurance for No Deforestation, No development on Peatlands and No Exploitation of communities and workers (NDPE) and drive smallholder inclusivity and benefit-sharing. POIG urges all stakeholders to continue to work together to create transparent and responsible supply chains and break the link between palm oil production and the destruction of forests and peatlands, the exploitation of communities and workers, and climate change once and for all.



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**About Palm Oil Innovation Group (POIG)**

The Palm Oil Innovation Group (POIG) is a multi-stakeholder initiative that strives to achieve the adoption of responsible palm oil production practices by key players in the supply chain through developing and sharing a credible and verifiable benchmark that builds upon the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), and creating and promoting innovations. Founded in 2013, the initiative was developed in partnership with leading NGOs as well as with progressive palm oil producers.

To learn more about POIG, visit [www.poig.org](http://www.poig.org)