RESPONSIBLE TOURISM INSTITUTE

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Biosphere Scheme Certification Rules

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1. Purpose and Scope

This document establishes the general rules governing the operation of the Biosphere Certification Scheme [hereinafter, the Scheme], including its scope, the parties involved, the certification process and the conditions for the granting, maintenance, suspension and withdrawal of certification.

The Scheme is developed and operated in accordance with the principles of transparency, objectivity, impartiality, independence and non-discrimination, which are reflected in the rules and procedures applicable to its development, access and operation.

The Scheme is owned by the Responsible Tourism Institute [RTI], which establishes and maintains its requirements, rules and operating conditions and is also the owner of the Biosphere mark. These Rules are complemented by the requirements and other current documents that form part of the Scheme documentation.

The Scheme has been developed with reference to the applicable international standards on conformity assessment, including ISO/IEC 17000:2020, ISO/IEC 17065:2012 and ISO/IEC 17067:2013. The rules applicable to the Scheme are those established in its current documentation.

2. Terms Used

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions established in ISO/IEC 17000:2020 and ISO/IEC 17065:2012 apply. In addition, the following terms specific to the Biosphere Scheme are used:

Term	Definition
Authorised certification body	Certification body authorised by RTI to operate the Biosphere Scheme in accordance with the conditions established by RTI.
Tourism entity	Public and/or private organisation that provides tourism services or forms part of the tourism value chain, including organisations acting as tourism destination management bodies, and which is responsible for the provision of tourism services and the associated operational processes.
Biosphere Requirements	Structured set of requirements established by the Scheme against which the conformity of entities is assessed.
Starters	Ten basic blocks that structure the conditions applicable to obtaining Biosphere Committed.
Biosphere Committed	Level applicable to companies that have demonstrated conformity with the conditions established by the Scheme for obtaining it.
Biosphere Certified	Certification level granted when conformity with the conditions established by the Scheme for obtaining it has been demonstrated.
Practice or action	Action undertaken by the entity and linked to a Biosphere Requirement, the implementation of which is subject to conformity assessment.

3. Scope and Object of Certification

3.1 Entities Eligible for Certification

For certification purposes, the following are distinguished:

- **Tourism companies**, to which the **Biosphere Requirements for Companies** apply and which may obtain **Biosphere Committed** and **Biosphere Certified**.
- **Tourism destination management bodies**, to which the **Biosphere Requirements for Destinations** apply and which may obtain **Biosphere Certified**.

3.2 Scope

This Scheme applies to entities that provide tourism services, including their associated operational processes, whose activities are assessed on the basis of their sustainability performance in accordance with the requirements established under this Scheme, irrespective of their legal status or geographical location.
This Scheme applies internationally.

3.3 Object of Conformity Assessment

The object of conformity assessment is the entity's activity of providing tourism services and its associated operational processes, assessed on the basis of its sustainability performance against the requirements established under this Scheme.

4. Structure of the Biosphere Requirements

The Biosphere Requirements are structured around the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. For each SDG, a set of requirements related to its area of action is established.
The Scheme requirements are established in the Biosphere Requirements for Companies and the Biosphere Requirements for Destinations, according to the type of entity.

5. Certification Levels and Conditions

The Scheme provides for Biosphere Committed and Biosphere Certified, according to the type of entity and the conditions established for each.

5.1 Biosphere Committed

Biosphere Committed applies exclusively to the Companies category.

To obtain it, the entity must demonstrate conformity with the ten Starters established in the Biosphere Requirements for Companies.

5.2 Biosphere Certified

Biosphere Certified applies to both Companies and Destinations.

For entities in the Companies category, obtaining Biosphere Certified requires prior attainment of Biosphere Committed.

To obtain Biosphere Certified, entities in the Companies category must demonstrate:

- conformity with at least **one requirement corresponding to each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals; and**
- achievement of a **minimum coverage of 50% in each of the three areas** established for the Companies category. For these purposes, each area comprises the following Sustainable Development Goals:
    - **Environment and Climate Change:** SDGs 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 and 15.
    - **Society and Culture:** SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 11 and 16.
    - **Governance and Economy:** SDGs 2, 8, 9, 10 and 17.

The **coverage of each area** is determined on the basis of the completion of the requirements included within the SDGs that comprise that area. The minimum **50% coverage** is considered to have been achieved when the completed requirements represent at least **50% of the total requirements corresponding to that area**.

To obtain Biosphere Certified, entities in the **Destinations** category must demonstrate conformity with at least **40% of the total requirements established in the Biosphere Requirements for Destinations**.

Additionally, destinations that have obtained Biosphere Certified may qualify for the Gold and Platinum distinctions, depending on the number of companies associated with their territory that hold Biosphere Committed and/or Biosphere Certified certification. These distinctions shall be awarded in accordance with the criteria established by the Scheme.

6. Access to the Scheme and Application

Biosphere certification is voluntary. Access to the Scheme is open, under transparent, fair and non-discriminatory conditions, to any entity falling within its scope.
The application for certification is submitted to an authorised certification body, which processes it in accordance with the rules of the Scheme.

7. Conformity Assessment

7.1 Audit

Conformity assessment is carried out through a third-party audit conducted by an authorised certification body, for the purpose of determining the entity's conformity with the applicable requirements of the Scheme.
The audit is based on objective evidence and may be conducted remotely, on-site or through a combination of both methods.

7.2 Individual Assessment of Requirements

Each requirement is assessed individually on the basis of objective evidence, in order to determine conformity with the conditions established for that requirement.

7.3 Assessment Results

Each requirement assessed receives one of the following results:

- Conforming: where the objective evidence allows it to be determined that the entity satisfies the conditions established for the requirement.
- Non-conforming: where the available evidence does not allow conformity to be determined or demonstrates that the conditions established for the requirement are not satisfied.

The results obtained form the basis for applying the certification conditions established in Chapter 5.

7.4 Corrective Actions

Where a requirement receives a Non-conforming result, the entity may take corrective actions and provide new evidence for assessment.
The certification body assesses the new evidence and, where appropriate, updates the result of the requirement in accordance with the rules of the Scheme.

8. Certification Decision

The certification decision is the responsibility of the authorised certification body and is made by applying the certification conditions established by the Scheme to the results obtained during the certification process.

The decision may result, as appropriate, in the granting, maintenance, suspension, reduction of the scope or withdrawal of certification.

9. Granting and Public Verification of Certification

Where the certification decision is favourable, the authorised certification body grants the corresponding certification and issues the documentation attesting to the certification and its scope.
Information on certifications granted and their status is kept publicly available, enabling any third party to verify an entity's certification status.

The use of the certification and the Biosphere certification marks is subject to the conditions established in the Rules for the Use of the Biosphere Mark and Certification Marks.

10. Surveillance and Maintenance of Certification

Once certification has been granted, the entity is subject to periodic surveillance activities aimed at verifying that the conditions under which certification was granted continue to be met.
Surveillance is carried out at intervals not exceeding twelve months from the initial certification decision or from the most recent surveillance activity.
The results of surveillance are taken into account in determining the maintenance of certification or, where appropriate, the adoption of other decisions provided for under the Scheme.

11. Termination, Reduction, Suspension or Withdrawal of Certification

Where it is determined that a certified entity no longer satisfies the certification requirements, the certification body shall take the appropriate decision regarding the reduction, suspension or withdrawal of certification.

Certification may be terminated at the request of the certified entity.

n the event of termination, reduction, suspension or withdrawal of certification, the certification status and scope shall be updated, as appropriate, in the publicly available information, together with the conditions relating to the use of the Biosphere certification marks in accordance with the Rules for the Use of the Biosphere Mark and Certification Marks.

12. Complaints and Appeals

Complaints and appeals relating to certification activities shall be handled by the certification body responsible for those activities, in accordance with its applicable procedure and the rules of the Scheme.

Complaints relating to the Biosphere Scheme or to the activities of RTI as Scheme Owner shall be handled by RTI in accordance with the procedure established for this purpose.

13. Independence and Impartiality of Certification

RTI, as Scheme Owner, is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Scheme but is not involved in the evaluation, review or certification decision concerning entities, which are the responsibility of the authorised certification bodies.