



GSSI

**BENCHMARK  
TOOL**

# GLOBAL BENCHMARK TOOL **GSSI Benchmark Procedures**

version 2.0, 2022

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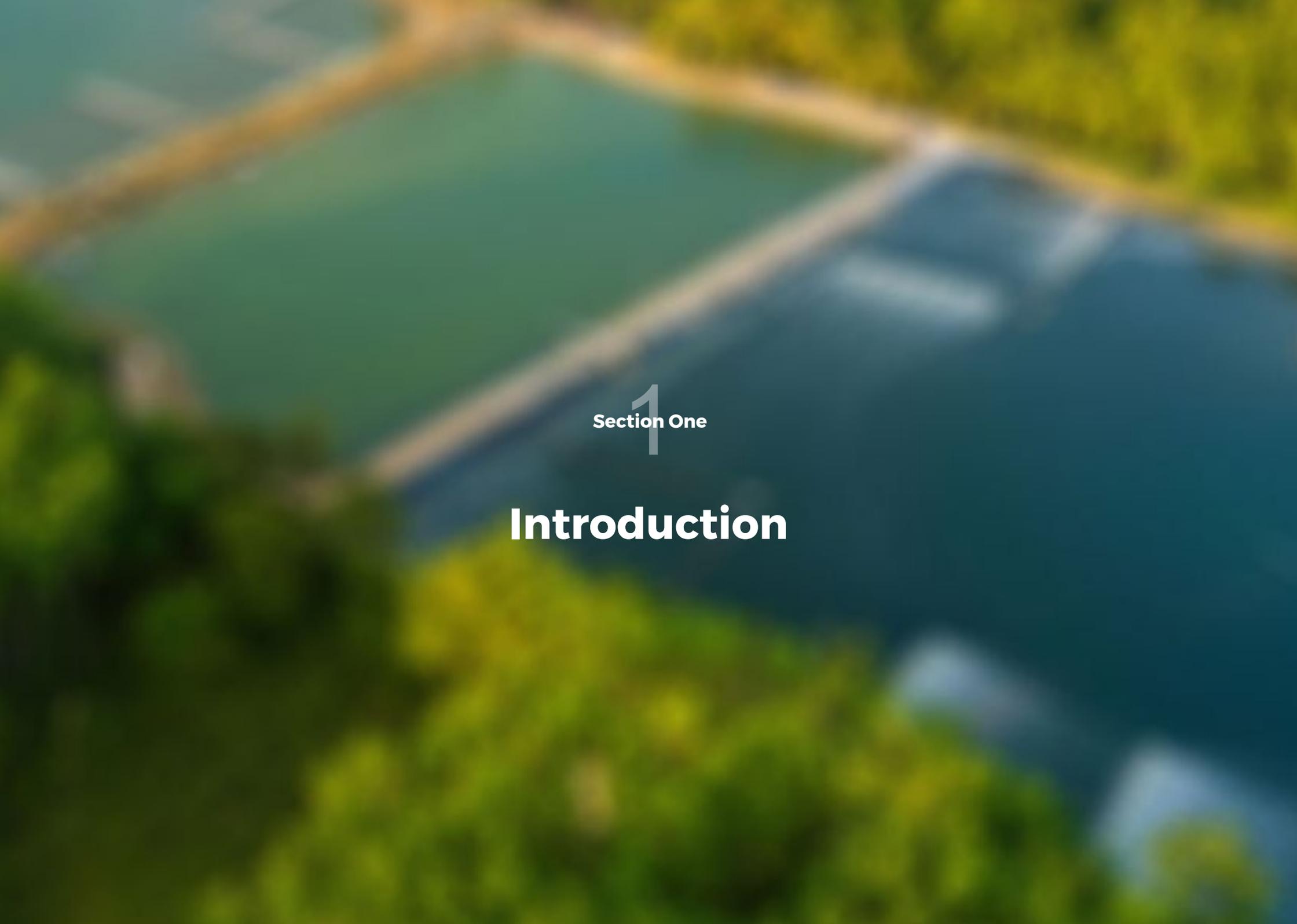
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The Benchmark Procedures document is an updated version of what was previously called the Benchmark Manual. This document serves as a reference document on the procedures followed for the Benchmark Process of the Global Benchmark Tool. These procedures are reviewed on an annual basis and GSSI reserves the right to change them when needed.

An aerial photograph of a large, rectangular swimming pool with a central island. The pool is surrounded by lush green trees and a paved walkway. The water is a deep blue color, and the island in the center is a lighter shade of blue. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

Section One

# Introduction

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Seafood is one of the highest traded food commodities in the world, providing 3.1 billion people with their primary source of protein. Sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture production systems is vitally important to feed the growing global population and safeguard the health of our oceans and planet. Certification has become one of the most prominent tools for providing assurance in sustainable seafood practices in both aquaculture production and wild capture fisheries. With many kinds of labels, claims, and logos in the market, it is important for producers, retailers, and consumers to understand which certifications programs they can trust. The Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI) created a unique solution for this – the Global Benchmark Tool. Underpinned by the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the FAO Guidelines for Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine/Inland Capture Fisheries, and the FAO Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification the Global Benchmark Tool offers a transparent and objective way for certification programs to demonstrate their credibility and robustness. It provides clarity and choice to producers

and markets around the world on which programs align with the relevant international codes and guidelines for seafood certification.

## 1.2 The Global Benchmark Tool

The GSSI Global Benchmark Tool was launched in 2015 with the objective of providing seafood certification schemes with formal recognition and thereby offering stakeholders in the seafood sector clarity on credible seafood certification schemes. In 2021, GSSI revised the Tool to ensure its alignment with the FAO Guidelines, resulting in Version 2.0.

In this document you will find a detailed outline of the content, requirements, and background of the Global Benchmark Tool Process.

### The Global Benchmark Tool consists of three parts:



The Framework consists of information that specifies what a scheme needs to be in alignment with, in order to be recognized by GSSI. The Framework consists of GSSI Essential Components, grounded in the CCRF and FAO Guidelines, that are compulsory for all applicant schemes, as well as GSSI Supplementary Components, which are voluntarily applied for and show a scheme's diverse approach to sustainable seafood.

### The Benchmark Process



The Process outlines the steps a scheme must go through before being recognized by GSSI, as well as the steps for maintaining that recognition.

### The Benchmark Result



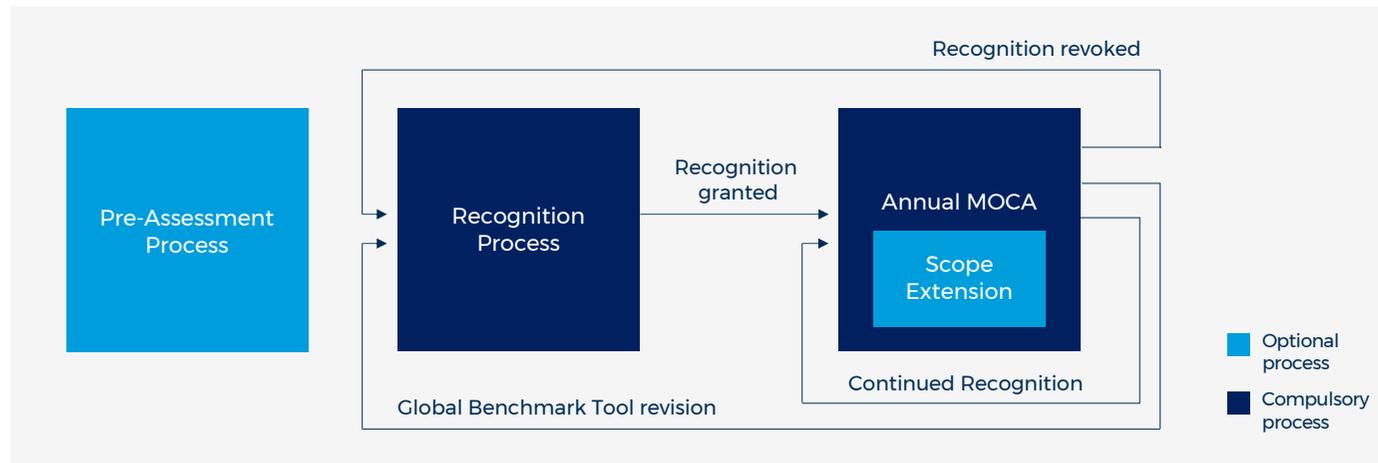
The Result is a statement of GSSI Recognition and a Benchmark Report, which is made publicly available on the GSSI website.



Section Two

# GSSI Benchmark Process

## 2. The GSSI Benchmark Process



### 2.1 GSSI Benchmark Process

Seafood certification schemes go through a voluntary, rigorous, six step Recognition Process once they apply to be benchmarked against the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool. Following these steps, and successfully completing them, leads to GSSI recognition. If a seafood certification scheme gains GSSI recognition by completing the Recognition Process, they are then required to undergo an annual Monitoring of Continued Alignment (MOCA). The annual MOCA ensures GSSI recognition remains current and evidence for alignment with the GSSI Benchmark Framework remains up to date – this is achieved by reviewing

annual documentation and additional audit reports. If a certification scheme's recognition is revoked during their MOCA, they must reapply for, and successfully complete, a Recognition Process to regain GSSI recognition.

When GSSI revises and publishes a new version of the Global Benchmark Tool, schemes are required to complete a new Recognition Process to maintain their recognition status.

#### ▪ Scope Extension

In conjunction with their annual MOCA, recognized certification schemes can request a Scope Extension. The Scope Extension Process allows certification schemes to submit additional standards

for benchmarking. If these are found to be in alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool Framework, they are added to the certification scheme's scope of recognition.

### 2.2 Eligibility Criteria

Certification programs must meet the following eligibility criteria to apply for recognition by GSSI:

1. The certification program is a third-party certification scheme which certifies either wild-capture fisheries or aquaculture facilities.
2. The certification program has a chain of custody standard in place.
3. The certification program has at least one certified entity under its fisheries

or aquaculture standard and can provide an initial audit and annual audit for this entity.

Certification programs are required to submit supporting evidence that they meet the above eligibility criteria together with their completed application.

### 2.3 Pre-Assessment

A Pre-Assessment is a separate type of process that falls outside of the Benchmark Process. The Pre-Assessment Process was designed by GSSI to promote improvement in non-recognized seafood certification schemes by providing insights into their alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool. The Pre-Assessment allows non-recognized seafood certification schemes to assess their alignment with the Benchmark Framework without having to commit to a full Benchmark Process. This provides them with valuable information they can use to make changes to their scheme or standard. A certification scheme can choose which parts of the Benchmark Framework they wish to be assessed against, ensuring time and cost-efficiency.

### 2.4 Benchmark Process Steps

The GSSI Benchmark Process follows six key steps. These six steps were designed to ensure that the GSSI Benchmark Process is independent, impartial and transparent. A different combination of these steps is followed for the Recognition, MOCA, Scope Extension and Pre-Assessment. These combinations are shown in the figure on the right.

	Application	Desktop Review	Office Visit	Benchmark Committee Review	Public Consultation	Recognition Decision
Recognition Process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
MOCA	✓	✓	!	✓	?	✓
Scope Extension	✓	✓	!	✓	✓	✓
Pre-Assessment	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗

- 1. Application:** Third party seafood certification schemes that are applying for GSSI recognition, or are due for their annual MOCA, complete an application form, provide evidence of (continued) alignment with the Benchmark Framework and complete a Benchmark Training Program.
- 2. Desktop Review:** Independent Experts review the application and evidence provided by the scheme. This review includes assessing the alignment of the scheme with the Benchmark Framework both on paper and in practice\*.
- 3. Office Visit:** The Independent Expert(s) visits the scheme's office to review further evidence of implementation and complete their assessment.
- 4. Benchmark Committee Review:** The GSSI Benchmark Committee reviews the work conducted by the Independent

Expert(s) and make a recommendation for recognition.

- 5. Public Consultation:** The results of the Independent Expert's review and the recommendation made by the Benchmark Committee are made publicly available for stakeholder input.
- 6. Recognition Decision:** The GSSI Steering Board makes the final decision for GSSI recognition of the scheme, based on the recommendation of the Benchmark Committee.

The activities followed in each of these steps are detailed in section 4 - GSSI Benchmark Operating Procedures.

\* During a Benchmark Process, the GSSI Independent Experts determine the alignment of

the scheme by reviewing not only relevant documentation, but also its implementation in practice. This means that Independent Experts will ensure that there is no consistent deviation from the scheme's policies and procedures. This also applies to the scheme's standard(s), where the Independent Experts ensure that the requirements and criteria of the standard(s) are met in practice by reviewing multiple audit reports of the scheme's certified fisheries and farms. If a lack of implementation or consistent deviation is found, then the scheme will be considered not in alignment.

 A Public Consultation is only held during a MOCA Process in exceptional circumstances. However, stakeholder input is vital for ensuring certification schemes remain credible and as such, public stakeholders can continuously provide comments or questions related to a certification scheme's recognition via the GSSI website.

 An Office Visit is not typically conducted a part of a MOCA Process. However, if the Independent Expert(s) indicate that an Office Visit is needed, one could take place if approved by the Benchmark Committee.

## 2.5 Benchmark Guidance Platform & Training Program

Seafood certification schemes that apply to be benchmarked against the Global Benchmark Tool must complete the Benchmark Training Program. This Training Program consists of two parts: (1) the completion of online modules using the GSSI Guidance Platform and (2) live training session(s) with GSSI. Completion of the Training Program is essential for ensuring the applicant certification scheme is sufficiently informed about what is required for completing the Benchmark Process. Furthermore, the Guidance Platform should be continuously referenced throughout the Benchmark Process to assist the certification scheme in completing the process.

## 2.6 Decision-making

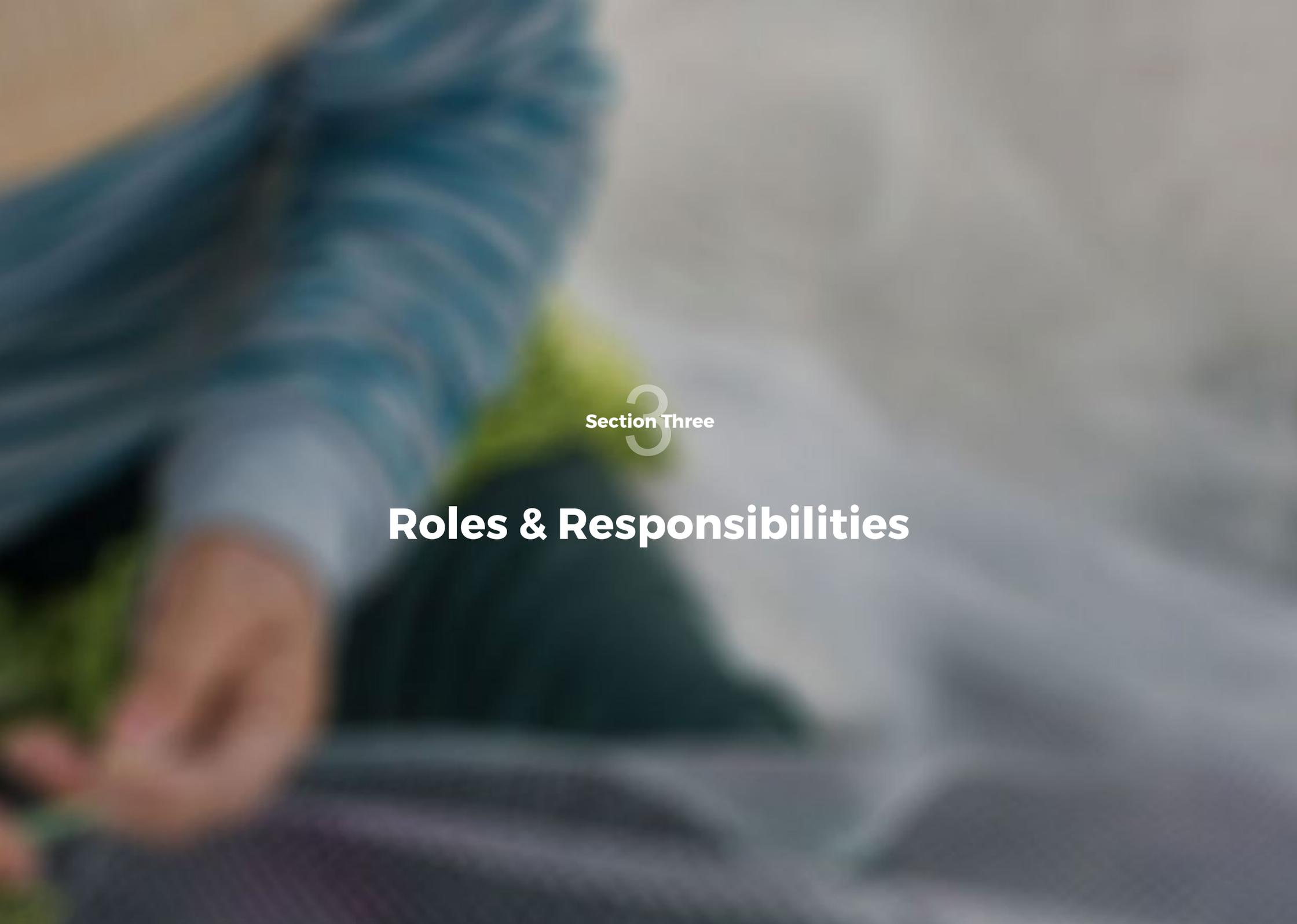
The decision-making rules of the GSSI Charter apply to participants involved in the GSSI Benchmark Process. The circumstances in which this applies are indicated in Section 4 – GSSI Benchmark Operating Procedures.

## 2.7 Suspension or revocation of recognition

The recognition of certification schemes may be suspended or revoked by the GSSI Steering Board.

Suspension of a certification scheme's recognition may occur when they are in breach of the Benchmark Agreement. In this instance, certification schemes may be given time to comply with the requirements set out in the Benchmark Agreement. If the certification scheme is unable to comply, they will face revocation of their recognition.

Revocation of a certification scheme's recognition occurs when the scheme is no longer in alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool or have not complied with the requirements set out in the Benchmark Agreement. In this instance, the certification scheme must apply to be rebenchmarked.



Section **3** Three

# Roles & Responsibilities

### 3. Roles & Responsibilities

The process of benchmarking a seafood certification scheme involves multiple different participants, each involved in, and responsible for, certain activities of the Benchmark Process. These participants are:



#### **GSSI Secretariat**

The GSSI Secretariat is the organization responsible for the facilitation and coordination of the Benchmark Process. The point of contact at the Secretariat, who manages the Benchmark Process, is called the Benchmarking Officer.



#### **Scheme Owners**

Scheme Owners are organizations that are responsible for the development, management, and maintenance of third-party seafood certification schemes, who voluntarily apply to be benchmarked against the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool. Scheme Owners complete a Training Program which provides essential guidance on how to complete the Benchmark Process. Scheme Owners then complete the GSSI Application Form, provide evidence of

their alignment with the Benchmark Framework and make themselves available to answer any queries or questions during their Benchmark Process.



#### **Independent Experts**

An Independent Expert is a professional, competent and trained individual appointed to conduct the assessment of a Scheme Owner's alignment with the Benchmark Framework. Each process has an Independent Expert reviewing the scheme's Governance and Management systems (Section A & B), as well as an Independent Expert Reviewing their Aquaculture (Section C) or Fisheries (Section D) Standard(s). Independent Experts complete a Training Program to ensure they understand what is needed to complete a Benchmark Process.



#### **GSSI Steering Board**

The GSSI Steering Board provides the final approval for the recognition of a Scheme Owner who has applied to be benchmarked against the Global Benchmark Tool.



#### **Steering Board Liaison**

The Steering Board Liaison is an appointed member of the Steering Board assigned to support and monitor the Benchmark Process on behalf of the Steering Board. The Steering Board Liaison is continuously informed of the progress for a Benchmark Process.



#### **Benchmark Integrity Committee**

The Benchmark Integrity Committee consists of Advisory Board members, representatives of the GSSI Partnership and invited experts. The Committee is responsible for ensuring

the integrity of a Benchmark Process. They do this by acting as Benchmark Committee members as well as handling any objections received by Scheme Owners as part of a Benchmark Process.



#### **Benchmark Committee**

The Benchmark Committee acts as a quality control step in a Benchmark Process by reviewing the work conducted by the Independent Experts. The Benchmark Committee consists of the Steering Board Liaison, two members of the Benchmark Integrity Committee and two additional Independent Experts different from those conducting the benchmark assessment.

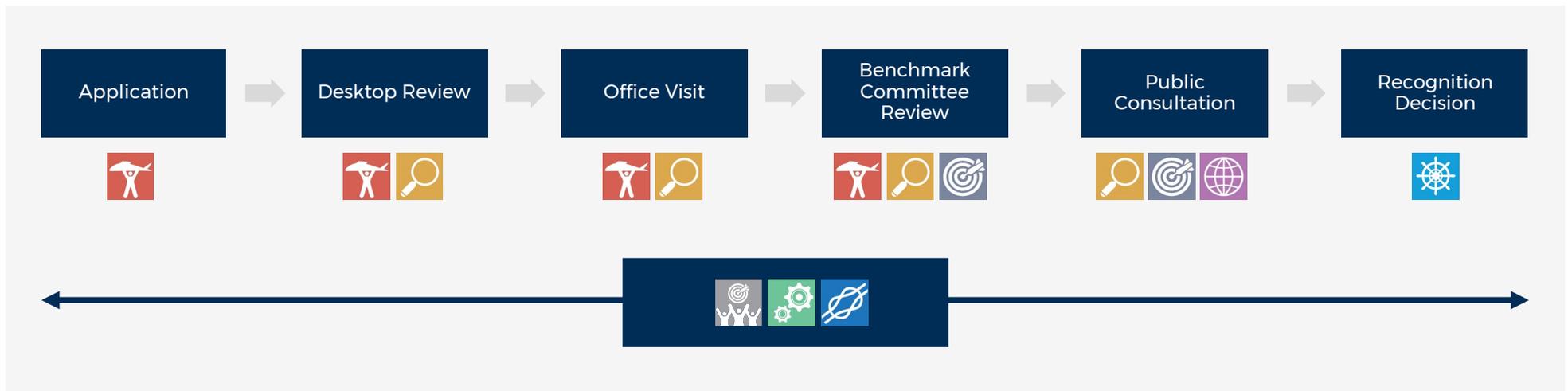


#### **Public**

The Public are stakeholders who can provide comments or questions during a Scheme Owner's Benchmark Process.

# GSSI Benchmark Process

Key steps and responsibilities in the GSSI Benchmark Process



 GSSI Secretariat

 Scheme Owners

 Steering Board Liaison

 Benchmark Committee

 Independent Experts

 GSSI Steering Board

 Benchmark Integrity Committee

 Public

**4**  
Section Four

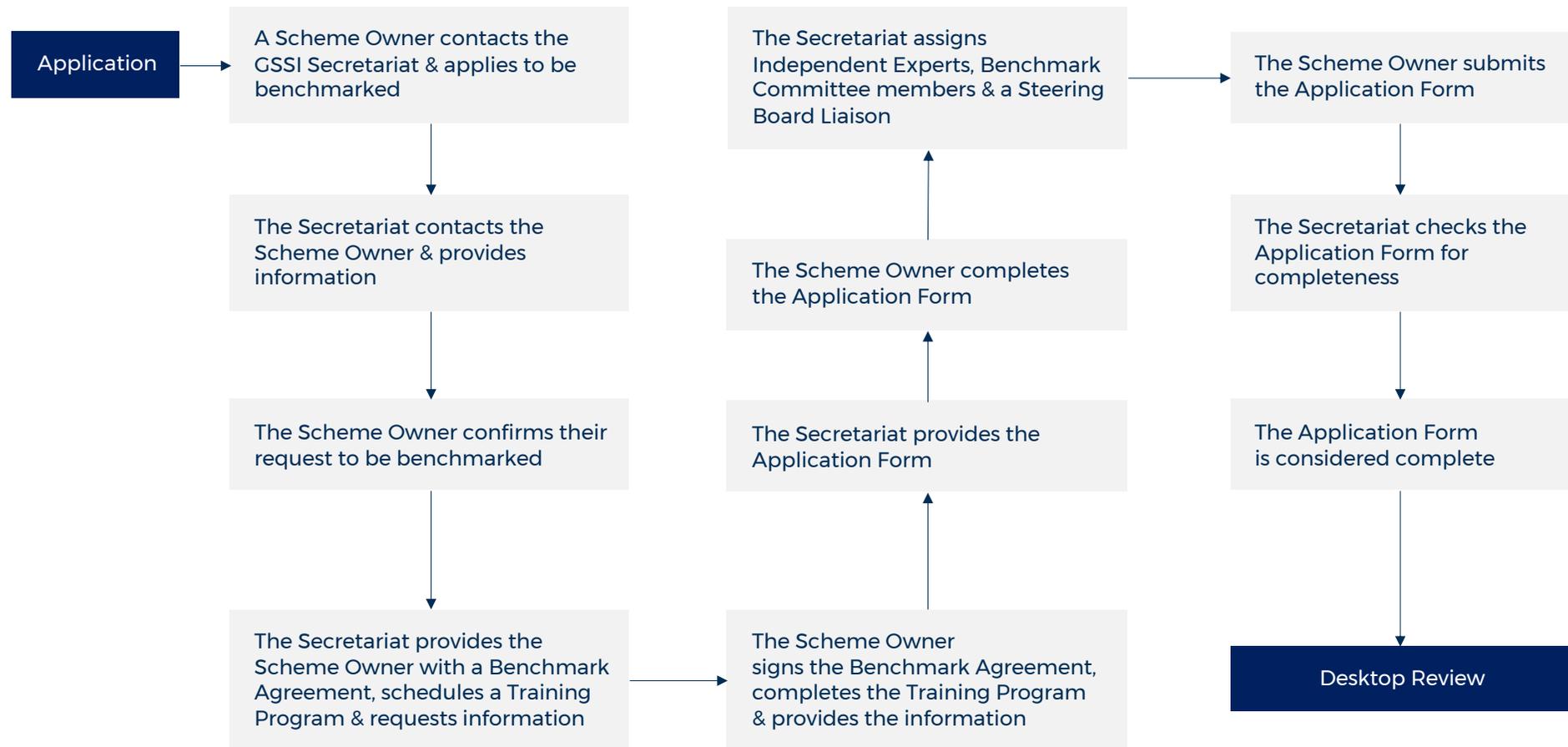
**GSSI Benchmark Operating Procedures**



#### 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

The GSSI Recognition Process is the process a seafood certification scheme must complete if they wish to achieve GSSI recognition for the first time. The activities followed during each step of the process and their applicable timeframes are detailed in this section.

## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

**Application** - Overview of activities

## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

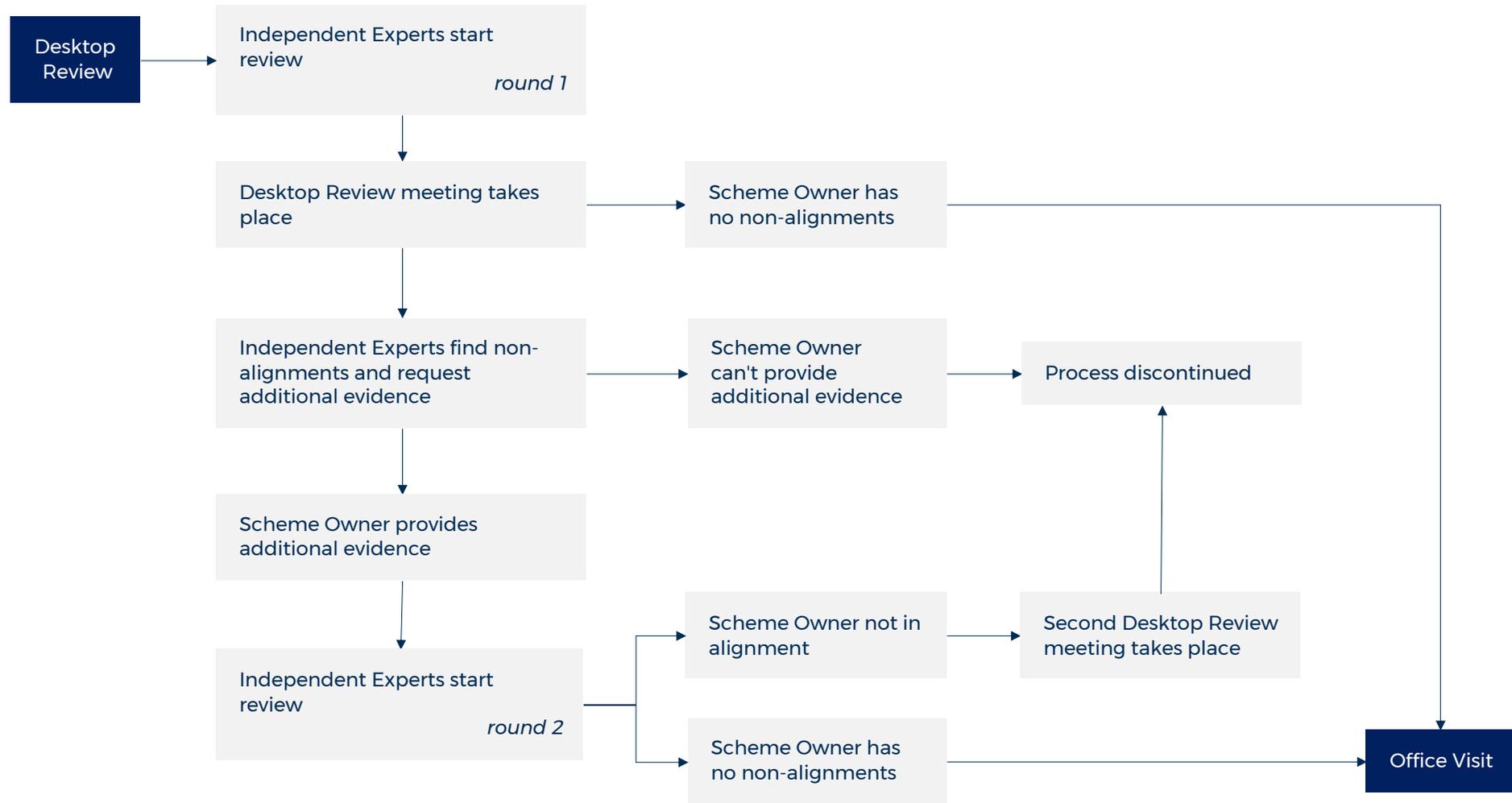
**Application** – Details of activities

1. Scheme Owners who wish to be benchmarked must contact the GSSI Secretariat via the [application page](#) on the GSSI website.
2. The Benchmarking Officer will then contact the Scheme Owner and schedule an introductory call, where they will provide information on the Benchmark Process.
3. Following the call, the Benchmarking Officer will request whether the Scheme Owner wishes to proceed with a Benchmark Process.
4. If the Scheme Owner confirms their wish to be benchmarked, the following will occur:
  - a. They will be provided with the Benchmark Agreement.
  - b. The Benchmarking Officer will request a list of entities that have been certified against the Scheme Owner's standard(s).
  - c. The Benchmarking Officer will schedule the Scheme Owner's Training Program.
5. The Scheme Owner must sign the agreement, provide the list of certified entities and complete the Training Program to initiate the Benchmark Process.
6. Once the above has been completed, the Benchmarking Officer will grant the Scheme Owner access to the Benchmark Application Form and provide them with the list of audit reports required per the GSSI Sample Size Policy ([section 5.1](#)). This list is selected by a GSSI Independent Expert.
7. The Scheme Owner must complete the Application Form within 12 weeks and should contact the Benchmarking Officer with any questions related to its completion.
8. Four weeks before the Application Form must be submitted, the Benchmarking Officer will start assigning Independent Experts, Benchmark Committee members and a Steering Board Liaison.
9. Once the appointments are confirmed the Benchmarking Officer will share these, for approval, with the Scheme Owner\*.
10. After the Scheme Owner submits their Application Form, the Benchmarking Officer will review the Application for completeness within two weeks.
11. If the Application is incomplete the Benchmarking Officer will inform the Scheme Owner and request that the missing information be provided within two weeks. The Benchmarking Officer will review up to a maximum of two additional submissions within those two weeks.
12. Once the Application is complete the process moves to the Desktop Review.

\* The Scheme Owner can request a change in any appointments made, provided that a Conflict of Interest as defined in the GSSI Conflict of Interest Policy is given (see [section 5.2](#)). Request for changes shall be submitted within one week after the assignment is communicated and the final decision on whether there is a conflict of interest lies with the GSSI Secretariat. If a Conflict of Interest is found, the individual in question will be replaced.

4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

## Desktop Review - Overview of activities

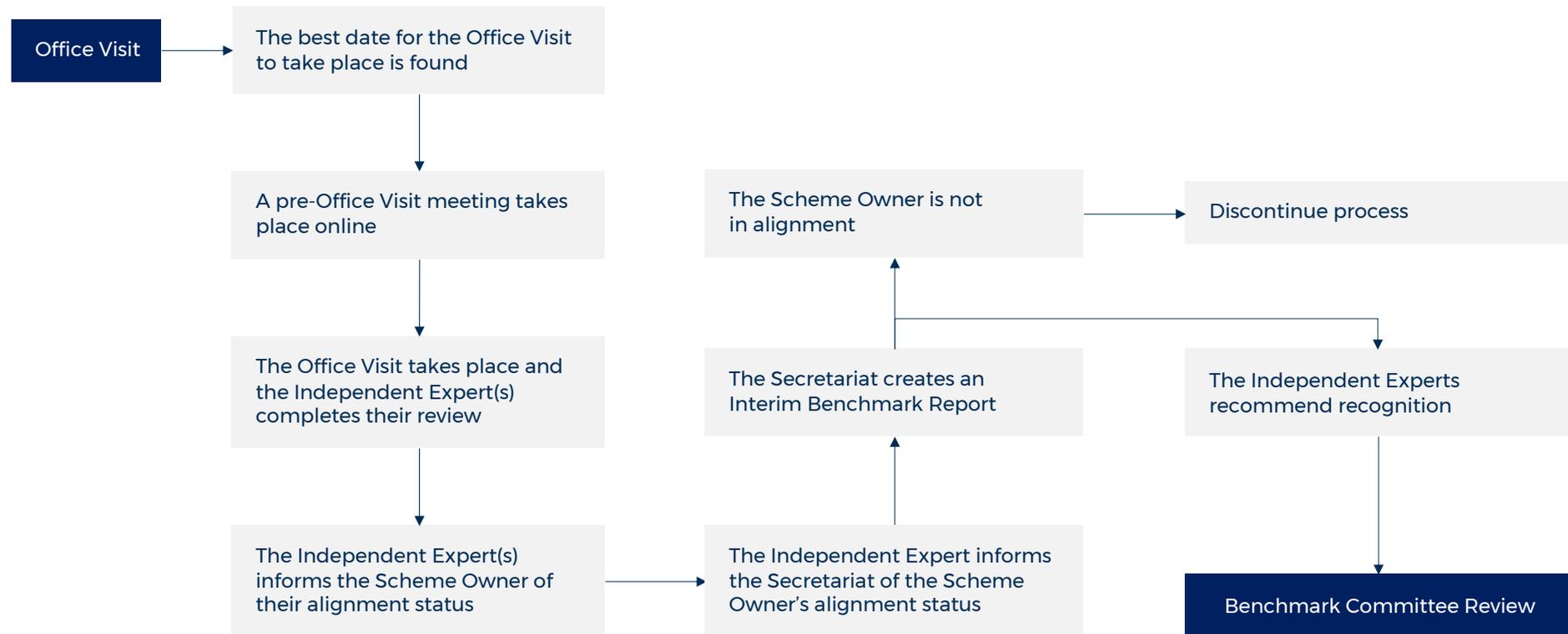


## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

**Desktop Review** – Details of activities

1. The Independent Experts will conduct a first round of review of the Scheme Owner's alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool within a period of four weeks. During this time, the Experts may request additional information from the Scheme Owner, who must make sure to respond in a timely manner.
2. A Desktop Review Meeting takes place within one week of the conclusion of the first round of Desktop Review. In this meeting the Independent Experts will present the results of their review, indicating any Components where the Scheme Owner is not in alignment and provide the Scheme Owner with an opportunity to ask any questions.
3. If the Independent Experts conclude that there are no Essential Components where the Scheme Owner is not in alignment, the process can move to the Office Visit.
4. If the Independent Experts have found some Essential Components to be not in alignment, the Scheme Owner will be granted four weeks in which to provide an improved Application Form and submit additional evidence. If the Scheme Owner indicates that they cannot provide an improved Application Form within this time-frame, the Benchmark Process will be discontinued.
5. After the four-week period in which the Scheme Owner updates their Application, the Independent Experts will conduct a second round of review over the course of two weeks.
6. If the Independent Experts conclude that there are no Essential Components where the Scheme Owner is not in alignment, the process can move to the Office Visit.
7. If there are Essential Components that the Independent Experts have found to be not in alignment, a second Desktop Review meeting will take place between the Scheme Owner, Independent Experts and Steering Board Liaison. The objective of the meeting is to ensure the Scheme Owner understands all conclusions of non-alignment found by the Independent Experts. At the conclusion of the meeting the Benchmark Process is discontinued.

## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

**Office Visit** - Overview of activities

## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

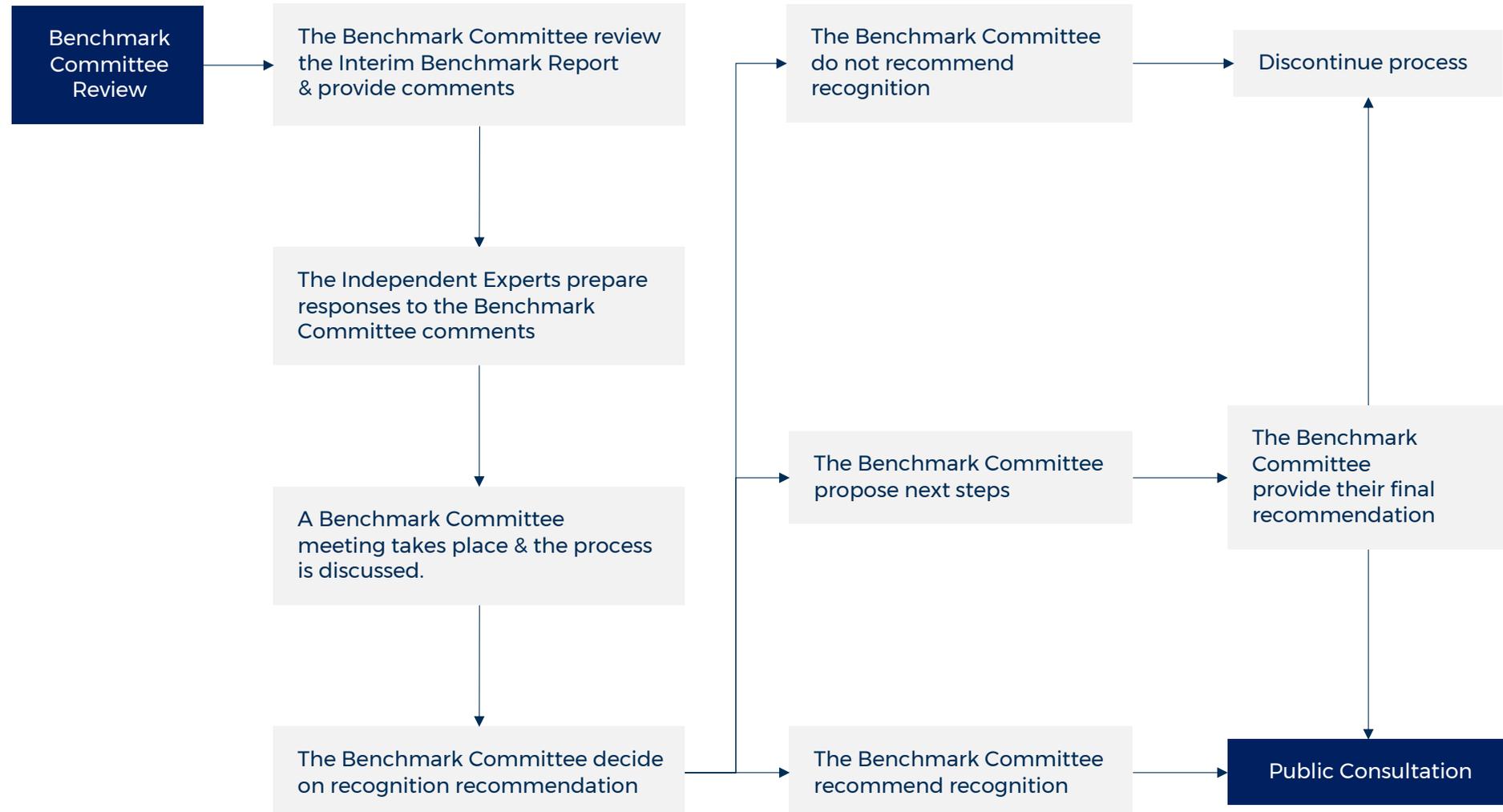
**Office Visit** – Details of activities

1. Upon completion of the Desktop Review the Benchmarking Officer will:
  - a. Confirm who will be conducting the Office Visit\*.
  - b. Decide whether the Office Visit will be in-person or remote (see section 5.4).
  - c. Coordinate with the Scheme Owner and Independent Expert(s) to find the best suitable date for the Office Visit. The Office Visit must take place within eight weeks of finalizing the Desktop Review.
2. When the Office Visit date has been set, the Benchmarking Officer will:
  - a. Schedule a call with the Independent Expert(s) and Scheme Owner to take place before the Office Visit. This call is to discuss Components that require follow-up during the Office Visit and results in the Scheme Owner understanding what needs to be shown during the Office Visit (i.e., evidence of implementation).
  - b. In case of a remote Office Visit, the Scheme Owner will be provided with the Mutual Agreement for Remote Office Visits, outlining the expectations of a remote Office Visit. The Agreement must be signed by the Scheme Owner prior to the Office Visit taking place.
3. On the date the Office Visit is set, the Independent Expert(s) will review and update the Components which require Office Visit follow-up.
4. Once all applicable Components are reviewed, the Independent Expert(s) will present the results to the Scheme Owner during the Office Visit showing where they are in alignment and where they are not.
5. The Independent Expert(s) will share the results and conclusions of their review with the Benchmarking Officer, who will compile an Interim Benchmark Report within two weeks.
6. If, after the Office Visit, the Independent Experts recommend recognition, the Benchmark Process will move to the Benchmark Committee Review.
7. If there are any Essential Components which are deemed not in alignment, the Benchmarking Officer will provide the Scheme Owner with a Benchmark Report summarizing their alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool and the Benchmark Process will be discontinued.

**\* Who conducts an Office Visit?**

An Office Visit will always include the Independent Expert for Scheme Governance and Management. In case the Independent Expert(s) reviewing the content of the Scheme Owner's standard have indicated that an "Office Visit Follow-up" is applicable to any Essential Components, the Benchmark Committee will be requested to decide (in line with the decision process in the GSSI Charter) whether the second Independent Expert should be included in the Office Visit.

## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

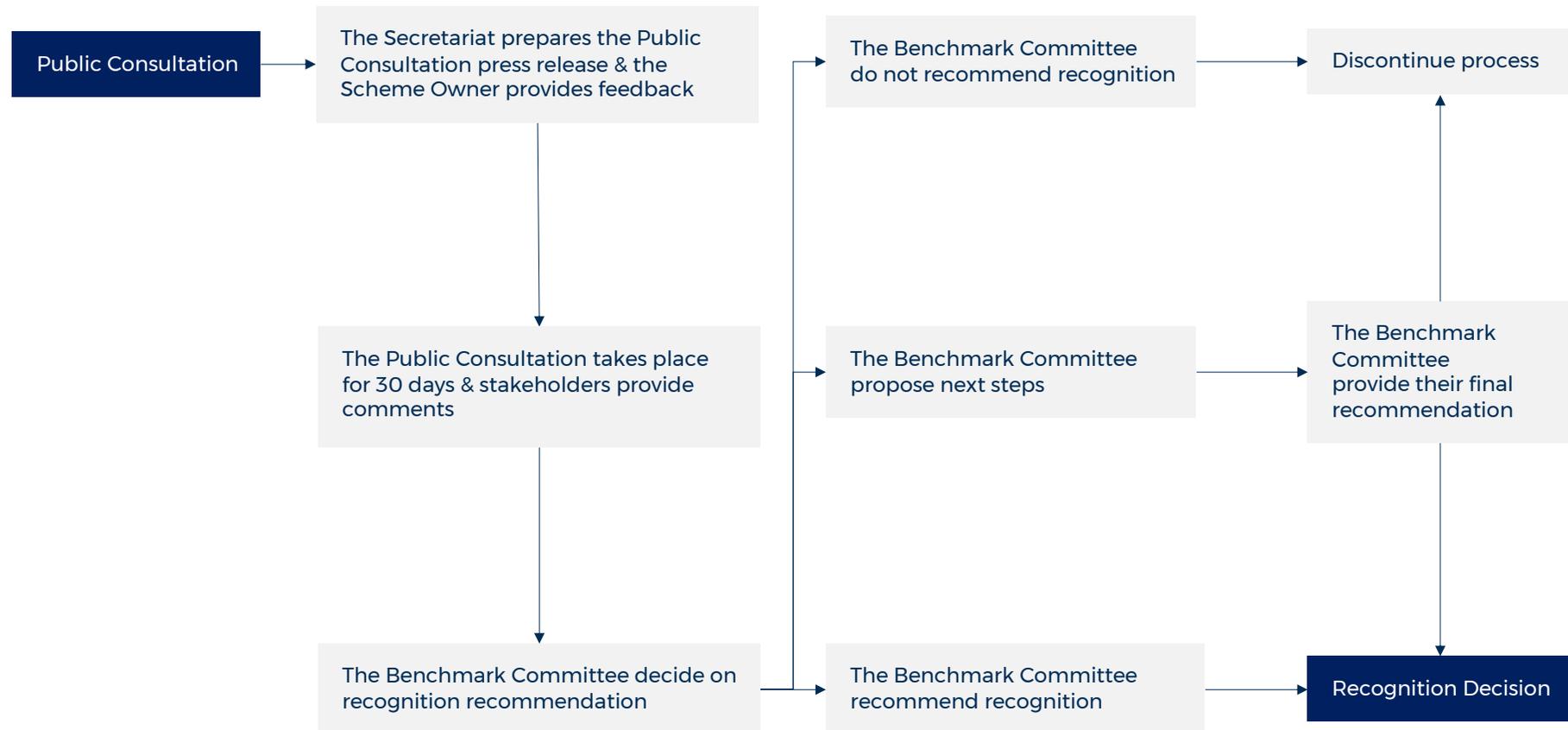
**Benchmark Committee Review** - Overview of activities

## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

**Benchmark Committee Review** – Details of activities

1. After the Office Visit, the Benchmarking Officer will inform the Benchmark Committee of the start of the Benchmark Committee Review and provide them with the Interim Benchmark Report. The Benchmark Committee members must review the Report within two weeks and provide any comments or questions within this period to the Benchmarking Officer.
2. The queries from the Benchmark Committee are then given to the Independent Experts, who draft responses within one week.
3. A Benchmark Committee meeting is then held, during which the Benchmark Committee's queries are discussed and the responses from the Independent Experts are given. The next steps to be followed in the Benchmark Process are decided on (in line with the GSSI Charter) by the Benchmark Committee during the meeting, and three possible outcomes exist:
  - a. The Benchmark Committee members agree with the conclusion drawn by the Independent Expert(s) and provide a preliminary recommendation for recognition (pending a Public Consultation period).
  - b. The Benchmark Committee disagree with the recommendation made by the Independent Expert(s) and do not recommend recognition.
  - c. The Benchmark Committee are undecided with the recommendation made by the Independent Expert(s) and propose next steps.
4. Based on the decision made above, the following shall occur:
  - a. If a preliminary recommendation for recognition is provided:
    - i. Within two weeks of the meeting, the Benchmarking Officer will provide the meeting minutes, which includes the outcome of the meeting.
    - ii. Benchmark Committee members will approve the meeting minutes and meeting outcome within one week of the Benchmarking Officer's writing and the process moves to the Public Consultation.
  - b. If the Benchmark Committee disagrees with the recommendation for recognition:
    - i. The process will be discontinued.
    - ii. The Benchmarking Officer will provide the Scheme Owner with a Benchmark Report summarizing their alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool.
  - c. If the Benchmark Committee is undecided with the recommendation for recognition:
    - i. The Benchmark Committee will propose next steps and a timeline for these.
    - ii. After the completion of these steps, the Benchmark Committee will provide their final recommendation.

## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

**Public Consultation** – Overview of activities

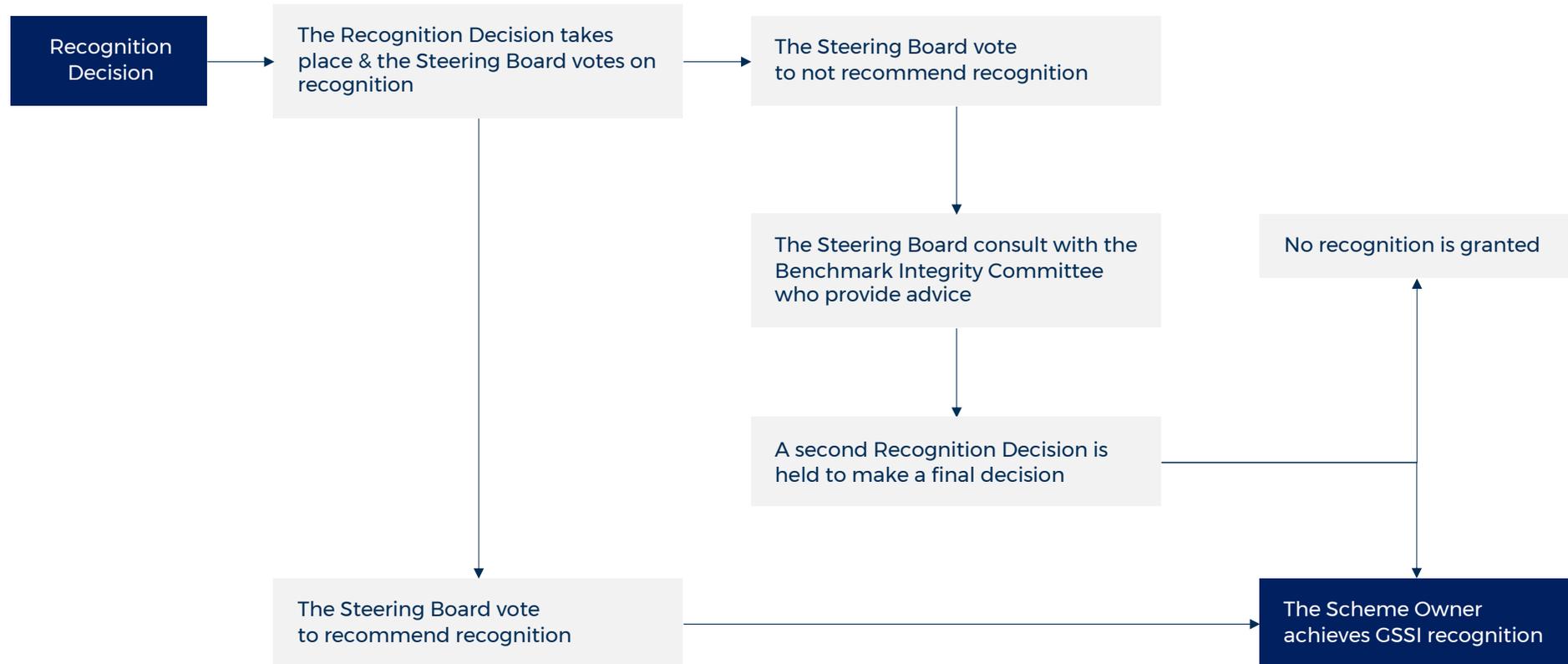
## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

**Public Consultation** – Details of activities

1. In preparation of the Public Consultation, the Benchmarking Officer will provide the draft text for the website and the press release to the Scheme Owner, who may provide feedback within one week.
2. After this week, the Public Consultation will take place for a period of 30 calendar days.
3. After the 30-day period, the comments received during the Public Consultation will be shared with the Independent Experts, Scheme Owner and Benchmark Committee\*.
4. Based on the comments received, the Benchmark Committee might request a final recommendation for recognition from the Independent Experts. The Public Comments received may result in a change of recommendation.
5. If requested, the final recommendations by the Independent Experts will then be shared with the Benchmark Committee. The Benchmark Committee will then decide (in line with the GSSI Charter), on the next steps.
6. If the Benchmark Committee decides to recommend recognition, the Benchmarking Officer will update the Interim Benchmark Report, making it into the Benchmark Report. The Public Consultation is then finalized, and the process moves to the Recognition Decision.
7. If the Benchmark Committee decides to not recommend recognition, the process will be discontinued. The Benchmarking Officer will provide the Scheme Owner with a Benchmark Report summarizing their alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool.
8. If the Benchmark Committee is undecided with the recommendation for recognition, they will propose next steps and a timeline for these. After the completion of these steps, the Benchmark Committee will provide their final recommendation.

\* Upon the conclusion of the Recognition Process, responses to the Public Comments will be publicly shared. The responses will have been drafted by the Independent Experts with the assistance of the Scheme Owner and are approved by the Benchmark Committee.

## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

**Recognition Decision** – Overview of activities

## 4.1 The GSSI Recognition Process

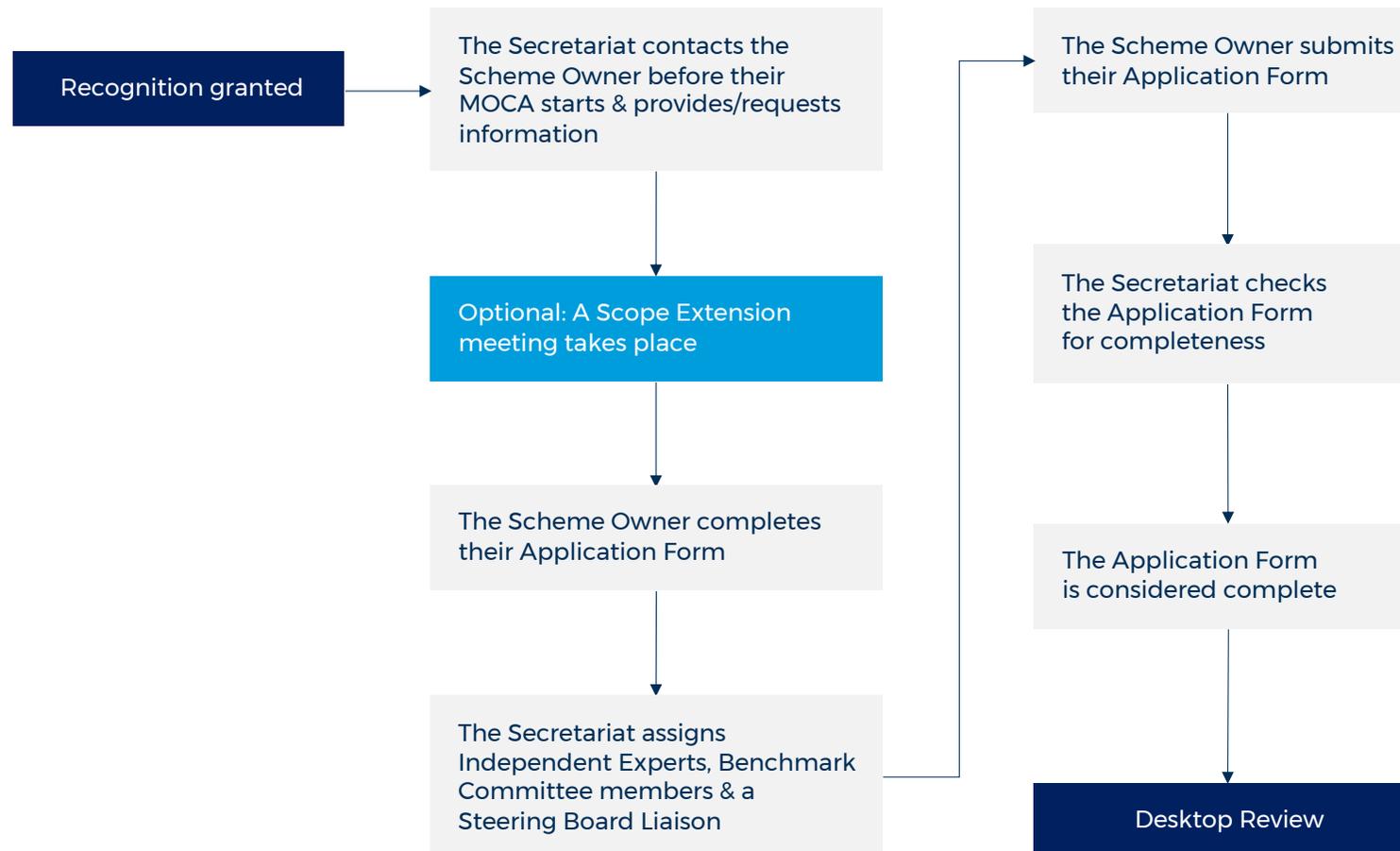
**Recognition Decision** – Details of activities

1. A Recognition Decision by the GSSI Steering Board will take place no later than six weeks after the final responses are received from the Benchmark Committee. The Steering Board will be provided with a summary of the process and the Benchmark Committee's recommendation on recognition.
  - a. Recommend recognition of the Scheme Owner
  - b. Deny recognition of the Scheme Owner.
2. The Steering Board will vote (in line with the GSSI Charter) on the recognition of the Scheme Owner. The Steering Board will vote to:
  - a. Recommend recognition of the Scheme Owner
  - b. Deny recognition of the Scheme Owner.
3. If the decision has been made to grant GSSI recognition to the Scheme Owner, this will be communicated to the Scheme Owner, Independent Experts and Benchmark Committee. The Scheme Owner will receive draft text for the press release for which they may provide feedback. One week after recognition has been granted, the recognition of the Scheme Owner will be announced via GSSI's social media platforms and website.
4. If the Steering Board does not grant recognition to the Scheme Owner, they will consult with the Benchmark Integrity Committee, who will act in an advisory capacity. After this consultation, the Steering Board will (in line with the GSSI Charter) come to a final decision.
5. The recognition decision made by the GSSI Steering Board is final.

#### 4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

The GSSI Monitoring of Continued Alignment (MOCA) Process is the process a seafood certification scheme must follow when they have received GSSI recognition. This process occurs on an annual basis for every recognized Scheme Owner. When Scheme Owners are due for their MOCA, they can also opt to undergo a Scope Extension at the same time. A MOCA without a Scope Extension is called a “standard MOCA”, and with, a “MOCA with Scope Extension”. Regardless of whether a Scheme Owner opts for a Scope Extension or not, similar activities are followed. Where there is a difference or additional activities between a standard MOCA and MOCA with Scope Extension, **the MOCA with Scope Extension activity is shown in blue.**

## 4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

**Application** - Overview of activities

## 4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

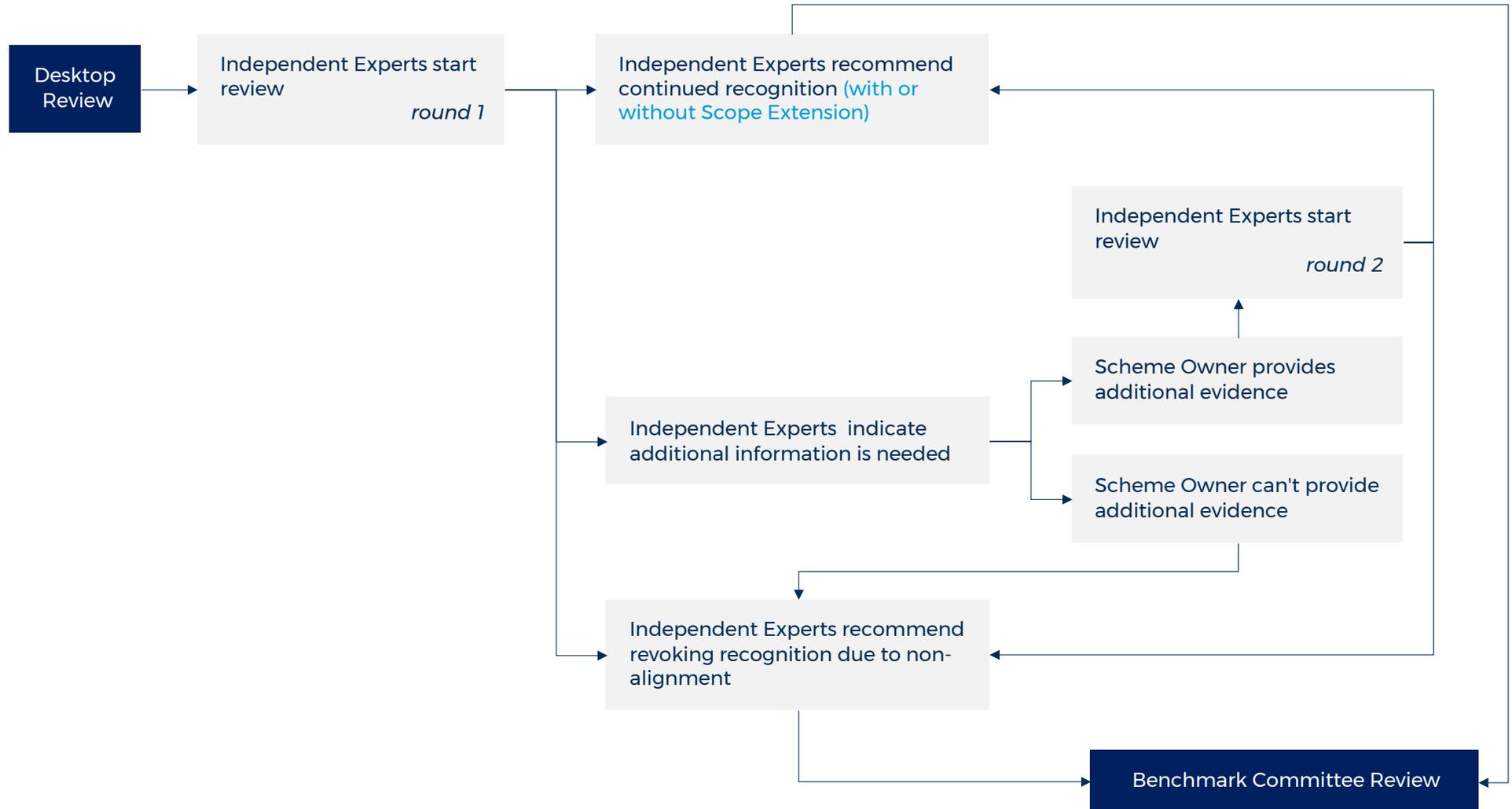
**Application** – Details of activities

1. The Benchmarking Officer contacts the Scheme Owner four weeks before they are due to start completing their Application Form and will request:
  - a. Whether any major changes have occurred that will affect the Scheme Owner's alignment.
  - b. Whether the Scheme Owner will undergo a standard MOCA or MOCA with Scope Extension.
  - c. That the Scheme Owner complete the MOCA (and Scope Extension) Training Program within three weeks.
  - d. A list of entities that have been certified against the Scheme Owner's recognized standard(s) and standard(s) being submitted for a Scope Extension.
2. If the Scheme Owner indicates that they wish to pursue a MOCA with Scope Extension, the Benchmarking Officer contacts them within one week and schedules a call. In this call the Benchmarking Officer provides information on the MOCA with Scope Extension.
3. Four weeks after contacting the Scheme Owner, the Benchmarking Officer will provide the Application Form and provide them with the list of audit reports required per the GSSI Sample Size Policy ([section 5.1](#)). This list is selected by a GSSI Independent Expert.
4. The Scheme Owner must complete the Application Form within six weeks. Any questions when completing the Application Form should be addressed to the Benchmarking Officer and will be answered within one week.
5. The Benchmarking Officer will start the assignment of the Independent Experts, Benchmark Committee members and a Steering board Liaison when the Application Form has been provided to the Scheme Owner and will complete this within 4 weeks. The appointments are then communicated to the Scheme Owner for approval\*.
6. After the Scheme Owner submits their Application Form, the Benchmarking Officer will review the Application for completeness within two weeks.
7. If the Application is incomplete the Benchmarking officer will inform the Scheme Owner and request that the missing information be provided within two weeks. The Benchmarking Officer will review up to a maximum of two additional submissions within those two weeks.
8. Once the Application is complete the process moves to the Desktop Review.

\* The Scheme Owner can request a change in any appointments made, provided that a Conflict of Interest as defined in the GSSI Conflict of Interest Policy is given (see section 5.2). Requests for changes shall be submitted within one week after the assignment is communicated and the final decision on whether there is a conflict of interest lies with the GSSI Secretariat. If a Conflict of Interest is found, the individual in question will be replaced.

4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

**Desktop Review** - Overview of activities



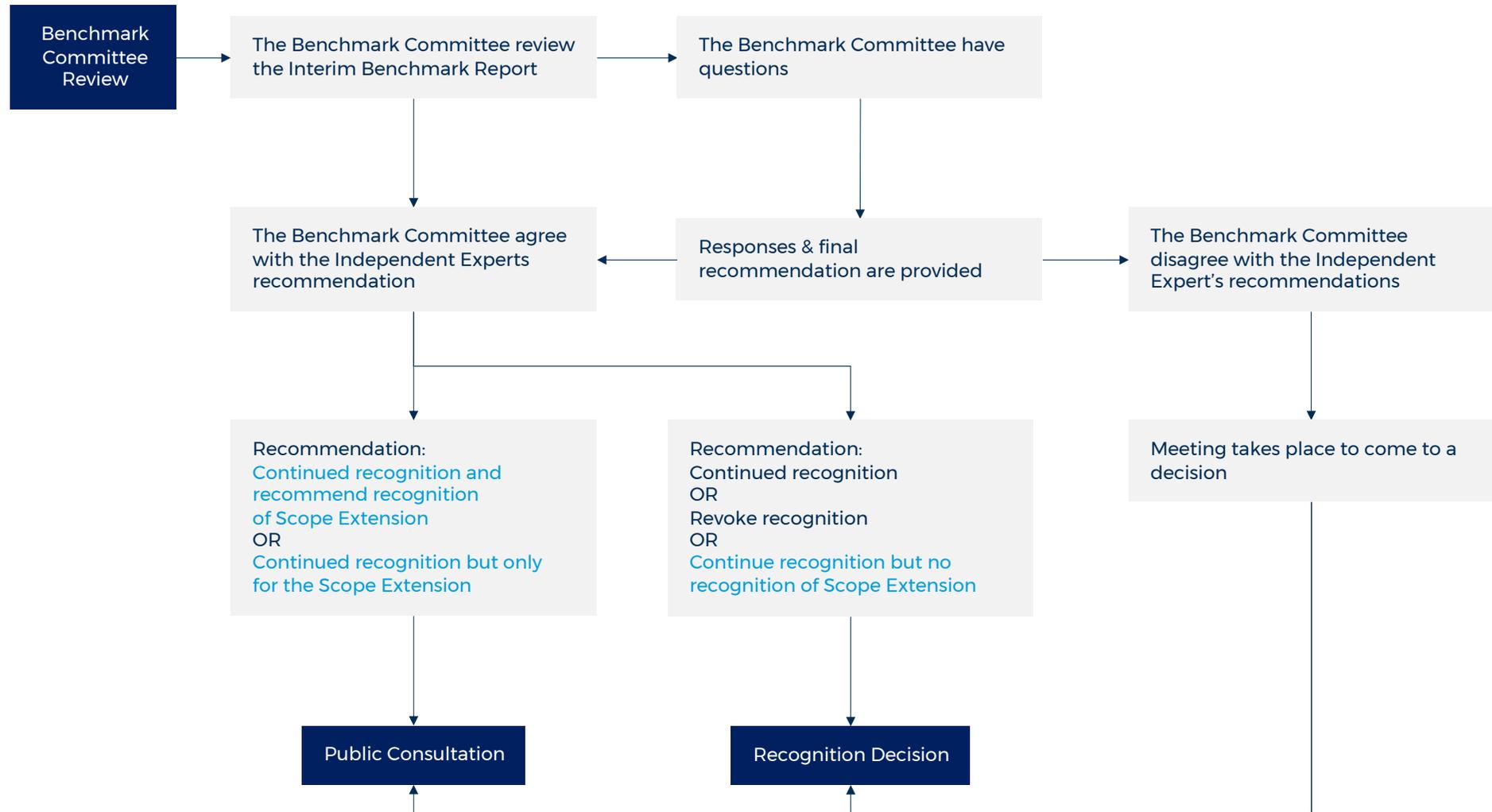
## 4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

**Desktop Review** – Details of activities

1. The Independent Experts will conduct their review within a period of two weeks. During this time, the Independent Experts may request additional information from the Scheme Owner, who must make sure to respond in a timely manner. During their review, the Independent Experts will also consider stakeholder comments (if any) that were received about the Scheme Owner's recognition.
  - a. When all Essential Components are in alignment: Recommend continued GSSI recognition of the Scheme Owner.
  - b. When one or more Essential Components are no longer in alignment: Recommend revoking recognition of the Scheme Owner.
  - c. When all Essential Components are in alignment for the MOCA and Scope Extension: Recommend continued recognition as well as recognition for the Scope Extension standard(s).
  - d. When all Essential Components are in alignment for the MOCA but not the Scope Extension: Continue GSSI recognition of the Scheme Owner but not recommend recognition of the Scope Extension standard(s).
  - e. When an Essential Component(s) from Section C or D is not in alignment for the MOCA, but all Essential Components from Section A & B are in alignment, as well as all Essential Components for the Scope Extension: Recommend revoking recognition of the MOCA standard(s) but grant recognition for the Scope Extension standard(s).
  - f. When both the MOCA and Scope Extension have Essential Components that are not in alignment: Recommend revoking recognition of the Scheme Owner.
  - g. When one or more Essential Components require additional evidence (for either MOCA or Scope Extension): Request the Scheme Owner to provide additional information.
2. The Independent Experts will share the results of their review with the Benchmarking Officer. There are several possibilities resulting from the Independent Experts review, which lead to certain recommendations. These are:
  3. If the Independents Expert(s) review results in any of 2a to f above, the process will proceed to the Benchmark Committee Review.
  4. If the Independent Expert(s) indicate that additional evidence is required (activity 2g above), the Scheme Owner must indicate whether they are able to provide the additional evidence within four weeks of being contacted.
    5. If the Scheme Owner is unable to provide the requested evidence within four weeks, it will result in a recommendation to revoke recognition (or not grant recognition for the Scope Extension standard(s)) and the process will move to the Benchmark Committee Review.
    6. If the Scheme Owner can provide the additional evidence requested, the Independent Experts will conduct a second review within two weeks and make a recommendation as in point 2a-f above. The process then moves to the Benchmark Committee Review.
  7. To conclude the Desktop Review, the Benchmarking Officer creates an Interim Benchmark Report.

4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

**Benchmark Committee Review** – Overview of activities



## 4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

**Benchmark Committee Review** – Details of activities

1. The Benchmarking Officer provides the Benchmark Committee with the Interim Benchmark Report. The Benchmark Committee members must review the Report within two weeks and provide any comments or questions within this period.
2. If there are no queries from the Benchmark Committee and they agree with the Independent Experts recommendation made in the Desktop Review, the process will move to the Steering Board Decision (or Public Consultation).
3. If there are queries, the Benchmarking Officer will inform the appropriate individual (Independent Expert and Scheme Owner), who must respond to the queries within two weeks. After responding to the queries, the Independent Experts will make their final recommendation. These can be:
  - a. Continue GSSI recognition of the Scheme Owner (MOCA).
  - b. Revoke recognition of the Scheme Owner (MOCA).
  - c. Continue GSSI recognition of the Scheme Owner (MOCA) and recommend recognition for the additional standard (Scope Extension).
  - d. Continue GSSI recognition of the Scheme Owner (MOCA) but not recommend recognition of the additional standard (Scope Extension).
4. The responses and final recommendations are then shared with the Benchmark Committee. The Benchmark Committee will decide (in line with the GSSI Charter) whether they agree or disagree with the recommendations.
  - e. Continue GSSI recognition of the Scheme Owner but only include the additional standard that was reviewed during the Scope Extension and revoking the recognition of the current recognized standards. This situation could only occur when:
    - i. The Scheme Owner is still in alignment with the Essential Components of Section A & B as part of their MOCA, **AND**
    - ii. The Scheme Owner is no longer in alignment with an Essential Component(s) in Section C or D for their MOCA, **BUT**
    - iii. The Scheme Owner is in alignment with all Essential Components in Section C or D for their Scope Extension standard.
  - f. Revoke recognition of the Scheme Owner and no recognition of the Scope Extension standard.
5. If the Benchmark Committee agree with the recommendation, the process will move to the appropriate next step. For recommendations 3 a, b, d and f the process moves to the Recognition Decision. For recommendations 3 c and e, the process moves to a Public Consultation\*.
6. If the Benchmark Committee disagree with the recommendation made by the Independent Experts, the Benchmarking Officer will schedule a meeting to take place within three weeks, which will include the Benchmark Committee, Independent Experts, Steering Board Liaison and Scheme Owner.
7. During this meeting, solutions to come to a recommendation decision shall be sought. Here, the Benchmark Committee may suggest the Scheme Owner undergo a period of Public Consultation.
8. If the Benchmark Committee review progresses to a Public Consultation, the Benchmarking Officer will create an Interim Benchmark Report. If it moves to the Steering Board Decision, the Benchmarking Officer will create a Benchmark Report as well as a summary of the MOCA Process.

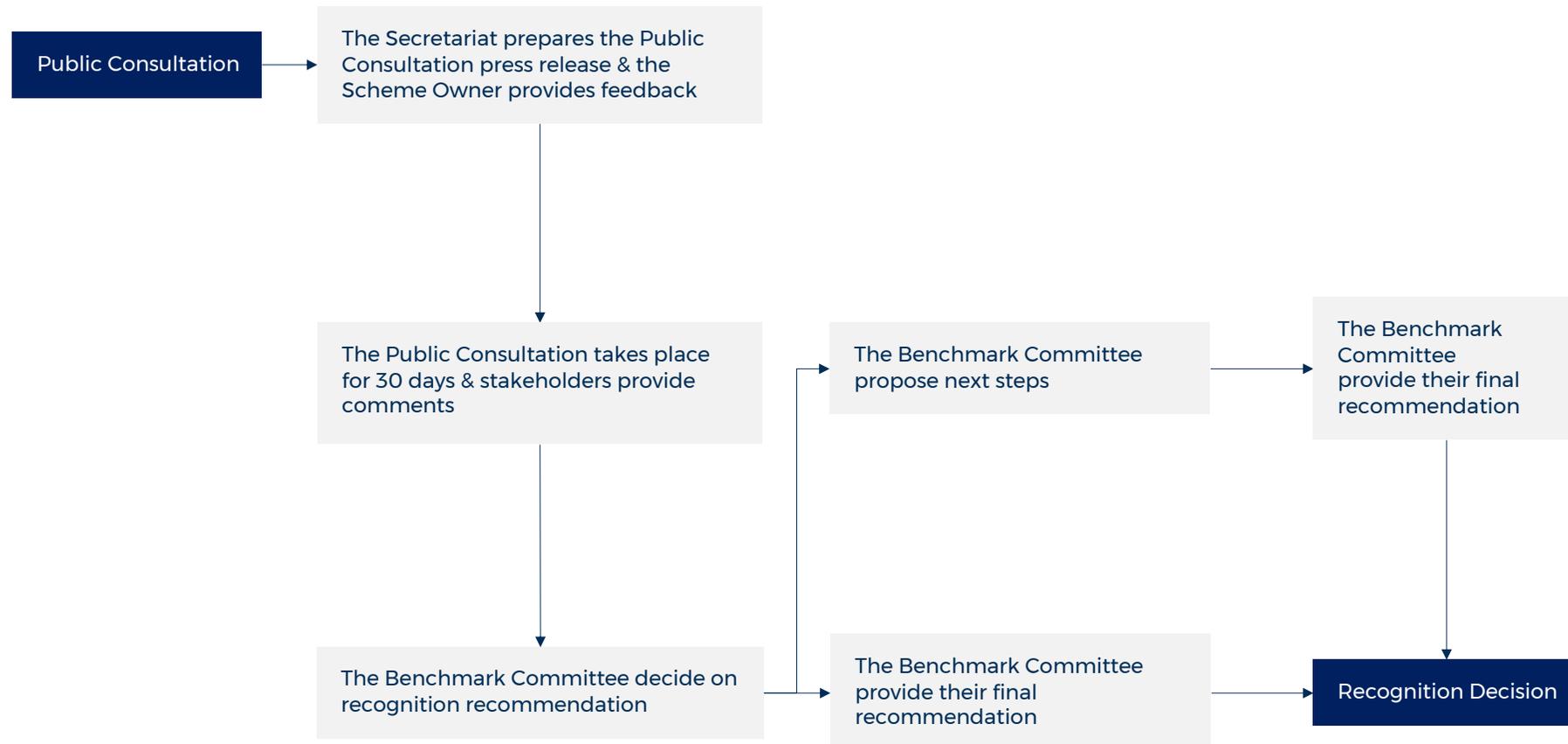
\* During a standard MOCA, a Public Consultation is not typically conducted. However, a Public Consultation **must** take place if:

- i. the Scheme Owner is undergoing a MOCA with Scope Extension. Only the Scope Extension standard will be subject to the Public Consultation (unless otherwise decided by the Benchmark Committee).
- ii. There has been a significant change in the Scheme Owner's standard or governance as part of the Scheme Owner's revision process.

A Public Consultation **could** take place (when the Benchmark Committee recommends it), if:

- i. Supplementary Components previously concluded as "not in alignment" have been put forward.
- ii. Two or more comments from stakeholders have been submitted to GSSI about the Scheme Owner's recognition.

## 4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

**Public Consultation** – Overview of activities

## 4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

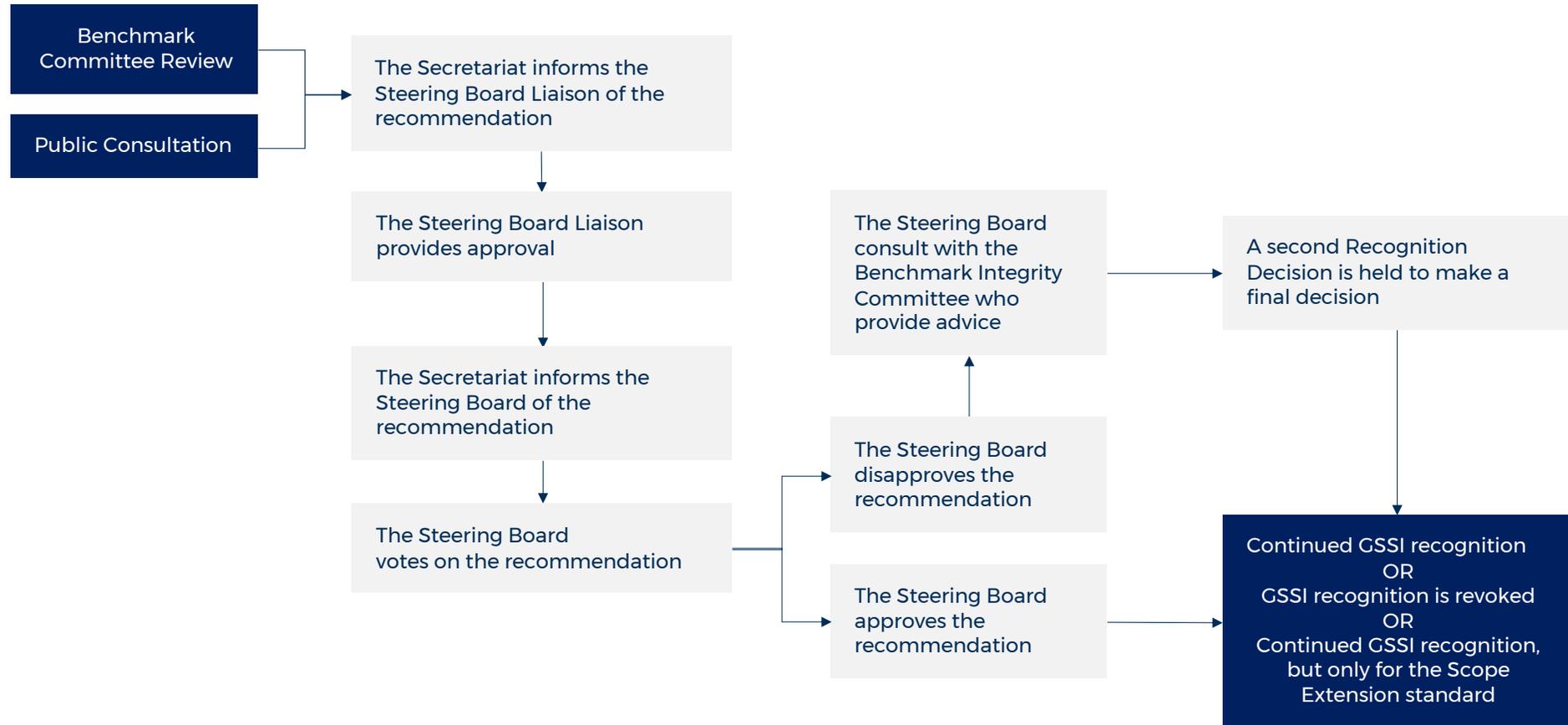
**Public Consultation** – Details of activities

1. In preparation of the Public Consultation, the Benchmarking Officer will provide the draft text for the website and the press release to the Scheme Owner, who may provide feedback within one week.
2. After this week, the Public Consultation will take place for a period of 30 calendar days.
3. After the 30-day period, the comments received during the Public Consultation will be shared with the Independent Experts, Scheme Owner and Benchmark Committee\*.
4. Based on the comments received, the Benchmark Committee might request a final recommendation for recognition from the Independent Experts. The Public Comments received may result in a change of recommendation.
5. If requested, the final recommendations by the Independent Experts will then be shared with the Benchmark Committee. The Benchmark Committee will then decide (in line with the GSSI Charter), on the next steps.
6. If the Benchmark Committee decides to recommend continued recognition or revoke recognition (with or without a Scope Extension), the Benchmarking Officer will update the Interim Benchmark Report, making it into the Benchmark Report. The Public Consultation is then finalized, and the process moves to the Recognition Decision.
7. If the Benchmark Committee is undecided with the recommendation for recognition, they will propose next steps and a timeline for these. After the completion of these steps, the Benchmark Committee will provide their final recommendation.

\* Upon the conclusion of the MOCA Process, responses to the Public Comments will be publicly shared. The responses will have been drafted by the Independent Experts with the assistance of the Scheme Owner and are approved by the Benchmark Committee.

4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

**Recognition Decision** - Overview of activities



## 4.2 The Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process (with Scope Extension)

**Recognition Decision** – Details of activities

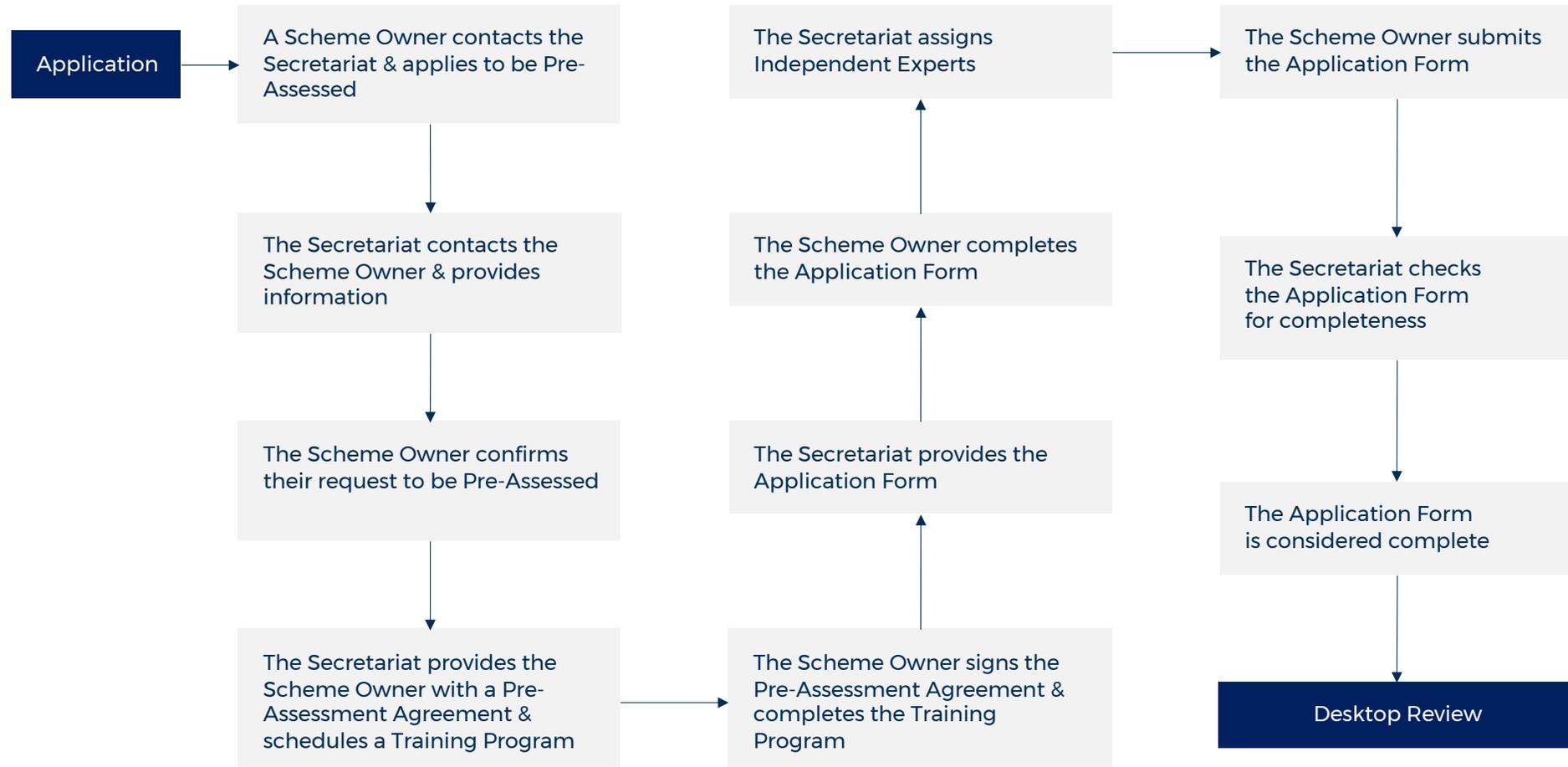
1. The Benchmark Officer will inform the Steering Board Liaison of the recommendation and include the Benchmark Report, summary of the process, Public Consultation comments and responses (if applicable) and draft text to be shared with the Steering Board. The Steering Board Liaison must respond within one week to provide their approval.
2. The Benchmarking Officer will then provide the recommendation on recognition, Benchmark Report, process summary document and Public Consultation comments (if applicable) to the Steering Board. Steering Board members must then vote on approval (in line with the GSSI Charter) within two weeks.
3. If the Steering Board approves the recommendation, the Benchmarking Officer informs the Scheme Owner, Independent Experts and Benchmark Committee of the decision.
  - a. If the Scheme Owner receives continued recognition (and recognition of the Scope Extension), this will be published on GSSI's social media platforms and website.
  - b. If the Scheme Owner's recognition is revoked, the reference to the recognition of the Scheme Owner will be removed from the GSSI website and other communication materials, and the revocation will be announced on GSSI's social media platforms.
  - c. If the Scheme Owner's recognition is revoked but the Scope Extension standard(s) receive recognition, the reference to the recognition of the revoked standard(s) will be removed from the GSSI website and other communication materials, and the revocation (and recognition of Scope Extension standard(s)) will be announced on GSSI's social media platforms.
4. If the Steering Board does not approve the recommendation, they will consult with the Benchmark Integrity Committee, who will act in an advisory capacity. After this consultation, the Steering Board will (in line with the GSSI Charter) come to a final decision.



### 4.3 Pre-Assessment Process

The Pre-Assessment is a shortened Benchmark Process meant for non-recognized schemes who want to assess their alignment with the Benchmark Framework. The activities followed are detailed on the next pages:

## 4.3 Pre-Assessment Process

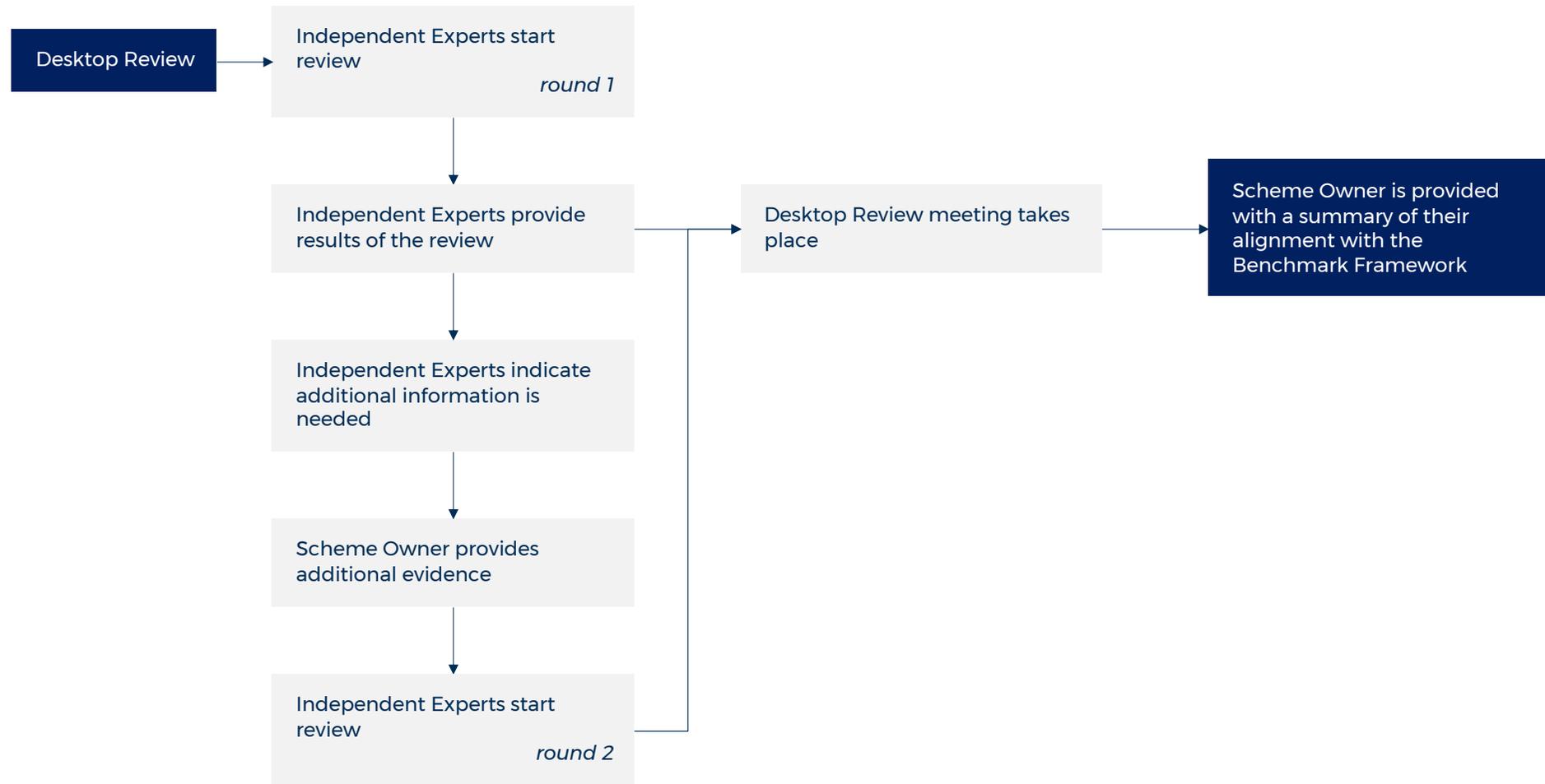
**Application** - Overview of activities

## 4.3 Pre-Assessment Process

**Application** – Details of activities

1. Scheme Owners who wish to undergo a Pre-Assessment contact GSSI via the website, which then requires the Secretariat to inform the Benchmarking Officer of the request within one week.
2. The Benchmarking Officer contacts the Scheme Owner within one week after being informed of the request and schedules an introductory call where they present the background on the Tool, guidance regarding the application process and detail the steps involved, timelines and fees for a Pre-Assessment Process.
3. Following the call, the Benchmarking Officer provides the Scheme Owner with a copy of the introductory presentation and requests whether the Scheme Owner wishes to proceed with a Pre-Assessment Process.
4. If the Scheme Owner confirms they wish to continue, the following will occur:
  - a. They will be provided with the Pre-Assessment Agreement.
  - b. The Benchmarking Officer will schedule the Scheme Owner's Training Program.
5. The Scheme Owner must sign the agreement and complete the Training Program to initiate the Pre-Assessment Process.
6. Once the above has been completed, the Benchmarking Officer will grant the Scheme Owner access to the Pre-Assessment Application Form
7. The Scheme Owner must complete the Application Form within 12 weeks and should contact the Benchmarking Officer with any questions related to its completion.
8. Four weeks before the Application Form must be submitted, the Benchmarking Officer will start assigning Independent Experts.
9. When the Scheme Owner submits their Application Form, the Benchmarking Officer will:
  - a. inform the Scheme Owner in writing of the Independent Experts.
  - b. review the Application for completeness within two weeks.
10. If the Application is considered incomplete the Benchmarking officer will inform the Scheme Owner and request that the missing information be provided within two weeks. The Benchmarking Officer will review up to a maximum of two additional submissions within those two weeks.
11. Once the Application is considered complete the process moves to the Desktop Review.

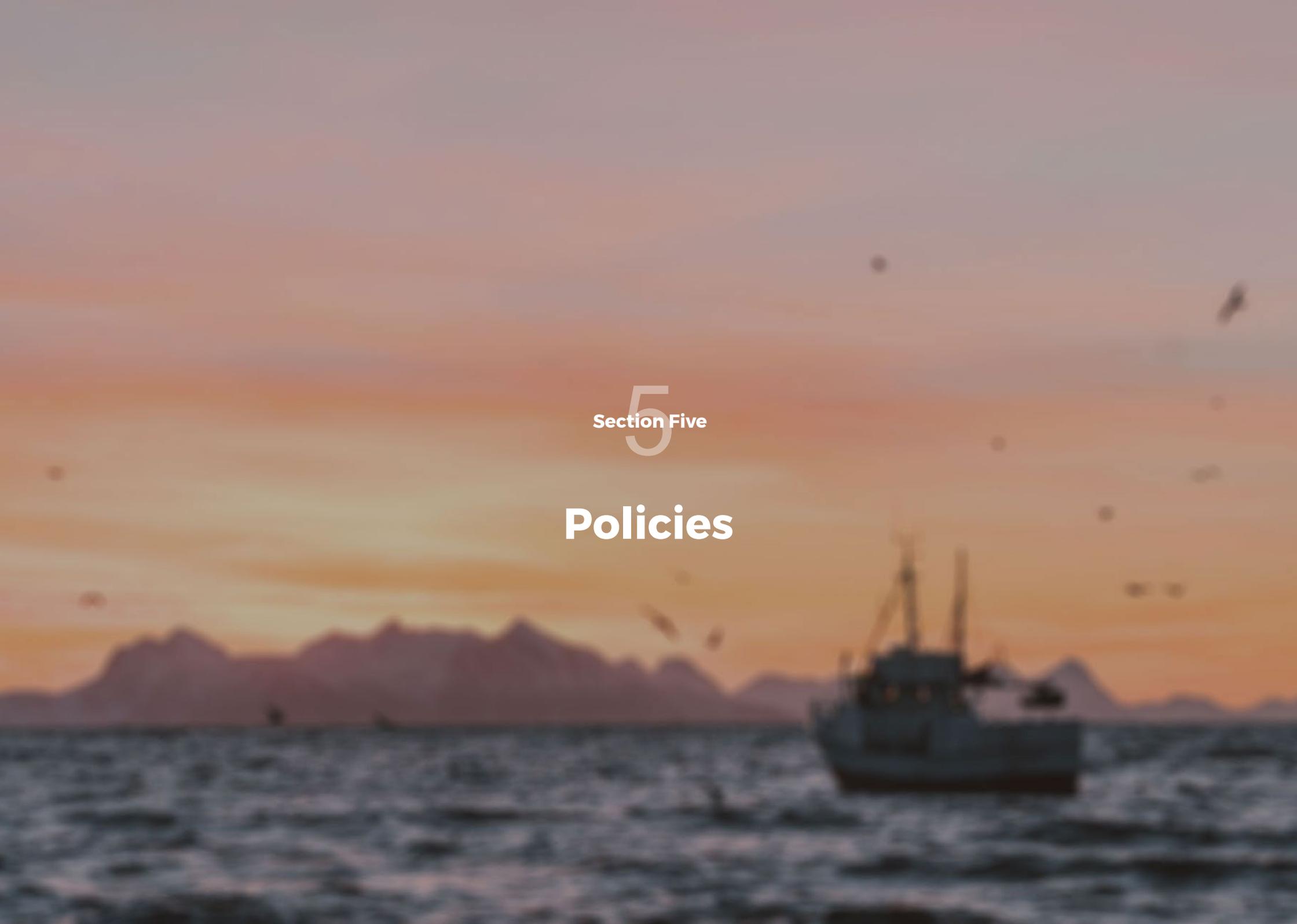
## 4.3 Pre-Assessment Process

**Desktop Review** – Overview of activities

### 4.3 Pre-Assessment Process

## Desktop Review – Details of activities

1. The Independent Experts will conduct a first round of review of the Scheme Owners alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool within a period of four weeks. During this time, the Experts may request additional information from the Scheme Owner, who must make sure to respond in a timely manner.  
in the form of a Benchmark Report, which summarized the schemes alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool.
2. After the first round of review concludes, the Experts will provide the results of their review, in writing, to the Benchmarking Officer and Scheme Owner. The Experts may indicate that they require additional evidence.
3. If the Experts request additional evidence, the Scheme Owner will have two weeks in which to provide it. Once submitted, the Independent Experts will conduct a second round of review within two weeks.
4. When the Independent Experts have concluded their review, the Benchmarking Officer will schedule a call to take place within three weeks. During this call any non-alignments will be discussed and explained by the Independent Experts and the Scheme Owner is free to ask any questions.
5. After the conclusion of the meeting the Scheme Owner will be provided with the results of the Pre-Assessment

The background of the slide is a blurred photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is a mix of soft pinks, oranges, and yellows. In the foreground, the dark blue water of the sea is visible with some whitecaps. A large, dark-colored boat is positioned in the lower right quadrant, moving towards the left. Numerous birds are scattered across the sky, some in flight and others perched on the horizon. The overall scene is serene and atmospheric.

Section Five

# Policies

# 5. Policies

## 5.1 Sample Size Policy

This policy is part of the Benchmark Processes (Version 2.0, 2021) to formalize the number of audit reports that need to be provided, per standard, by a Scheme Owner for a Benchmarking Process. The table below is used to determine the number.

Audit reports selected must relate to the latest version of the standard. In case multiple versions of the standard are operational (transition period), the number of certified entities should correspond to the total number of certified entities, including the older version of the standard. The selection of audit reports will be made by a GSSI Independent Expert and Scheme Owners shall provide GSSI with an overview of the certified entities for this selection.

Number of Certified Entities under standard	Benchmark Process or Scope Extension		Monitoring of Continued Alignment	
	Initial audits	Annual audits	Initial audits	Annual audits
1	1	1	0	1
2-3	2	2	0	1
4-5	2	2	0	1
6-10	3	2	1	1
11-20	4	2	1	2
20+	4	2	2	2

## 5.2. Conflict of Interest Policy

The GSSI Benchmark Process was designed to be independent, impartial and transparent. Conflicting interests that may undermine the credibility of this process must therefore be identified and declared.

Conflict of interests may arise for any Independent Expert or Benchmark Committee member. Relationships with any of the following parties are relevant (but not exclusive):

1. Seafood certification schemes
2. Accreditation bodies
3. Certification bodies
4. Private companies involved in seafood certification, such as service providers

A conflicting interest with any of the abovementioned parties could include, but is not limited to:

1. Have a stake in any of the abovementioned parties.
2. Have a personal relationship with any of the above-mentioned parties.
3. Have or have had financial dependencies on any of the abovementioned parties.

It is the policy of GSSI that the existence of any potential conflict of interest shall be disclosed before participation in, or service for, GSSI begins. It is the responsibility of all those affected to continuously be on the lookout for potential conflicts and to immediately make such disclosures.

Note: It is recognized that many of the representatives that participate in GSSI may have potential conflicting interests. The GSSI Conflict of Interest Policy is not aimed to be exclusionary but seeks to appropriately address any potential conflict of interest to ensure that work can be undertaken in a transparent and credible manner.

## 5.3 Objection Policy

The GSSI Objection Policy is designed to give a consistent approach on how the GSSI Secretariat shall handle and process an objection made by a Scheme Owner against a recommendation or decision as part of the GSSI Benchmark Process.

The GSSI Objection Policy is limited to four instances during a Scheme Owner's Benchmark Process – in other words, decisions made after the Scheme Owner has submitted their Application form and before the GSSI Steering Board makes the final decision of recognition. The decisions which a Scheme Owner can object to, are when:

1. The Independent Expert(s) conclusion in the Desktop Review leads to a recommendation to discontinue the process due to non-alignment with the Benchmark Framework.
2. The Independent Expert(s) conclusion in the Office Visit leads to a recommendation to discontinue the process due to non-alignment with the Benchmark Framework.
3. The Benchmark Committee do not recommend recognition of the Scheme Owner based on the Independent Expert conclusions, and de-

cide the process will be discontinued.

4. The Benchmark Committee recommend revoking recognition during the Monitoring of Continued Alignment Process.

When the applicant Scheme Owner wishes to object against the decision to discontinue the Benchmark Process or revoke recognition, the following procedure is followed:

1. The Scheme Owner must inform the Benchmarking Officer, in writing, within two weeks after the decision has been communicated to them. The Scheme Owner's objection must be accompanied by a letter providing details of where and why they disagree with the decision.
2. Upon submission of the objection letter by the Scheme Owner, the Benchmarking Officer will schedule a call with the Scheme Owner, Steering Board Liaison and Benchmark Integrity Committee to take place within four weeks.
3. The Benchmark Integrity Committee will be provided with the letter from the Scheme Owner and a summary of the Independent Expert or Benchmark Committee conclusions that led to the decision to discontinue the

Benchmark Process or revoke recognition.

4. During the call, the Steering Board Liaison shall summarize the process and the Scheme Owner will present why they disagree the decision. The Benchmark Integrity Committee will ask questions to ensure a full understanding of the situation. To conclude the meeting, the Benchmark Integrity Committee shall vote (in line with the GSSI Charter) on whether the process should be discontinued (for a Recognition Process) or whether to revoke recognition (for a MOCA Process). If any Benchmark Integrity Committee member is unable to attend the meeting, they will be provided with a summary of the meeting and must cast their vote electronically.
  - a. If the Benchmark Integrity Committee agree that the process should be discontinued (for a Recognition Process), the decision is final. If the Benchmark Integrity Committee decide that the process should continue, it will proceed with the applicable next steps in the Benchmark Process.
5. If the Benchmark Integrity Committee agree that the Scheme Owners recognition should be revoked (for a MOCA Process), this recommendation

is included in the communication to the Steering Board, who will make the final decision on whether to revoke the Scheme Owners recognition.

**5.4 Remote Office Visits**

GSSI requires an Office Visit to take place when a scheme is being benchmarked against the Global Benchmark Tool. The Benchmarking Officer will confirm the availability of the appropriate point-of-contact person at the Scheme Owner and determine the location of the Office Visit. It is the Benchmarking Officer who decides whether the Office Visit will take place in-person or remotely. It is standard that the Office Visit takes place in-person but exception in the form of a remote Office Visit can be made in case:

- a. The Scheme Owner and Independent Expert(s) are equipped for a remote Office Visit without compromising the completeness and/or thoroughness of the benchmarking process, and
- b. The Independent Expert is confident an adequate Office Visit can be carried out remotely, and
- c. An in-person Office Visit is deemed not possible or not desirable because of one of the following scenarios:

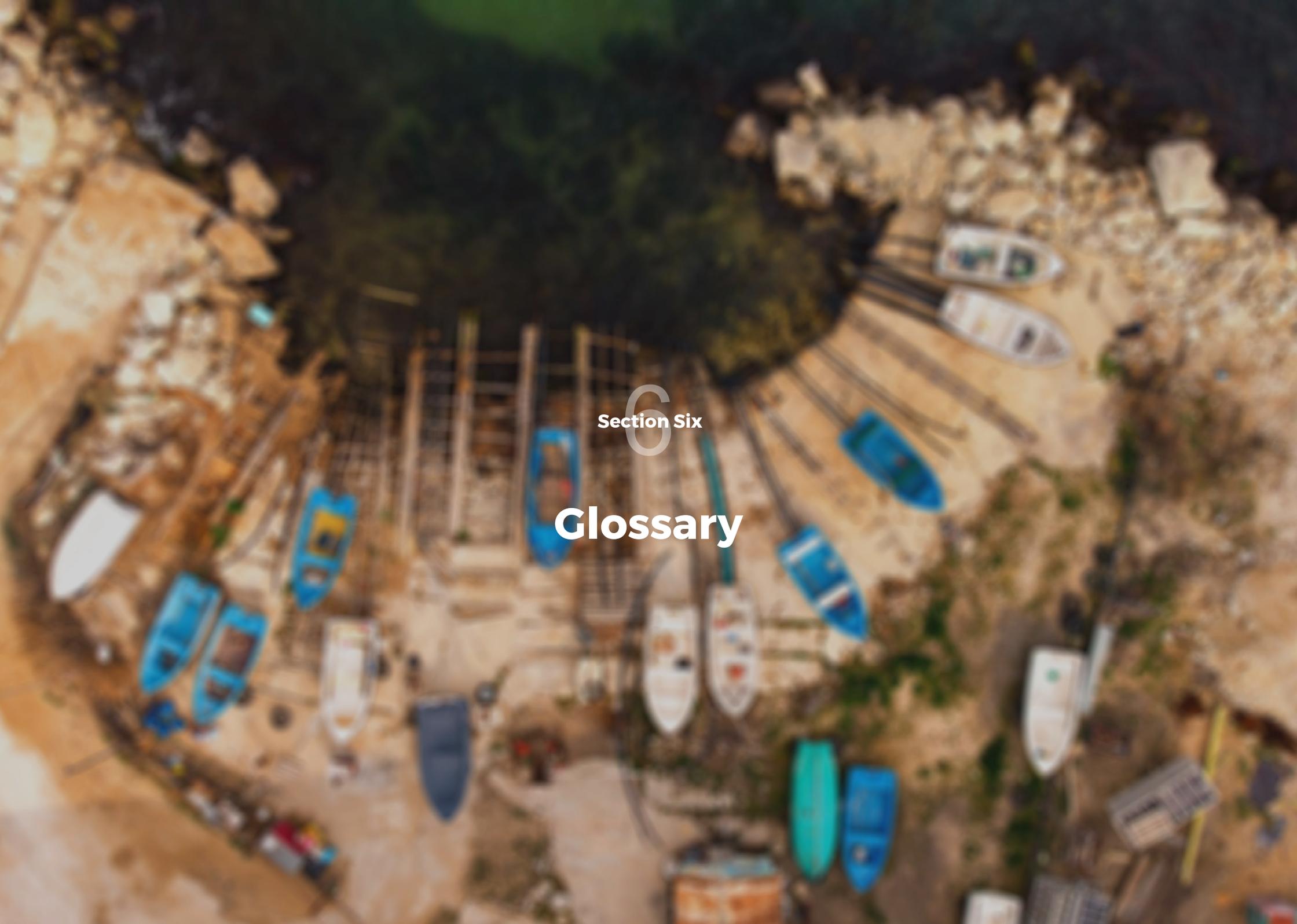
**Unfavorable travel conditions or concern over health and safety:**

- Extraordinary circumstances prevent safe travel to the office of the Scheme Owner, e.g., civil unrest, wide-spread disease, UN embargo; or
- Entry/re-entry restrictions in the destination country of the Scheme Owner office or in the country of origin of the Independent Expert (e.g., mandatory quarantine upon arrival)

**Reasons related to the Scheme Owner:**

- The Scheme Owner has been GSSI-recognized previously under an earlier version of the Global Benchmark Tool and the current Benchmarking Process is their re-benchmarking under an updated version.

Once the Benchmarking Officer has decided whether the Office Visit shall take place in-person or remotely, the decision will be shared with the Scheme Owner and Independent Experts.

An aerial photograph of a boatyard. Numerous boats of various colors (blue, white, teal) are stored on land, some on wooden racks. A few boats are in the water. The background shows a rocky coastline and a body of water.

Section Six

**Glossary**

## 6.1 Glossary

<b>Application Form</b>	The Application Form is comprised of the evidence a Scheme Owner must provide to show alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool. This consists of a detailed explanation of their alignment as well as documentation to support this.
<b>Benchmark Agreement</b>	The formal and legally binding agreement signed by GSSI and the applicant Scheme Owner
<b>Benchmark Report</b>	The final document detailing a Scheme Owners alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool which cannot be changed
<b>Benchmarking Officer</b>	The representative from GSSI who is responsible for coordinating a Benchmarking Process
<b>CCRF</b>	Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>GSSI</b>	Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative
<b>Interim Benchmark Report</b>	The provisional document detailing a Scheme Owners alignment with the Global Benchmark Tool which is a precursor to the Benchmark Report and can be changed
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>Training Program</b>	A set of modules which Scheme Owners and Independent Experts must complete in order to participate in a Benchmarking Process. These modules provide information necessary to complete the process correctly.
<b>UN</b>	United Nations