Request for Proposals

Review and Enhancement of BCI's Benchmarking Process under the Recognition Programme

RFP n#: 2026-3-SSI-RECOGNITION

Location: Remote

Start date: 6th May 2026

End date: 10th July 2026

Technical Team: Standards, System & Integrity

All applications must be submitted via this **form**.

You may submit questions to tender@bettercotton.org – RFP 2026-3-SSI-RECOGNITION" until 2nd April 2026, noting that the **final submission deadline for bids is the 9th April 2026**.

Questions, requests and applications sent after the deadline will only be considered in exceptional circumstances

Important Submission Process Information: After submitting your details through the **form**, you will receive a separate email to upload your supporting documents to a secure platform.

Description

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) is the world's largest cotton sustainability programme. Our mission: to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. Through our network of field-level partners we have provided training on more sustainable farming practices to more than 2.9 million cotton farmers in 26 countries. More than a fifth of the world's cotton is now grown under the BCI Standard and our membership network includes more than 2,400 members.

More information about BCI can be found on our website: www.bettercotton.org

Background

BCI uses a process called 'benchmarking' to establish a one-way recognition of other credible cotton sustainability standard systems. Recognising other standards as equivalent through benchmarking is an effective way to ensure local applicability of our interventions and deepen impact while mainstreaming sustainability in cotton production, by building on existing knowledge and activities through meaningful partnerships.

Since 2013, this recognition model has allowed farmers who meet the requirements of a successfully benchmarked standard system to access and expand the market for BCI and avoid duplicative compliance requirements. BCI's Benchmarking Policy defines the framework to engage ongoing and prospective partnerships with organisations that administer similar sustainability standards and wish to establish one-way recognitions with the BCISS.BCI seeks an independent consultant to assess, map, and evaluate the current benchmarking processes across all pillars[1] of the BCI Standard System (BCISS), compare them to recognized best-practice benchmarking frameworks, and provide actionable recommendations to enhance consistency, credibility, transparency, and strategic value.

Scope of Work

The consultant will conduct a comprehensive review of BCI's current benchmarking and recognition processes across all six pillars of the BCISS. The work will include process mapping, assessment against global best practices, and development of actionable recommendations to enhance coherence, robustness, and transparency.

The consultancy phases include:

1) **Mapping of current state**
   The consultant should map the existing processes against each of the six pillars of the BCI Standards System (Farm-level standard, Capacity Strengthening, Assurance Framework,

[1] These are: Farm-level standard, Capacity Strengthening, Assurance Framework, Chain of Custody, Claims Framework and Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning. Check https://bettercotton.org/ for more details.

Chain of Custody, Claims Framework and Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning). This process mapping should be based on the existing BCI Benchmarking Policy as well as interviews with stakeholders involved in the process. The consultant should provide an interview plan and list any additional documentation needed from BCI.

The consultant should review any existing documentation related to the one-way recognition of our partners in Australia and Brazil:

1. Australia: Cotton Australia / my Best Management Practices (myBMP)
2. Brazil: Associação Brasileira dos Produtores de Algodão (ABRAPA) / The Responsible Brazilian Cotton Programme (ABR)

In addition, the consultant will be conducting interviews with relevant internal and external stakeholders (approximately 10 interviews).

Deliverables:

1. A complete set of visual process maps of current procedures in place to reach to the decision of one-way recognition.
2. Identification of variations in methodology, decision making, governance and Quality Assurance.
3. Specific report about the ABRAPA/ABR and Cotton Australia/myBMP benchmarking processes including an assessment about its robustness in relation to the claim of full equivalence.

Prior to moving to phase 2, we would like to conclude on phase 1 by BCI approval.

2) Best-Practice of Standard Recognition Model and Benchmarking Process

The consultant should identify best-practices for standard recognition models through benchmarking process, including an assessment of the following phases:

- Defining the scope and structure
- Developing the benchmark
- Defining the benchmark process

This model should include a detailed description of the different steps that need to be fulfilled before taking a decision on recognition. There should be separate steps to be taken to reach a conclusion on each of the pillars of our BCISS. The model should be developed in compliance with the ISEAL Good Practice Guide for Benchmarking Sustainability Schemes version 2, March 2025[2].

During this step, the consultant should assess whether the proposed one-way scheme recognition model is compatible with ISO/IEC 17065 and therefore identify any risks to accreditation arising from:

[2] https://isealalliance.org/sites/default/files/resource/2025-03/Good%20Practice%20Guide%20for%20Benchmarking%20Sustainability%20Systems_v2.pdf

- Reliance on externally certified producers
- Recognition of equivalence between schemes
- Control of certification decisions and claims

Clarify whether ISO/IEC 17065 accreditation of recognised schemes alone is sufficient, or whether additional equivalence assessment and controls are required.

Deliverables

1. A structured model for BCI's recognition process aligned including clearly defined stages, decision gates, and documentation requirements.
2. A detailed step-by-step benchmarking methodology for each of the six pillars of the BCISS, specifying assessment criteria, evidence requirements, scoring or equivalence determination approach, and decision-making thresholds.
3. A proposed governance structure for recognition decisions, including roles, responsibilities, escalation procedures, conflict-of-interest safeguards, and quality assurance controls.
4. A focused technical assessment of whether the proposed one-way recognition model is compatible with ISO/IEC 17065.

3) Gap-Analysis & Recommendations

During this process the consultant should conduct an analysis of the gaps between the outcome of deliverables 1 & 2 and provide some recommendations on next steps.

The gap analysis should look at what structural gaps exist between the current process and the best-practice in the industry. Based on that there should be a recommendation to BCI on if and how to address any of the gaps identified. Deliverables should include a prioritized action plan, resource implications as well as clear recommendations on governance and decision-making. Each recommendation should include rationale, risks, benefits, resource implications, and a priority level.

The recommendation should also consider potential risks/considerations for the ISO 17065 accreditation of the BCI certification scheme.

Deliverables

1. A comparative analysis identifying structural, procedural, governance, and assurance gaps between:
    - Current BCI benchmarking processes (Phase 1 findings)
    - The proposed best-practice model (Phase 2 output)
2. A sequenced roadmap outlining recommended actions, milestones, and suggested phasing (short-, medium-, long-term).

3. A specific recommendation on adapting our current model of full recognition and move towards a model of partial recognition
4. An analysis of staffing, governance, financial, and operational implications associated with implementing the recommended improvements.
5. Draft templates and tools to operationalise the model, including:
    - Recognition application checklist
    - Equivalence assessment template
    - Decision record template
    - Ongoing monitoring and review checklist
6. Clear recommendations on required updates to:
    - Benchmarking Policy
    - Recognition procedures
    - Decision-making authorities
    - Oversight and quality assurance mechanisms
7. A consolidated final report integrating all findings, accompanied by a presentation-ready slide deck summarising key risks, decisions required, and recommended next steps.

High-level Timeline

9th April 2026	**Applications deadline** All applications must be submitted via this **form**.
10th April 2026	Applications review & shortlisting / interviews
24th April 2026	The successful applicant will be notified Unsuccessful shortlisted applicants will also be notified
6th May 2026	**Start of the consultancy**
22nd May 2026	Mapping of current-state: Document review completed and deep-dive interviews scheduled.

5th June 2026	Report on first phase: Mapping of current state
12th June 2026	Report on Best-Practice Benchmarking Model
26th June 2026	Gap Analysis & Recommendations Report
10th July 2026	Final report and slide deck

Required Skills & Knowledge

In addition to skills, competencies and expertise, we will consider value for money and demonstrable commitment to the sustainability field to evaluate applications.

Skills, Knowledge and Experience
Essential
- Strong expertise in governance and process design
- Demonstrated experience working with sustainability standards and certification schemes, particularly in the agricultural sector
- Strong track record in technical standards and strategic advisory work
- Excellent stakeholder engagement skills and able to effectively communicate with people from different backgrounds
- Strong analytical and mapping capabilities
- Demonstrated experience reviewing benchmarking or assurance systems.
Desirable
- Familiarity with ISO 17065 and its accreditation requirements.
- Familiarity with the regulatory landscape, e.g. EUDR, Empowering Consumer Directive etc.
- Knowledge of BCI Standard Systems with its different pillars.

Application Requirements

Please note that we have changed our RFP submission protocol, and this is now in two phases;

- **Phase 1: Initial details will be submitted on the form found in this link.**

- **Phase 2: You will receive an email with live links to upload relevant documents (please check your Spam and Junk folders)**

Proposals responding to this Request for Proposals must be written in English and should be a maximum of 10 pages (excluding CVs), and include the following:

- Overview of relevant experience
- Proposed methodology and timeline
- Detailed and transparent budget, in EUROS, including time allocation and day rates

We thank all applicants for their interest; however, only shortlisted applicants will be contacted.

BCI is committed to good practice and transparency in the management of natural, human and financial resources. All applications will be reviewed under the principles and subject to BCI's policies on equal opportunity, non-discrimination, anti-bribery & corruption and conflict of interest.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Technical Evaluation Criteria

- Demonstrated understanding of this RFP
- Quality and clarity of the proposed approach and methodology
- Feasibility of the proposed activity plan and timeline, and appropriateness of time allocated to delivering each task
- Relevant professional experience of the proposed consultant(s)
- Quality and relevance of the sample work submitted

Financial Evaluation Criteria

- Quality and clarity of budget provided, and level of detail included
- Alignment of the budget to the activity timeline detailed in the technical proposal
- Value for money