



GLOBAL BENCHMARK TOOL USER MANUAL



GLOBAL
BENCHMARK TOOL

Confidence in certified seafood

VERSION 1, OCTOBER 2015

Confidence

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Introduction

The User Manual to the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool provides additional information beyond the Tool itself. It combines sections for different actors in the Benchmark Process, to facilitate interaction between actors based on common background.

Roles and responsibilities of the Scheme Owners, Independent Experts, Benchmark Committee Members and the GSSI Steering Board are outlined.

The chapter about the GSSI Benchmark Agreement includes a fee structure to show how costs for the Benchmark are distributed between the applicant Scheme Owner and GSSI.

GSSI is committed to promote improvement in seafood certification and labelling schemes. As such, GSSI will review the Global Benchmark Tool's *GSSI Components* on a regular basis every 3 years.

With special respect to GSSI being a benchmarking initiative not involved in certification or accreditation, the wording throughout the GSSI documents is chosen to differentiate.

The GSSI Benchmark Process has been designed to be independent, impartial and transparent. The outcome of this Process shall provide recognition to credible Seafood Certification Schemes and show where differences exist.

Reading this document prior to the GSSI Benchmark will help to clarify and to promote common understanding of this initiative. For further questions please contact the GSSI Secretariat at Secretariat@ourgssi.org.

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1. GSSI Headlines

GSSI vision: more sustainable seafood for everyone

GSSI mission: ensure confidence in the supply and promotion of certified seafood as well as to promote improvement in the seafood certification schemes.

GSSI does:

- drive change towards sustainability through a multi-stakeholder process
- deliver recognition of seafood certification schemes aligned with the FAO Guidelines
- increase comparability and transparency in seafood certification
- enable informed choice for procurement of certified seafood

GSSI does not:

- undertake any accreditation or certification
- develop or own any standards
- rank certification schemes
- define sustainable or responsible seafood
- permit any consumer facing labelling about its recognition
- make policy for any business or scheme

GSSI Objectives:

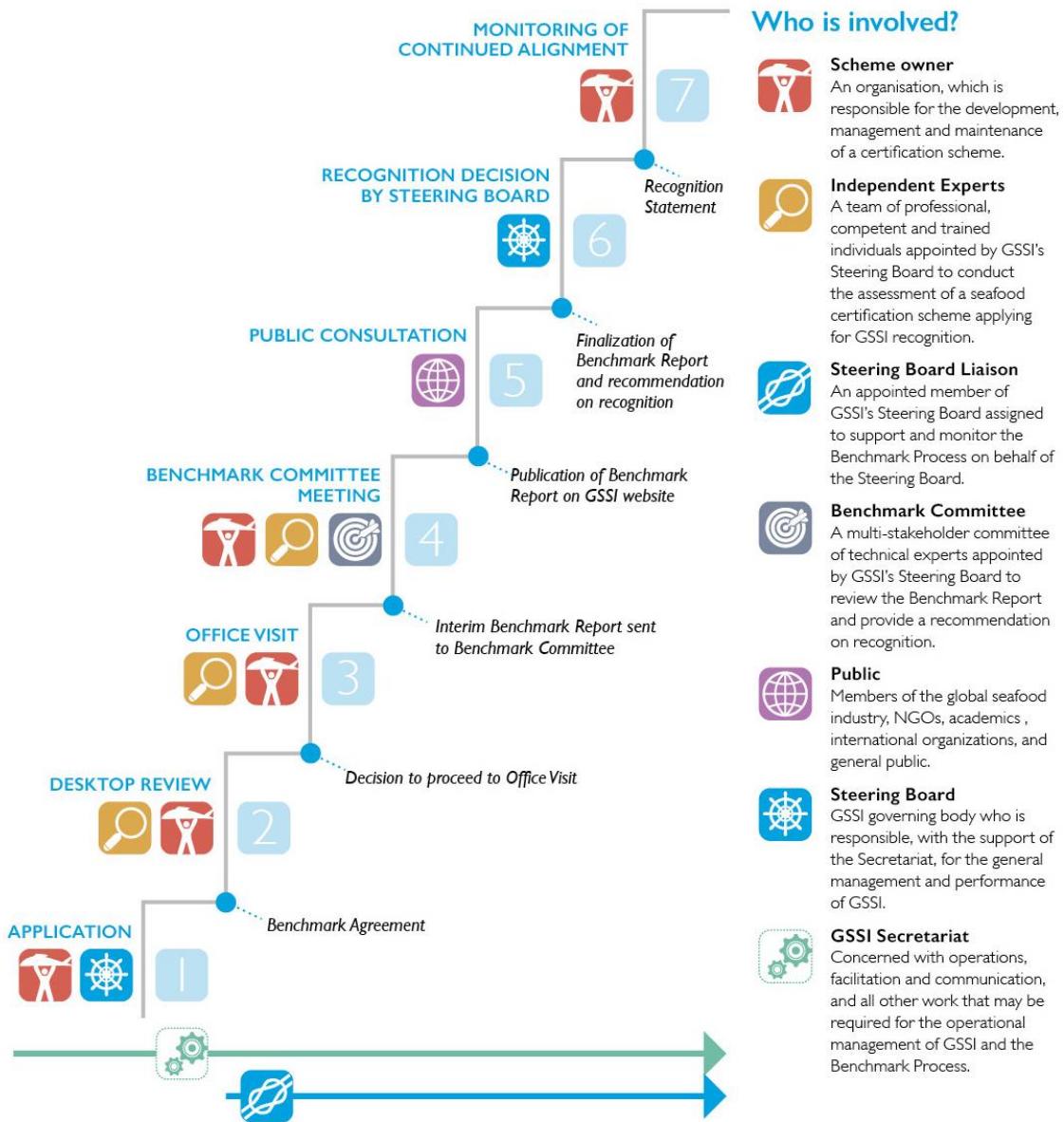
- a. To provide an international multi-stakeholder platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange in seafood sustainability.
- b. To develop an internationally agreed set of requirements and indicators to measure and compare the performance of seafood certification schemes, in order to facilitate their implementation and use.
- c. To build, operate and maintain a common, consistent and Global Benchmark Tool for seafood certification schemes.
- d. To reduce cost by eliminating redundancy and improving operational efficiency of seafood certification schemes thereby increasing affordability and flexibility within the supply chain.

2. GSSI Benchmark Process

Seafood certification schemes go through a 7-step Benchmark Process to be recognized by GSSI. The expert-led process involves objective assessments made against the Benchmark Framework. The process has been designed to be independent, impartial and transparent. The first 4 steps are confidential between the applying Scheme and GSSI.

2.1 Overview

From Application to Recognition: Key steps and responsibilities in the GSSI Benchmark Process



2.2 Description of the GSSI Benchmark Process

Step 1: Application

When a Seafood Certification Scheme takes the decision to apply for recognition by GSSI for a specific standard or a series of standards, it shall contact the GSSI Secretariat for guidance regarding the application process and to receive the latest version of the GSSI Application Form. The Secretariat will provide a detailed introduction and overview of the GSSI Benchmark Process and explain all relevant steps and procedures.

A Steering Board Liaison is appointed by GSSI as contact point to the Steering Board to monitor and support throughout the Benchmark Process. For each application Independent Experts and Benchmark Committee members are appointed by the GSSI Steering Board and approved by the Scheme Owner. The Scheme Owner has the right to address objections to any appointments made to the GSSI Steering Board, provided that a conflict of interest is given. Objections shall be submitted within one week after being informed about the assignment.

Between the Scheme Owner and GSSI a Benchmark Agreement (Section 7) is signed to formalize the relationship.

After the Scheme has submitted the application and supporting documents the GSSI Secretariat will review the application for completeness before it is sent to Independent Experts for the Desktop Review

Step 2: Desktop Review

This step helps to assess the Scheme Owner's capability to proceed and successfully complete the Benchmark Process within the expected timeframe of 6 months. A team of two Independent Experts (IE) conducts a detailed Desktop Review of the submitted application. The "Process IE" reviews Section A and B requirements and the "Technical IE" reviews Section C or D. The application form is used as report format for the exchange between IE and Scheme Owner when further clarification is sought. During this phase phone and conference calls, as well as e-mail exchange, is used for clarification of the points arising from the application.

On completion of the Desktop Review, an executive summary of identified issues is drafted and attached to the Desktop Review Report. The Desktop Review Report is then forwarded to the Secretariat and the consolidated report is presented to the GSSI Steering Board Liaison and the Scheme Owner. The Secretariat arranges a conference call between IE, Steering Board Liaison and the Scheme Owner to discuss any issues identified within the Desktop Review Report. Following this call the IE make a recommendation to progress to the Office Visit or to request the Scheme Owner to resubmit a revised application.

If the recommendation is to progress to an Office Visit, the IE will review needs and benefits of a joint office visit by both IE against an office visit by the Process IE only. The decision for the need of a joint Office Visit is made in order to find the most efficient approach for further clarification of outstanding issues, based upon factors such as the number and complexity of pending issues and the confidence of the Process IE to evaluate consistency of technical issues related to audit reports, auditor training and other related matters.

Based on the Desktop Report the IE team can recommend proceeding to the Office Visit, request the Scheme Owner to improve their application, or recommend to discontinue the Benchmark Process. The decision how to proceed is made with the agreement of the Scheme Owner. If no agreement can be reached the matter is referred to the SBL for resolution by the GSSI Steering Board.

Step 3: Office Visit

The Independent Expert(s) carry out an Office Visit with special emphasis on issues which could not be easily clarified during the desktop review (see Annex: Agenda of the Office visit). During the Office Visit evidence is gathered and reviewed to assess a Scheme's alignment with *GSSI Components*.

The Independent Expert(s) comment on all areas where the scheme does and does not align with *GSSI Components*. In consultation with the Independent Expert(s) the Scheme Owner agrees upon any corrective actions to come into alignment. Corrective actions have to have a defined timeframe for implementation and require follow up evaluation prior to recognition.

The IE issue an Interim Benchmark Report on the outcome of the Benchmark Process after the office visit and the details regarding any corrective actions. This Report is in Excel Format. The Report shall include an executive summary addressing all identified recognition issues and include a statement about the likelihood of the scheme to gain recognition within a defined timeframe. Each Independent Expert will issue one report which is agreed with the Scheme Owner and circulate it to the GSSI Secretariat for consolidation. The Secretariat will circulate the consolidated version to the GSSI Steering Board Liaison, the Scheme Owner and the Independent Experts.

The Scheme Owner is given 2 weeks to review the Interim Benchmark Report and to comment prior to the Benchmark Committee meeting. In the event that agreement cannot be reached between the IE team and the Scheme Owner, the matter is referred to the GSSI Steering Board Liaison for resolution by the Steering Board.

The Secretariat will initiate the Benchmark Committee Meeting by circulating the agreed Interim Benchmark Report to the Benchmark Committee members.

Step 4: Benchmark Committee Meeting

The Benchmark Committee acts as 'Quality Assurance' of the process and reviews the work undertaken by the IEs within the Desk Top Review and Office Audit. The Benchmark Committee members shall raise any issues, which they have concerns with during the BC meeting.

The GSSI Benchmark Committee includes

- The GSSI Steering Board Liaison (Chair of the Committee)
- Independent Expert* for Scheme Governance and Operational Management
- Independent Expert* for Fisheries and/or Aquaculture
- 2-5 voluntary Experts across the Sector

*Note: These Independent Experts shall be different from those conducting the Benchmark

The IEs present the Interim Benchmark Report to the Benchmark Committee members. The Benchmark Committee Meeting is held as an online meeting and will include an agenda item for the Scheme Owner to respond to the Interim Benchmark Report (see Annex: Agenda for Benchmark Committee Meeting).

The outcome of the Benchmark Committee meeting shall be a Benchmark Report that includes a recommendation for recognition or non-recognition. The decision shall be based on consensus between Benchmark Committee members. In the event that the recommendation is non-recognition the Benchmark Committee shall decide upon any further actions with advice and guidance from the Steering Board Liaison. If no consensus can be reached the matter is forwarded to the GSSI Steering Board.

Recommendation for recognition is mandatory to proceed to the next step of public consultation.

Step 5: Public Consultation

If recognition is recommended by the Benchmark Committee, the Scheme Owner has to accept the Benchmark Report and its public consultation for a period of 4 weeks. All comments submitted during this period are given careful consideration by the Benchmark Committee and they will confirm their final recommendation for recognition. In the event that the Benchmark Committee has to change their decision upon recognition after the public consultation, the Benchmark Committee shall decide upon any further actions with advice and guidance from the Steering Board Liaison.

Step 6: Recognition by the GSSI Steering Board

The GSSI Steering Board is briefed by the Steering Board Liaison about the Benchmark Report, executive summary and the recommendation for recognition by the Benchmark Committee. The Board reviews the Benchmark Report to ensure due process has been followed and accepts or rejects the recommendation of the Benchmark Committee.

In the event of non-recognition, the GSSI Steering Board will provide the Scheme Owner with reasons for the decision and outlines further action for the Scheme Owner. In the event of non-recognition the GSSI SB will provide the Liaison, BC, Secretariat and Scheme Owner with reasons for this decision and outline further actions for correction.

Upon a positive decision for recognition by the Board a GSSI Recognition Statement, the Benchmark Report, and the public comments will be published on the GSSI Homepage. An executive summary describing the scope and characteristics of the benchmarked scheme should be included. Only the *GSSI Supplementary Components* that a scheme has implemented should be included in the overview graphics of the different sections providing a unique graphical “fingerprint” for each GSSI recognized scheme to allow comparability between schemes (Annex: Benchmark Tool Report Mock-up).

Step 7: Monitoring of Continued Alignment

The GSSI issues recognition for a specific standard for a time period of 3 years. Within this time period recognized Scheme Owners perform an annual self-assessment and inform the GSSI Secretariat about significant changes in the Scheme Ownership, scheme management or the standard. Reported changes can initiate a reassessment prior to the normal 3-year cycle.

If a Scheme Owner is recognized for a specific standard by GSSI but wants to add further standards to its scope a reassessment of Section A and B of the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool is not necessary within the above mentioned 3 years, if Governance and Scheme Management are identical for the additional standard. The scope of the existing GSSI Recognition can be extended by benchmarking the additional standard against section C or D only.

GSSI will update its Global Benchmark Tool on a 3 year interval and an appropriate transition period of generally 12 months will allow implementation of changes.

2.3 Roles and Responsibilities during the GSSI Benchmark Process

Step	Scheme Owner	Secretariat	Steering Board	Independent Experts Process and Technical	Steering Board Liaison	Benchmark Committee	Public
Application	Decision to apply						
		Inform about Benchmark Process and Application					
	Complete application with detailed references	Recommend IEs to the SB. Recommend BC Members to the SB Ask SB for nomination of the SB Liaison	Appoint IEs, SB Liaison and BC Members	Accept appointment	Accept appointment and block time	Accept appointment and block time	
	Accept appointed IEs and BC Members.	Communicate appointments to the Scheme Owner					
	Sign Benchmark Agreement	issue Benchmark Agreement	Sign Benchmark Agreement				
	Pay 5.000 € advance payment						
		Check Application for completeness					
Desktop Review		Issue IE contracts to the appointed IEs	sign IE contract	sign IE contract with GSSI			
		Forward complete application to the IEs		Do the Desktop Review Agree with Scheme Owner on Desktop Report incl. executive Summary, Recommendation to/not to proceed to a joint/single Office Visit Submit Desktop Report to the GSSI Secretariat			
	Review Desktop Report	Consolidate Desktop Reports of the IE			Review Desktop Report		
	Approve decision by the SB Liaison	Facilitate conference call between Scheme Owner, SB Liaison and IEs		Present Desktop Report and recommendation regarding the office visit	Approve recommendation by the IEs regarding the office visit		

Step	Scheme Owner	Secretariat	Steering Board	Independent Experts Process and Technical	Steering Board Liaison	Benchmark Committee	Public
Office Visit	Accept offer for additional costs of the Benchmark Process	Prepare offer for additional costs beyond the 5.000 € advance payment					
	Suggest dates for the office visit	Communicate dates for the office visit.		Approve dates for office visit			
	Dedicate resources for the office visit			In general the Process IE will do the Office Visit. Agree with SO on interim Benchmark Report incl. executive summary, corrective actions (if required), recommendation to proceed to the BC Meeting and recommendation regarding recognition. Submit interim Benchmark Reports to the GSSI Secretariat.			
	Review consolidated Interim Benchmark Report and agree to proceed	Consolidate interim Benchmark Reports and distribute to IE, SO and SBL		Review interim Benchmark Report	Review consolidated interim Benchmark Report and approve recommendation of the IE		
	Benchmark Committee	Issue BC-member contract	sign BC-member contract			Sign BC-member contract	

Step	Scheme Owner	Secretariat	Steering Board	Independent Experts Process and Technical	Steering Board Liaison	Benchmark Committee	Public
Meeting	Present the Scheme in the BC Meeting	Organize BC Meeting		Present the Interim Benchmark Report and recommendations	Chair the Benchmark Committee Meeting	Challenge the Report, clarify overarching questions... Agree on recommendation regarding recognition	
	Agree to proceed to public consultation			In case of BC recommending non-recognition advice and guidance upon any further actions	In case of BC recommending non-recognition advice and guidance upon any further actions	In case recommendation for recognition is not given the BC decides upon any further actions In case recommendation for recognition is given the benchmark proceeds for public consultation	
Public consultation		Facilitate public consultation by announcing and publishing the Benchmark Report and the recommendation for recognition					Review published information and send comments to the GSSI Secretariat
	Review and reply to public comments	Consolidate public comments and submit to Scheme Owner, BC and IE		Review and reply to public comments In case recommendation for recognition is not given based on the public comments the IE will provide advice and guidance upon further actions	Review public comments and BC recommendation for recognition In case recommendation for recognition is not given based on the public comments the SBL will provide advice and guidance upon further actions	Consider public comments, the reply from the Scheme Owner and the IE for recommendation to the SB. In case recommendation for recognition is not given based on the public comments the BC decides upon any further actions	

Step	Scheme Owner	Secretariat	Steering Board	Independent Experts Process and Technical	Steering Board Liaison	Benchmark Committee	Public
Recognition decision by Steering Board		Put recognition decision on SB agenda; send Benchmark Report and corresponding information to the SB. Organize and facilitate SB Meeting	Participate in the SB meeting. Review Information prior to the SB Meeting and prepare questions regarding the overall process. Approve overall process has been followed. Approve BC recommendation for recognition of the Scheme		Present Report, the overall process and the BC-recommendation to the SB		
		Issue recognition statement Publish GSSI Recognition Statement, the benchmark report incl. implemented <i>GSSI Supplementary Components</i>					
Monitoring of continued alignment	Do a yearly self-assessment and supply information about changes to the standard to the GSSI Secretariat	Confirm reception of self-assessments summary and present to the Board Initiate regular reassessment every 3 years	Review the self-assessment and decide if reassessment is necessary based on substantial changes	Consult the Secretariat and the SB in the decision making about a reassessment			

2.4 Display of Benchmark Results

Once a seafood certification scheme has gone through the Benchmark Process and is found in alignment with all *GSSI Essential Components* it will be publically recognized by GSSI. GSSI will then publish a statement and a Benchmark Report on www.ourgssi.org. (See Annex: Benchmark Tool Report Mock-up.)

The Benchmark Report will cover:

- the scope of the GSSI Benchmark
- the timeline of the GSSI Benchmark Process
- who was involved
- summary of the scheme (including scope)
- Evidence of alignment of the Scheme with the *GSSI Components*

3. GSSI Benchmark Application Guidelines

3.1 Introduction

To be considered for recognition, schemes shall complete a Benchmark Application Form (see Annex: GSSI Application Form), which is available on request from the GSSI Secretariat. It is advisable that prior to completion of the Application Form the applicant scheme fully understands the *GSSI Components* which separate into *GSSI Essential Components* and *GSSI Supplementary Components*.

GSSI Essential components are grounded in the CCRF and the FAO Guidelines, which a seafood certification scheme needs to meet to be recognized by GSSI.

GSSI Supplementary Components show a seafood certification scheme's diverse approach and help stakeholders understand where differences exist. They are defined by the GSSI Expert Working Groups and grounded in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related FAO documents, ISO normative standards and ISEAL codes, and outline the status of existing practices in seafood certification and can be built on going forward. Each *GSSI Supplementary Component* has a rationale to explain the value that alignment with it offers both schemes and stakeholders. Alignment with *GSSI Supplementary Components* is not required for GSSI recognition.

The guidance given in the application form helps to explain the intention of the *GSSI Component* and provides examples of evidence.

During the process of completing the application form it is advisable to establish a dossier of key supporting documentation, which can be used as objective evidence enabling the Independent Experts to assess alignment with the *GSSI Components*.

On completion of the Application Form, this will be submitted to the GSSI Secretariat in electronic format.

On receipt of the Application Form, the GSSI Secretariat will conduct a short review of the Application Form's content and confirm acceptance of the application. This confirmation will be provided within 1 week of the receipt of the scheme application, and if accepted, the Scheme Owner will be provided with a Benchmark Agreement for signature.

3.2 Scheme Application Guidelines

3.2.1 General

These requirements apply to all scheme applications.

- Applications will only be accepted by GSSI for benchmark, if submitted on the pro forma GSSI Benchmark Application Form in electronic format.
- The application will consist of two documents; the completed GSSI Benchmark Application Form and a dossier of key supporting documentation. The GSSI Benchmark Application Form should be sent to the GSSI Secretariat at the time of application. The dossier of key supporting documentation can either be included if available in electronic form or be retained at the Scheme Owner’s registered office in case of hardcopies.
- The Benchmark Application Form should be completed in full, be legible, and in English.
- Within the Benchmark Application Form, where reference are made to key supporting documentation in the dossier, a short summary should be submitted (columns headed “Scheme Information (Summary)” and “Supporting Documentation Reference”) together with the page number and paragraph of the relevant reference. The key supporting documents within the dossier shall be clear, objective evidence of alignment with *GSSI Components*.
- The Benchmark Application Form has a number of worksheets, which relate to categorization of the *GSSI Components*. Chapter 3.4 of this Section provides details regarding the completion of the Benchmark Application Form, and in all cases the columns are headed with the party that is expected to complete the named sections.
- The Benchmark Application Form will be a working document that will be referenced on each occasion an assessment is made; it is used by both GSSI and the Scheme Owner. The document will record outcomes and provide guidance on any further information that is required to be submitted by the Scheme Owner.
- If, during the course of completion of the Application Form, the Scheme Owner identifies obvious areas of non-alignment with *GSSI Essential Components*, it is strongly recommended these be addressed prior to submission of the scheme for benchmarking.
- The Benchmark Application Form should be completed in full, prior to submission to the GSSI Secretariat as any omissions could lead to return of the document and a requirement for re-submission. Every Scheme Owner should complete the workbooks entitled General Information, Scheme Summary, A-Governance and B-Operational Management. In addition to these workbooks the Scheme Owner should complete either the workbook entitled C-Aquaculture and or D-Fisheries, dependent upon the scope of recognition applied for.
- The Scheme Owner Agreement must be signed by an authorized person of appropriate seniority within the applicant Scheme Owner’s management.
- The Scheme Owner should appoint a person authorized by the scheme management to liaise directly with GSSI during the Benchmark Process. The person’s name and details must be incorporated on the Benchmark Application Form (General Information).

- The Scheme Owner is responsible for ensuring that the information provided with the Benchmark Application Form is not in breach of express confidentiality obligations owed to third parties and is not otherwise restricted by applicable laws.
- The completed GSSI Benchmark Application Form should be sent to the following e-mail address: secretariat@ourgssi.org

Enquiries relating to scheme applications or the GSSI Benchmark Process should be addressed to:
secretariat@ourgssi.org

3.3 Application Documentation

3.3.1 The GSSI Benchmark Application Form

The format of the GSSI Benchmark Application Form is a downloadable Excel spreadsheet with a number of worksheets. There is one GSSI Application Form, which will be used for all types of application, however dependent on the type of application; there are specific worksheets to complete.

Work Sheet	Name of Work Sheet
1	General Information
2	Scheme Summary
3	A-Governance
4	B-Operational Management
5	C-Aquaculture
6	D-Fisheries

3.3.2 The Application Dossier

The application dossier is a series of documents collated by the Scheme Owner to present to GSSI and it is recommended that this dossier be brought together at the same time as the GSSI Benchmark Application Form is being completed. The documents within the dossier will support the application and allow the Independent Expert and Benchmark Committee to assess alignment with *GSSI Essential Components*.

The dossier should be developed in a logical format in line with the GSSI Reference Number of GSSI Benchmark Application Form. The dossier shall be presented with clearly defined sections in accordance with the work sheets named within the GSSI Benchmark Application Form (Table 1). The dossier may be presented to the Independent Expert in hard copy or electronically; whatever the format, cross referencing to the clauses within the GSSI Benchmarking Application Form should be clear.

3.4 Completion of the GSSI Benchmark Application Form

3.4.1 Introduction

The completion of the GSSI Benchmark Application Form will be dependent upon the type of recognition sought, namely aquaculture or fisheries. Summary of the evidence to be put forward should be provided on the Benchmark Application Form and supplemented by a supporting information dossier. The following summarizes the information required to assist with the completion of the worksheets within the Benchmark Application Form.

3.4.2 General Information Worksheet

The Scheme Owner should provide information within this workbook to confirm the name of the scheme and the scope of recognition sought. The name of the scheme is the declaration placed on accredited certificates by Certification Bodies; this should include a standard edition number.

The name of the Scheme Owner liaison person should be included to ensure effective on going communication.

3.4.3 Scheme Summary Worksheet

The Scheme Owner should provide a short summary of the history and objectives of the scheme including information regarding the date of commencement of operation, markets, rationale for development, mission and general objectives. This summary should typically be 150 words.

There is also a requirement to provide information on statistics on the use of the scheme, which will give the GSSI an overview of the size and diversity of the scheme.

3.4.4 Description of Columns Sections A to D general

A description of the different columns, which repeat in each of the sections, is given below. The Scheme Owner should complete the columns marked as those requiring completion by the applicant within the column header.

GSSI Reference Number

Each *GSSI Component* has a unique identifier, the GSSI Reference Number.

Performance Area

Under each Section (A-D), there are a number of Performance Areas to group the *GSSI Components*.

Topic

Except the Aquaculture Performance Areas, all other sections are drilled down further into Topics, presenting subtitles of the Performance Areas to enable easier navigating in the tool.

Element

The Topics are broken down into a range of Elements of which each includes one or several *GSSI Components*. This structure allows identifying specific *GSSI Components* by narrowing down the content of the Framework using the filter function of Excel.

Status

The Status column has two criteria; *GSSI Essential Component* or *GSSI Supplementary Component*. *GSSI Supplementary Component* status criteria are color coded to differentiate from those defined as *GSSI Essential Component*.

Seafood certification schemes that undergo the Benchmark Process and are found to be in compliance with all of the *GSSI Essential Components* will be formally recognized by GSSI. The *GSSI Essential Components* are grounded in the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and ‘FAO Guidelines’.

The benchmarking process will also verify and communicate if recognized seafood certification schemes have implemented *GSSI Supplementary Components*. The *GSSI Supplementary Components* show a seafood certification scheme’s diverse approach and help stakeholders understand where differences exist. They are defined by the GSSI Expert Working Groups and grounded in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related FAO documents, ISO normative standards and ISEAL codes, and outline the status of existing practices in seafood certification and can be built on going forward. Each *GSSI Supplementary Component* has a rationale to explain the value that alignment with it offers both schemes and stakeholders. Alignment with *GSSI Supplementary Components* is not required for GSSI recognition.

GSSI is committed to provide its users with an accurate evaluation of an applicant scheme so it is important that status information of both types of *GSSI Components* be submitted by the applicant.

GSSI Component

The information specified in this column is the actual *GSSI Essential Component* or *GSSI Supplementary Component* as defined by the GSSI Expert Working Groups in the framework of the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool.

Guidance Column

This information has been provided by GSSI to assist applicant schemes to better understand the *GSSI Component* and its intention. This column is designed to support identifying and supplying objective evidence within the Supporting Documentation Column and to collate the key supporting documentation dossier.

It is important to understand that the provided information is not exhaustive and represents examples. If there are other supporting documents, such as minutes of meetings, that clearly define and are supportive as objective evidence, this should not be overlooked and should be included within the dossier.

Scheme Information (Summary) TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT

This information should be completed by the applicant and should be a brief summary of how the scheme meets the respective *GSSI Component* outlined in the *GSSI Component* Column.

Supporting Documentation Reference TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT

This column should be completed by the applicant to provide detailed reference to the information supplied in the adjoining Scheme Information (Summary) Column. The named reference(s) of the documents that will be in the supporting document dossier should be indicated with corresponding page and paragraph numbers.

Comment TO BE COMPLETED BY GSSI SECRETARIAT

This column is used by the GSSI Secretariat to note comments during the review for completeness of the application, in case information is missing or clarification is needed.

Desk Top Review Comment TO BE COMPLETED BY INDEPENDENT EXPERT

This column is used by the Independent Expert of the respective section for comments based on the Desktop Review. This includes a statement about the status of alignment with the corresponding rationale, or if required further questions for clarification, e.g. if additional documents are required. The IE will also mention here if a closer look at a specific *GSSI Component* is required during the office visit. This column shall be used to document the communication and information exchange between Scheme Owner and IE to achieve consensus about the judgement based on objective evidence.

Scheme Comment TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT

This column is used by the scheme to reply to the IEs questions and comments in the Desktop Review Comment Column. This column shall be used to document the communication and information exchange with the Scheme Owner to achieve consensus on the judgement of the IE based on objective evidence.

Conclusion TO BE COMPLETED BY INDEPENDENT EXPERT

This column has possible criteria:

In alignment: if the IE approves implementation of the respective *GSSI Component*

Not in alignment: if the IE does not approve implementation of the respective *GSSI Component*

Not applicable: If the IE approves the respective *GSSI Component* is not applicable

To regulate the use of the non-Applicable-option the following rules apply:

Sections A and B shall generally not allow any 'non-applicable' on the *GSSI Essential Components* level unless explicitly stated in the *GSSI Essential Component*. For sections C and D, the scope of the Scheme is an integral part for the judgement. A scheme needs to justify why certain *GSSI Essential Components* are not applicable, e.g. if the scope of a regional Fishery Scheme excludes deep sea or enhanced fishery. Precondition for the non-applicable option is an active exclusion from the scope. Not regulating a specific topic, which is not actively excluded from the scope of the scheme, does not result in the judgement of being not-applicable.

3.4.5 How to use the columns:

Application (APPLICANT)		Check for completeness	Desktop Review (IE and APPLICANT)			Office Visit if agreed (IE and APPLICANT)		
Scheme Information (Summary) TO BE COMPLETED BY APPLICANT	Supporting Documentation Reference TO BE COMPLETED BY APPLICANT	Comment TO BE COMPLETED BY SECRETARIAT	Desktop Review, TO BE COMPLETED BY IE	Scheme Comment TO BE COMPLETED BY APPLICANT	Conclusion TO BE COMPLETED BY IE	Office Audit Comment TO BE COMPLETED BY IE	Scheme Comment TO BE COMPLETED BY APPLICANT	Conclusion TO BE COMPLETED BY IE
This information is completed by the applicant and should be a brief summary of how the scheme meets the respective GSSI Component F (GSSI Component). Column. The named reference(s) of the documents that will be in the supporting document dossier should be indicated with corresponding page and paragraph numbers.	This column is used by the applicant to provide detailed reference to the information supplied in the adjoining Scheme Information (Summary) Column. The named reference(s) of the documents that will be in the supporting document dossier should be indicated with corresponding page and paragraph numbers.	This column is used by the GSSI Secretariat to note comments during the review for completeness of the application, in case information is missing or clarification is needed.	This column is used by the Independent Expert to comment based on the Desktop Review. The comments include the corresponding rationale for the conclusion. If required, requests for further clarification are included here. The IE will also mention here if additional evidence needs to be reviewed during the office visit. For multiple exchanges please add a corresponding date to allow follow up of the discussion between IE and applicant.	This column is used by the applicant to reply to the IE comments made during the desk top review. This column is expected to contain additional information for the Independent Expert beyond the supplied Scheme Information in Column H. Corrective actions the applicant is going to implement are noted in this column including a defined timeframe and evidence for implementation, which is going to be supplied to the IE. For multiple exchanges please add a corresponding date to allow follow up of the discussion.	This column is used to filter the excel sheet. The IE can enter only four options: - In Alignment - Not in Alignment - Not Applicable - Corrective Action (as intermediate)	This column is used by the Independent Expert to comment based on the office visit. The comments include the corresponding rationale for the conclusion. For multiple exchanges please add a corresponding date.	Please complete this column with the scheme during the office visit, in case you "agree to disagree". Corrective actions the applicant is going to implement are noted in this column including a defined timeframe and evidence for implementation, which is going to be supplied to the IE. For multiple exchanges please add a corresponding date.	This column is used to filter the excel sheet. The IE can enter only four options: - In Alignment - Not in Alignment - Not Applicable - Corrective Action (as intermediate)

3.4.6 Description of Columns Sections A to D specific to each section

A-Governance Worksheet

Performance areas of Section A:

- Scheme Governance
- Scheme Management
- Standard Setting and Maintenance

Examples for objective evidence of Section A

Listed below are examples of documents which would be expected to be part of the key supporting documentation dossier. It is important to understand the information is not definitive and are examples. If there are other supporting documents, such as minutes of meetings, that clearly define and are supportive as objective evidence, this should not be overlooked and should be included within the dossier.

- The constitution/charter/ statute/ instruments of government
- Governance policy
- Policies-
- Objectives/KPI's
- Organizational structure with specific responsibilities
- Key personnel qualification and experience
- Personnel roles and job descriptions
- Operating procedures
- Internal review
- Reviews of the scheme operation, and corrective action procedure to address non-conformities
- Where applicable, delegation of operational management to a competent authority
- Conformity assessment program
- Complaints procedure, including requirements for complaint investigation, complaint and corrective action management documentation
- Complaints and corrective action
- Evidence of liability coverage for its activities
- Schemes Board structure i.e. named individuals on Boards, committees and in management roles
- Normative documents - controls for the translation and publication of normative documents
- Monitoring and evaluation procedures
- Logo /Copyright procedures
- Appeals procedure
- Standard setting procedure
- Standard maintenance procedure
- Standard review procedure

B-Operational Management Worksheet

Performance areas of Section B:

- Accreditation
- Certification
- Chain of Custody

Examples for objective evidence of Section B

Listed below are examples of documents which would be expected to be part of the key supporting documentation dossier. It is important to understand the information is not definitive and are examples. If there are other supporting documents, such as minutes of meetings, that clearly define and are supportive as objective evidence, this should not be overlooked and should be included within the dossier.

- Arrangements/ contract with Accreditation Bodies
- Accreditation Bodies ISO 17011 status
- Scheme Accreditation Body procedures
- Certification Body contract /agreement
- Scheme certification requirements
- Development timelines and achievement thereof
- Audit report format
- Online audit report compliance
- Auditor competence requirements
- Auditor training assurance
- Auditor assessment procedures
- Chain of custody standard/ procedures
- Chain of custody report
- Where applicable, multisite arrangements

C-Aquaculture Worksheet

Performance areas of Section C:

- Aquatic Animal Health Management
- Chemical and Veterinary Drug Use
- Environmentally Responsible Infrastructure Construction , waste disposal and general storage
- Feed and Fertilizer Use
- Impacts on Habitat and Biodiversity
- Seed
- Species Selection and Escapes

- Water Quality and Waste

Examples for objective evidence of Section C

Listed below are examples of documents which would be expected to be part of the key supporting documentation dossier. It is important to understand the information is not definitive and are examples. If there are other supporting documents, such as minutes of meetings, that clearly define and are supportive as objective evidence, this should not be overlooked and should be included within the dossier.

- Scheme Standard
- Scheme Guidance
- Scheme Audit reports

D-F Worksheet

Performance areas of Section D:

- Governance and Fishery Management
- Management Objectives
- Management Approaches, Strategies and Plans
- Data and Information
- Assessment Methodologies
- Stock and Eco system Status and Outcomes

Examples for objective evidence of Section D

Listed below are examples of documents which would be expected to be part of the key supporting documentation dossier. It is important to understand the information is not definitive and are examples. If there are other supporting documents, such as minutes of meetings, that clearly define and are supportive as objective evidence, this should not be overlooked and should be included within the dossier.

- Scheme Standard
- Scheme Guidance
- Scheme Audit reports

4. Competences of Independent Experts and Benchmark Committee Members

4.1 Qualifications

An Independent Expert and GSSI Benchmark Committee Member working for GSSI shall have attained, as a minimum, a university degree in a scientific discipline.

4.2 Experience

An Independent Expert shall have a minimum of 10 years and GSSI Benchmark Committee Member a minimum of 5 years full time experience in quality management/ aquaculture or fisheries or related marine sciences in areas such as

quality assurance or in a quality management function in production or manufacturing, retailing, inspection, auditing or enforcement.

4.3 Knowledge

An Independent Expert and GSSI Benchmark Committee Member shall have:

- detailed knowledge of audit principles, procedures and techniques in relation to quality management auditing,
- detailed knowledge of general business processes and understand the workings of organizations in relation to size, structure, function and relationships with specific reference to quality management,
- knowledge of key legislative requirements.

An Independent Expert and GSSI Benchmark Committee Member shall attend the formal GSSI Training for Independent Experts and GSSI Benchmark Committee Members in order to have:

- a detailed knowledge of the mission and objectives of GSSI,
- a detailed knowledge of the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool,
- a detailed knowledge of the GSSI benchmark process,
- a detailed knowledge of quality management systems, applicable procedures or other management systems and documents used as audit criteria,
- a detailed knowledge of accreditation and certification processes and procedures.

4.4 Skills

An Independent Expert and GSSI Benchmark Committee Member shall have:

- good organizational and time management skills,
- good people management skills,
- the ability to make correct decisions based on objective and verifiable evidence,
- the ability to understand and interpret verbal material,
- good, appropriate oral communication skills so that communications can be understood by the intended audience,
- The ability to effectively communicate between themselves and other people,
- the ability to understand and interpret written material with particular reference to system development and operational, and legislative requirements,
- good, appropriate written communication skills so that communications can be understood by the intended audience,
- the ability to produce clear and accurate reports of assessment findings and clearly articulate these in relation to GSSI Global Benchmark Tool requirements,
- the ability to effectively control and manage meetings during the assessment process,
- the ability to effectively and systematically assess situations and information to make informed decisions on objective and verifiable evidence,

- the ability to effectively plan, prioritize and adjust the activities of the benchmarking process, as far as possible without adversely affecting the outcome of assessment,
- the ability to provide direction and guidance to the Benchmark Committee members,
- the ability to prevent and resolve conflicts,
- the ability to lead the GSSI Benchmark Committee members to reach conclusions.

4.5 Personal Attributes

An Independent Expert and GSSI Benchmark Committee Member shall be:

- fair, truthful, unbiased, sincere, discreet, trustworthy and honest,
- able to demonstrate a high level of personal integrity,
- open-minded, reasonable and willing to consider alternative ideas or points of view,
- tactful in dealings with people, as appropriate to achieve the benchmarking objectives,
- instinctively aware of and able to understand situations,
- able to adjust readily to different situations and to effectively resolve conflict and arrive at consensus agreement where possible,
- persistent and focused in their approach to achieve objectives,
- able to reach timely conclusions based on logical reasoning and analysis and, in the case of possible conflict, be confident to manage and control discussions. The individual will assume the leadership role during problematical discussions and situations in order to resolve issues,
- able to act effectively and function independently,
- able to be professional and ethical and make decisions even though these actions and decisions may result in disagreement, confrontation or appeal proceedings,
- courteous, conscientious, discreet and business like in their approach,
- empathetic, respectful to others and able to engender trust,
- able to keep relevant information confidential in accordance with non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements,
- able to communicate confidently and with authority to secure agreement with Scheme Owner management,
- able to maintain strict independence from self-interest or personal bias,

Prior to entry into the Register of Independent Experts and GSSI Benchmark Committee Members, an Independent Expert and GSSI Benchmark Committee Member shall sign a Statement of Confidentiality and a Declaration of Interests and provide these to the GSSI Steering Board. In the event that personal circumstances mean that these statements are compromised, the Independent Expert and GSSI Benchmark Committee Member will inform the GSSI Secretariat, who will, in turn, take appropriate steps to ensure that the integrity of GSSI is not compromised.

The Register of Independent Experts and GSSI Benchmark Committee Members shall be published on the GSSI website (see Annex: GSSI declaration of Interest Form, GSSI Confidentiality Agreement).

5. Guidance for Independent Experts

This chapter will assist Independent Experts when undertaking assessment of the GSSI Components.

5.1 Supporting Documents

This manual should be read in conjunction with

- the GSSI Benchmark Process (Chapter 1 of this document)
- the GSSI Benchmark Application Completion Guidelines (Chapter 2)
- the GSSI Glossary of Terms as part of the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool

5.2 Principles of Assessment

The following principles should apply:

- 1) Within the GSSI Benchmark Framework and the GSSI Application Form completed by the applicant, the content of the Guidance Column is provided to:
 - detail the intention and scope of the GSSI Components and
 - assist the Applicant to provide relevant documentation
 - assists the Independent Experts in assessing the level of implementation of the GSSI Components during the Desk Top Review and the Office Visit
- 2) Within the GSSI Benchmark Application Completion Guidelines (Chapter 2), examples of documents which would be expected to be within a key supporting documentation dossier are listed for section A, B, C and D. This information has been provided by GSSI to assist applicant schemes to identify and supply objective evidence within the Supporting Documentation Column and to collate the key supporting documentation dossier.
- 3) It is important to realize that there will be significant amounts of information within the key supporting documentation dossier and that the type of information may vary. It is also important to understand the information is not definitive and are examples for the Scheme Owner. If there are other supporting documents, that clearly define and are supportive as objective evidence, this should not be overlooked and should be included within the dossier.
- 4) The GSSI Glossary of Terms is mandatory, to ensure common vocabulary and understanding.
- 5) The decision that evidence submitted by the applicant scheme for each GSSI Component is aligned or non-aligned rests with the Independent Experts and they should use their expertise and judgement to make this decision. This is particularly important at the Desk Top Review and the Office Audit where access to evidence should be freely available.
 - Missing evidence for a GSSI Components applicable to the scope of the scheme is not in alignment.
 - Where a scheme is in alignment at the standard setting level but allows systematic deviation at the implementation level of the farm/fishery, this is not in alignment.
 - In section C and D there are GSSI Components based on FAO language, using wording such as “suitable”, “feasible”, and “adequate”. As the assessment relates to the scheme and not the farm/fishery,

- the independent experts should use their knowledge and experience to judge the scheme derivation, definition and approach for what is suitable, feasible or adequate for the scope of their scheme.
- 6) When assessing alignment, the Independent Expert is obliged to probe and question the applicant scheme representative to establish there is, or is not, alignment. Given the fact that schemes vary operationally, there may be a number of means in achieving proof of alignment. As evidence provided within the Application Form may be inadequate or insufficient, further questioning and other evident sought to make a valued judgement is expected.
 - 7) **Not applicable:** If the IE approves the respective GSSI Component is not applicable
To regulate the use of the non-Applicable-option the following rules apply: Sections A and B shall generally not allow any 'non-applicable' on the *GSSI Essential Components* level unless explicitly stated in the *GSSI Essential Component*. For sections C and D, the scope of the Scheme is an integral part for the judgement. A scheme needs to justify why certain *GSSI Essential Components* are not applicable, e.g. if the scope of a regional Fishery Scheme excludes deep sea or enhanced fishery. Precondition for the non-applicable option is an active exclusion from the scope. Not regulating a specific topic, which is not actively excluded from the scope of the scheme, does not result in the judgement of being not-applicable.
 - 8) In all cases the Independent Expert shall provide a clear rational for his/her decision. This rational is not to be considered as consultancy to the scheme, but the Independent Expert should gain consensus and acceptance of non-alignment with the Scheme Owner.
 - 9) To address non-alignments the Independent Expert(s) and the Scheme Owner will agree upon any corrective actions to come into alignment. Corrective actions have to have a defined timeframe for implementation and require follow up evaluation prior to recognition. Implementation of corrective actions is a valid reason to extend the proposed timeframe by 6 month of up to 12 month maximum in order to complete the GSSI Benchmark Process.
 - 10) If there is any doubt, the Independent Expert will consult with other Independent Experts of the team and the GSSI Secretariat. Where conflict or disagreement cannot be resolved, the Steering Board Liaison will provide support and guidance.
 - 11) Understand the inter-personal skills and personal attributes expected of the Independent Experts and ensure these are exercised fully.
 - 12) It should also be appreciated that decision making is through consensus using the Benchmark Committee framework to challenge individual judgement of the Independent Expert.

New scheme versions can be used for the assessment, even if evidence supporting implementation cannot yet be available, due to the short period of application of the new version. However, it must be assured that the new version is finalized and approved and that first evidence of implementation will be available shortly (shortly: depending on the nature of the change and the normal frequency of implementation of this change).

6. Guidance for the GSSI Benchmark Committee

6.1 Composition of the GSSI Benchmark Committee

The composition of the GSSI Benchmark Committee is

- The GSSI Steering Board Liaison (Chair of the Committee)
- Independent Expert* for Scheme Governance and Operational Management
- Independent Expert* for Fisheries and/or Aquaculture
- 2-5 voluntary Experts across the Sector

*Note: These Independent Experts shall be different from those conducting the Benchmark

6.2 Role of the GSSI Benchmark Committee Member

The GSSI Benchmark Committee acts as the ‘Quality Assurance’ of the Benchmark Process and reviews the work undertaken by the IEs within the Desk Top Review and Office Audit. For the Benchmark Committee Meeting the Committee member will be well prepared and familiar with the argumentation exchanged between Scheme and IE, having carefully considered the rationales for judgements and the corrective actions and their status.

Main reference document is the Interim Report and its executive summary (see annex: executive summary). A detailed focus is on non-alignments and non-applicable criteria and the assessment of corrective actions.

The Committee members should gain a view on the robustness of the benchmarking process and raise any issues they may have during the Committee meetings. To develop such view all evaluated sections and their interaction shall be considered. Verbal interaction during the Committee Meeting with the responsible IEs and the Scheme Owner, as well as comments from the public consultation is taken into consideration.

6.4 Outcome of the GSSI Benchmark Committee Meeting

The outcome of the Benchmark Committee meeting shall be Benchmark Report that includes a recommendation for recognition or non-recognition based on consensus between Benchmark Committee members

Below some key questions are outlined as examples to facilitate the Benchmark Committee discussion beyond the focus on individual GSSI Components.

7. Benchmark Agreement

7.1 Benchmark Agreement

During the first step of the GSSI Benchmark Process (Application) between the Scheme Owner and GSSI a Benchmark Agreement is signed to formalize the relationship. This Benchmark Agreement covers confidentiality issues as well as financial issues related to the benchmark. Part of the agreement is a phased fee for the benchmark, which includes an advance payment of 5.000 € prior to cover the initial costs of the desktop review (see Annex: GSSI Benchmark Agreement).

7.2 Fee structure

The fee structure outlined below is based on cost recovery for the Benchmarking process. Administrative cost is currently covered by the GSSI. Approximations are based on an initial benchmark of a Seafood Certification Scheme. Reassessment and scope Extension is expected to require less working days of the Independent Experts.

Quality of the Application has an impact on the number of IE days required for benchmarking.

Fee	Euros (excl. VAT)
Application Fee	0.00 €
Annual Management Fee	0.00 €
Daily rate of an Independent Expert (IE)	800.00 €/day
Daily rate for Independent Expert Travel	400.00 €/day
Desk Top Review (approx. 6-7 IE-days)	5000 € advance payment according to detailed offer
Single Office Visit plus Travel	
Travel cost (variable)	Economy Flights For long distance flights an additional travel-rest-day is added Hotel at local rates, transport as required
Report preparation	0.00 €
Benchmark Committee (approx. 4 IE-days)	Approx. 3.000 €
Public Consultation	0.00 €
GSSI Recognition	0.00 €

7.3 Extension of Schemes scope

Multiple standards (e.g. Species specific standards in Aquaculture) require individual benchmarking against the corresponding Section of the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool. GSSI Recognition of the Scheme for Section A&B applies within the validity of the GSSI Recognition for all benchmarked standards, a reassessment of Section A&B is not necessary to extend the scope of the schemes GSSI Recognition.



www.ourgssi.org

secretariat@ourgssi.org

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