

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURES

1. Policy on Complaints and Appeals

USOCA is committed to maintaining a transparent, impartial, and efficient mechanism for handling complaints and appeals. All complaints related to USOCA's operations, staff, or services, as well as those against certified operators, shall be addressed promptly, fairly, and in a non-discriminatory manner. Appeals against certification decisions shall also be processed in line with ISO/IEC 17065 and NPOP requirements, ensuring that no party is subjected to bias or undue influence.

All stakeholders, including operators, producers, processors, handlers, traders, interested parties, and members of the public, have the right to lodge a complaint or appeal. Complaints and appeals must be submitted in writing and will be formally documented, investigated, and resolved in a timely manner.

2. Complaints Handling Procedure

a. Receipt of Complaints

- Complaints may be submitted via email, fax, letter, or telephone.
- For telephonic complaints, complainants shall be requested to submit the matter in writing for official consideration.
- The Joint Director/Deputy Director, with the approval of Management, shall review all complaints received.
- Complaints and subsequent actions shall be duly entered in the Complaints Register.

b. Acknowledgment and Processing

- Each complaint shall be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt.
- USOCA may request additional information or supporting evidence from the complainant.
- Complaints shall be resolved, where feasible, within **15 working days**.

c. Investigation

- The Certification Officer (CO) or Senior Certification Inspector shall investigate the complaint, review relevant records, and prepare an investigation report.

- Where applicable, show-cause notices or warning letters shall be issued to the concerned operator. Operators must respond within **15 days** of receipt.
- The matter, with full records, shall be placed before the Management Committee for review and decision-making.

d. Resolution and Corrective Action

- Corrective actions, where required, shall be implemented by the Quality Manager (QM)/Certification Officer and monitored for effectiveness by the Management Committee.
- Sanctions, if applicable, shall be imposed in accordance with the approved **USOCA Sanction Catalogue**.
- Final decisions and actions taken shall be communicated to the complainant in writing. No verbal communication shall be considered official.

e. Complaints against Certified Operators

- Complaints alleging non-compliance by certified operators shall be investigated promptly.
- Depending on the severity of the non-compliance, USOCA shall notify relevant authorities of the complaint and the measures taken.

f. Complaints against USOCA

- Complaints regarding USOCA operations or personnel shall be resolved within **15 working days**.
- If the complainant is unsatisfied with the resolution, they may escalate the matter to the Management Committee.
- Complaints involving USOCA officials shall be handled by the immediate reporting authority.
- Complaints against the Chief Executive Officer (Director) shall be reviewed by the Management Committee; decisions supported by a minimum of four committee members shall be valid.
- Resolutions shall be documented and communicated formally by the QM.

3. Appeals Procedure

a. Scope of Appeals

- Appeals may be filed by operators or applicants concerning:
 - Certification decisions (grant, refusal, suspension, or withdrawal).
 - Sanctions imposed under the USOCA Sanction Catalogue.
 - Other decisions directly affecting certification status.

- Appeal procedure shall be inform to the applicant at the time of certification.

b. Submission of Appeals

- Appeals must be submitted in writing to USOCA within **30 calendar days** of notification of the contested decision.
- Appeals shall be lodged with the Quality Manager, who will register them in the Appeals Register and acknowledge receipt to the appellant.

c. Appeals Review Process

- Appeals shall be reviewed by the Appeals Panel/Committee constituted by the Management Committee, ensuring no conflict of interest with the personnel involved in the original decision and it should be independent of the certification activities.
- The appellant shall be provided with an opportunity to present their case.
- The Appeals Panel shall deliberate, record findings, and make a final decision within **45 days** of receiving the appeal.

d. Decision and Communication

- The decision of the Appeals Panel shall be final and binding within the framework of NPOP and ISO/IEC 17065 requirements.
- The outcome, along with reasons for the decision, shall be formally communicated in writing to the appellant.

4. Records and Confidentiality

- All complaints and appeals, along with their investigation reports, decisions, and corrective actions, shall be documented and maintained securely by the Quality Manager.
- Information shall be treated with strict confidentiality and disclosed only to relevant parties as required by law, accreditation bodies, or regulatory authorities.