

# BCI Criterion 4.2

## Conversion Risk Assessment Procedure

### Medium and large farms

Version 0.1



# Identification

**Name of producer:**

.....

**Name of Production Unit or Farm:**

.....

**Location (administrative unit, province/state and country):**

.....

**Area of existing farm:**

.....

**Size of proposed conversion area:**

.....

**Coordinates of polygon that includes the proposed conversion area:**

.....

# Introduction

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) has identified a need to more effectively address the negative environmental and social impacts that may result from conversion of new lands for cultivation of cotton. BCI is adopting the High Conservation Value (HCV) approach for these purposes, and the revised BCI Criterion 4.2 reads:

*“4.2.1 In case of any proposed conversion from non-agricultural land to agricultural land, the BCI High Conservation Value risk-based simplified approach must be implemented”*

The HCV approach aims to identify important social and environmental values in production landscapes and to maintain them with effective management and monitoring over time. BCI recognises that clearing areas of natural vegetation for expansion of agriculture may degrade or destroy HCVs. The risks depend on several factors, including the scale of conversion, the probability that HCVs occur in the proposed conversion area, and the sensitivity of those HCVs to land use change.

Where one (or more) of these risk factors is small, there is less risk of negative impacts. Thus, the best way of avoiding negative impacts is to steer expansion of cotton cultivation to land already used for agriculture, or convert only heavily degraded lands where there is little probability that HCVs remain. However, degraded land is not always available. The more natural the area, and the more people that depend on subsistence practices, the higher probability that HCVs are present. The severity of impact depends on how these values react to land use change: conversion is likely to lead to complete loss of values closely linked to the site, e.g. specialised species very dependent on a certain habitat, while more generalist and wide-roaming animals may be less affected. Impacts may be reduced if values can be replaced or substituted, e.g. provision of solar stoves to compensate for loss of access to fuelwood. Scale is also important: large agricultural expansion is more likely to cause serious damage than smaller operations, due to cumulative effects and higher likelihood of impacting on HCVs not uniformly distributed in the landscape.

# Procedure overview

This procedure has been developed by BCI in cooperation with the HCV Resource Network (HCVRN). It is designed to help BCI producers comply with 4.2.1 in case of any proposed conversion from non-agricultural land to agricultural land, the BCI High Conservation Value risk-based simplified approach must be implemented

The approach is based on the premises that:

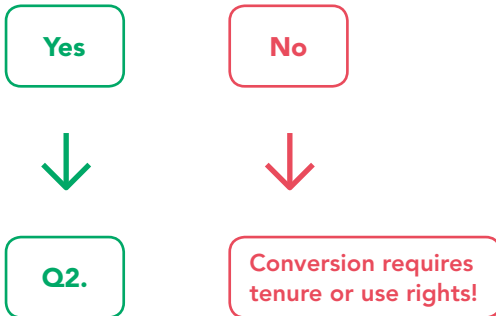
- During the season planning process, the Producer identifies any planned conversion of non-agricultural land. In the case of Production Units (PUs), the PU manager, through the Internal Management System (IMS) and using information collected by Field Facilitators, needs to identify planned expansion from existing farmers, or assess new farmers joining the PU. This information is provided through the PU Data Structure maintenance and reporting requirement, along with farmers' lists and planned acreages;
- The farmer (the PU manager in case of a SH/MF) uses the risk assessment questionnaire to evaluate the level of risk that the expansion of cultivation poses to HCV. Production Unit Managers and individual farmers identify potential risks together. In the PU context, this information will be collected and reported to the PU manager making use of the Integrated Management System structure and facilitated by Field Facilitator;
- The basic procedures distinguish between three levels: **low**, **elevated** and **high** risk;
- The risk that conversion of areas smaller than ten hectares, outside Protected Areas, Key Biodiversity Areas and Intact Forest Landscapes, impacts negatively on nationally significant concentrations of rare, threatened or endangered species or ecosystems is assumed to be low;
- For conversion to proceed, all risks initially classified as **elevated** must be mitigated through HCV mitigation plan and/or reduced to lower levels through more in-depth expert analysis;
- Proposed conversion for which any aspect is classified as of **high** or **significant** risk requires prior HCV assessment by an assessor licensed under the HCVRN Assessor Licensing Scheme (ALS), see <https://www.hcvnetwork.org/als/home>

# Risk assessment and mitigation

This section contains the risk assessment and the procedures for medium and large farms to comply with BCI Criterion 4.2, adapted to different levels of risk. It consists of twelve questions with associated guidance. The tool also serves as documentation of the risk assessment, to be presented to the certification auditor upon request.

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## Q1: Does the farmer have full tenure or use right to the proposed conversion area (PCA)?



Prior to conversion of new land to crop cultivation or pasture, BCI producers must demonstrate that they own, or have the right to use, that land, e.g. through land title, acquisition documents or witnessed agreements. However, recognised land rights of the rural poor are often based on unwritten customary land tenure and inheritance rules, and land use rights of members of indigenous societies is often assigned by community leaders. Such informal tenure is equally valid, and may be demonstrated through documented interviews with community leaders, village councils, community members and neighbours.

**Q2:** Does the proposed conversion comply with legal requirements including any land designation or zoning, and does the farmer have all necessary permits?

**Yes**

**No**



**Q3.**

**Conversion requires compliance with all legal provisions!**

Conversion by BCI producers must comply with all applicable national and jurisdictional laws and regulations. LFs and Production Unit Managers are expected to know what provisions apply, what requirements (e.g. for social and/or environmental impact assessments) must be met, and what permits (e.g. for water use) need to be obtained in the context where their producers operate, and to verify that these requirements are complied with.

**Q3: Do any other people have legal or customary rights that may be affected by the proposed conversion?**

No



Q4.

Yes



**Elevated Risk:** Producers must identify all parties with legitimate, formal or informal use rights or claims to the PCA. Such rights may include seasonal access to water, fodder, natural products or food sources. Land may also be subject to a combination of individual and collective ownership and use rights. Parties with rights may be identified by notifying neighbours, community leaders, village councils and community members about the proposed conversion. Rights holders must be informed about the implications of the proposed conversion, and their prior consent demonstrated, e.g. through documents, witnessed agreements, or videoed interviews. Claims affecting the area must also be addressed and evaluated, and any conflicts or disputes resting on legitimate claims be resolved prior to conversion. In cases where the PCA is leased from the owner(s), the farmer must be able to demonstrate consent and agreement on the terms, including compensation, the duration of the lease, and conditions for termination.



Documented consent from all rights holders



Q4.

#### Q4: Is the PCA located in, or overlapping with, a Protected Area?

No



Q5.

Yes



**Conversion is not allowed in protected areas!**

Many protected areas (e.g. national parks, reserves) host nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity, some of which are threatened by encroachment of settlers, illegal hunting or illegal clearing for pasture or agriculture. BCI farmers are not allowed to convert land in officially designated protected areas, whether or not these are legally protected.

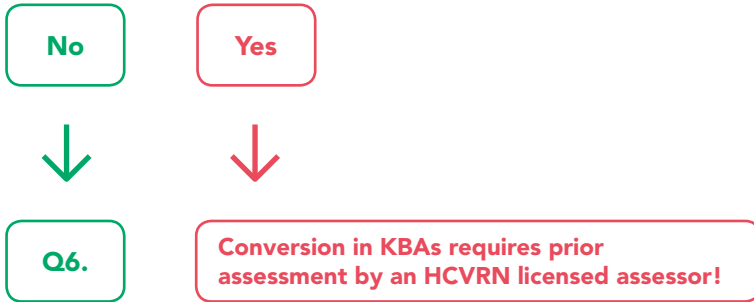
To find out the locations of protected areas, visit the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), a joint project between UN Environment and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), at <https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/our-work/world-database-protected-areas>.

This is a comprehensive, regularly updated global database with PAs shown in green. Click on the map, move the pointer to your country and area of interest, and use the + button in the right end of the map to zoom in. Double left clicking on a chosen area opens a new window with a map and some basic information (name, area, year of establishment, responsible agency). Unfortunately, this is the limit of the information on this site that is available for free - further sources of information related to a certain area may be found using internet search engines.

Should you still not know for sure if the PCA overlaps with a protected area after visiting this site, contact the Implementing Partner for advice.



## Q5: Is the PCA located in a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA)?



Key Biodiversity Areas, KBAs, are areas that meet certain criteria related to threatened biodiversity, geographically restricted biodiversity, ecological integrity, biological processes and/or irreplaceability. KBAs are identified through a consultative, scientific process based on a global standard with quantitative thresholds. The approach is governed by an alliance of organisations including BirdLife International, IUCN, Conservation International, Global Environment Facility, WWF and Wildlife Conservation Society. As KBAs are identified on much the same grounds as High Conservation Value 1, KBAs may be considered likely HCV candidates, and therefore BCI farmers are not allowed to convert land in such areas without prior HCV assessment by an HCVRN licensed assessor.

To find KBA sites, visit <http://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/site/mapsearch>. Move the pointer and scroll or right click to zoom in on your country and area of interest. KBAs are shown in brown. Left click on an area and a bar appears with a name. Clicking on the name opens a new window with data on coordinates and area, sometimes also a link to some more information. However, just like the map of protected areas, not much data is available for free - further sources of information related to a certain area may be found using internet search engines.

Should you still not know for sure if the PCA overlaps with a protected area after visiting this site, contact the Implementing Partner for advice.

Note: the identification of KBAs largely reflect the activity of civil society conservation organisations. As a result, the density of KBAs vary considerably between countries – from basically just protected areas and reserves, to dense networks of recognised KBAs.

**Q6:** Is the PCA located in, or closer than 2 km to, an Intact Forest Landscape (IFL)?

No



**Q7.**

Yes



Is the PCA located in, or overlapping with, an IFL?



Yes



**Conversion is not allowed in Intact Forest Landscapes!**



**No, but the PCA, or part of the PCA, is closer than 2 km to an IFL**



**Conversion requires prior assessment by an HCVRN licensed assessor!**

Intact Forest Landscapes, IFLs, are remaining large areas of forests and forest mosaics without signs of logging, mining or infrastructure visible on satellite imagery. IFLs store lots of carbon in the trees and in the soil, and have capacity to host large proportions of the regional fauna and flora. All IFLs are considered areas of High Conservation Value (HCV), and BCI farmers are not allowed to convert land within IFLs. As an additional safeguard, conversion within a 2 km buffer zone around an IFL requires prior HCV assessment by a HCVRN licensed assessor.

To find the location of IFLs, see <http://www.intactforests.org/world.webmap.html>. The site contains a world map where you can easily move to and zoom in on the area you want to survey. The map is based on medium resolution (Landsat) imagery. IFLs remaining year 2013 are shown in dark green (with the loss of IFL area since year 2000 in red).

Should you still not know for sure if the PCA is in or near an Intact Forest Landscape after visiting this site, contact the Implementing Partner for advice.

**Q7:** Is any part of the PCA closer than 100 m to a river, stream, ditch, canal, pond or lake?

No



**Q8.**

Yes



**Elevated Risk:** Cultivation close to open water may cause leakage of pesticides, fertilisers and suspended particles, with negative impacts on water quality at and downstream the point of pollution. To mitigate such impacts, maintain (or restore) a buffer zone of perennial vegetation adjacent to the water body or stream, at least 20 meters wide (or as wide as the water course, whichever is the larger number). Do not clear, plant or use any pesticides or fertilisers in the bufferzone, and do not dump waste or sewage.



**Mitigation measures should be identified by LF/Production Unit Manager and the Water Management Plan should be accordingly updated**



**Q8.**

**Q8:** Is the PCA larger than 100 hectares, or part of a cumulative expansion larger than 100 hectares over the last year by the same producer?

No



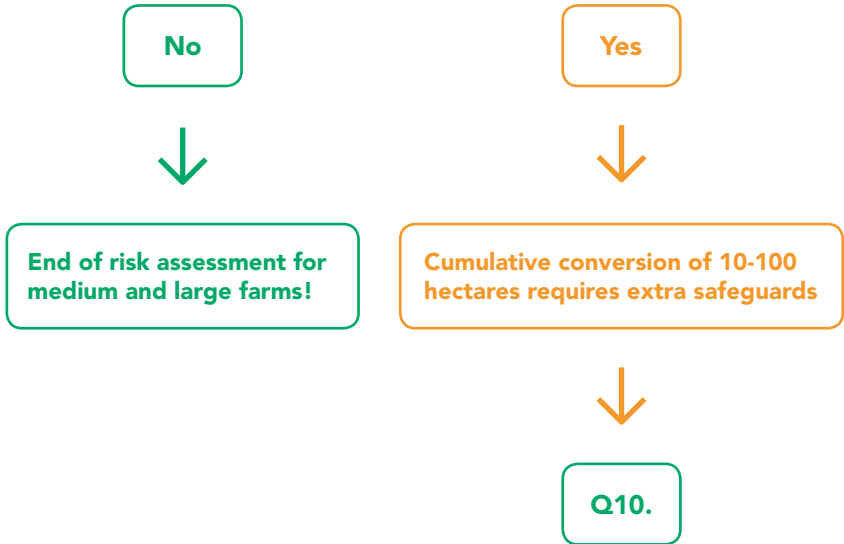
Q9.

Yes



**Cumulative conversion of more than 100 hectares requires prior assessment by an HCVRN licensed assessor!**

**Q9:** Is the PCA 10-100 hectares, or part of a cumulative expansion 10-100 hectares over the last year by the same producer?



**Q10:** Is any part of the PCA localised on a steep slope (> 1 m vertical in 4 m horizontal)?

No

Yes



**Q11.**

**Elevated Risk:** Cultivation on slopes increases the risk of soil erosion, mud- and landslides after heavy rain. Conversion of areas on slopes requires prior analysis by a BCI-recognised expert, normally a desktop procedure based on remote sensing imagery, information in the literature and, where relevant, consultation with local expertise. The outcome will be a brief report including recommendations for how to minimise and mitigate soil movement, appropriate to the soil and rainfall characteristics.

For advice related to BCI-recognised experts, contact the Implementing Partner.



**Report concluding significant risk of severe erosion**

**Report concluding low risk of severe erosion if recommended mitigation measures are implemented and Soil Management Plan accordingly updated**



**Conversion requires prior assessment by an HCVRN licensed assessor!**



**Q11.**

**Q11: Will the PCA be irrigated by surface water (river, canals) or ground water sources?**

No



Q12.

Yes



**Elevated Risk:** Use of surface or ground water to irrigate new areas of cultivation may exacerbate water scarcity and reduce water availability for other users. This requires analysis by a BCI-recognised expert, normally a desk-top procedure based on remote sensing imagery, information in the literature and, where relevant, consultation with local expertise. The outcome will be a brief report including recommendations for how to reduce water consumption.

For advice related to BCI-recognised experts, contact the Implementing Partner.



**Report concluding significant risk of severely reduced water availability for other users**



**Conversion requires prior assessment by an HCVRN licensed assessor!**



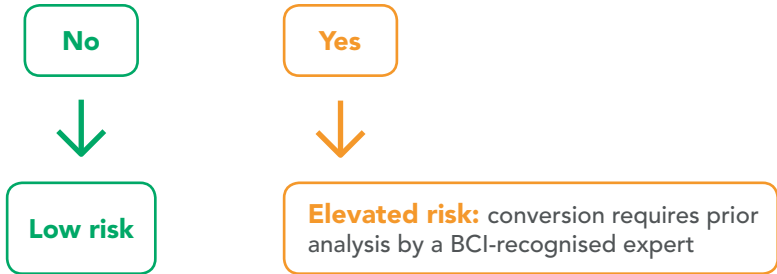
**Report concluding low risk of severely reduced water availability for other users if recommended mitigation measures are implemented, and Water Management Plan accordingly updated**



Q12 A-C.



**Q12A:** Does the proposed conversion require clearing of trees or bushes with stem diameter > 10 cm?



**Q12B:** Has the PCA been used for crop cultivation any time over the last 3 years?

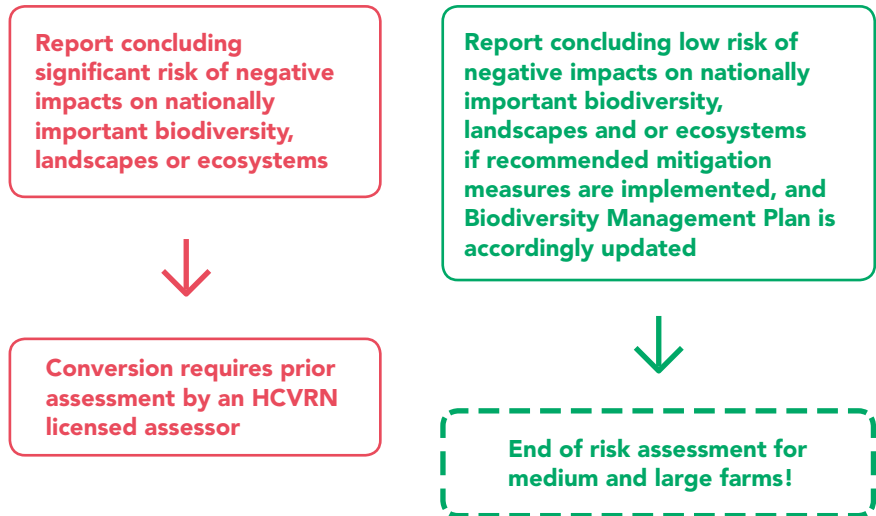


**Q12C:** Will the cultivation of the PCA require measures to drain excess water?



The objective of questions 12 a-c is to separate low risk PCAs from potential High Conservation Value forest/savanna, grassland and wetland. **Low risk** answers to all three questions indicate that the PCA is unlikely to be a rare or threatened ecosystem or to host nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity, and no further assessment is required. However, any **elevated risk** requires analysis by a BCI-recognised expert, normally a desk-top procedure based on remote sensing imagery, information in the literature, and where relevant, consultation with local expertise. The outcome will be a brief report including recommendations for how to reduce negative impacts on biodiversity.

For advice related to BCI-recognised experts, contact the Implementing Partner.



# Sign off

*I have completed/verified this risk assessment for conversion by medium and large farms. All questions have been adequately addressed and documented, and required reports from experts are available.*

**LF Manager / Production Unit Manager**

**Name:** .....

**Signature:** .....

**Date:** .....

