

Gold Standard - Northmore Gordon

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Details:

Home › Glossary › Gold Standard

Gold Standard

The Gold Standard is an accreditation scheme for voluntary carbon offset and renewable energy projects. It provides certification that projects meet rigorous standards for emissions reductions or renewable energy generation, and that they contribute to sustainable development outcomes. Projects certified under the Gold Standard generate tradable instruments-primarily Verified Emission Reductions (VERs)-that represent genuine, additional environmental benefits. The scheme is used by organisations seeking credible carbon credits or renewable attributes to support emissions-reduction claims and meet voluntary net-zero commitments.

Related guidance

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What is the Gold Standard, as defined by Northmore Gordon?

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What tradable instruments are associated with the Gold Standard?

The primary tradable instrument associated with the Gold Standard is the Verified Emission Reduction (VER), which represents one tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent reduced or avoided by a certified project. The Gold Standard label can also be applied to Certified Emission Reductions (CERs) from the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism and International Renewable Energy Certificates (I-RECs) when those instruments meet the Gold Standard's requirements for sustainable development and project additionality. Each instrument type belongs to its own programme with distinct eligibility rules and retirement procedures.

Can the Gold Standard label be applied to certificate types other than VERs?

Yes, the Gold Standard label can be applied to CERs (Certified Emission Reductions) and I-RECs (International Renewable Energy Certificates) where projects meet Gold Standard requirements around

sustainable development and project additionality. However, these are distinct instrument families with separate creation, ownership and retirement pathways. A CER, I-REC or VER remains an instrument belonging to its own programme - they should not be treated as interchangeable units. The Gold Standard certification indicates quality and additionality criteria have been met, but the specific instrument type determines its eligible uses and accounting treatment.

What requirements must a project meet for the Gold Standard label to apply to CERs or I-RECs?

To qualify for the Gold Standard label, projects must demonstrate sustainable development benefits alongside emissions reductions or renewable energy generation. Projects must also establish additionality - meaning the intervention would not have occurred under business-as-usual conditions. The Gold Standard assessment examines whether the project goes beyond regulatory requirements and contributes measurable social or environmental co-benefits. We can assist organisations in evaluating whether proposed carbon or renewable projects meet these criteria and in preparing the evidence necessary to support Gold Standard certification applications.

How does the Gold Standard differ from Australian certificate schemes?

The Gold Standard is a voluntary certification scheme applied to carbon and renewable projects globally, focusing on environmental integrity and sustainable development outcomes. It differs from mandatory Australian schemes like the ACCU Scheme, NSW Energy Savings Scheme, and Victorian Energy Upgrades, which operate within specific jurisdictional frameworks and regulatory requirements. The Gold Standard also differs from other renewable certificate pathways such as REGOs, LGCs, STCs and I-RECs in that it provides an overlay of quality assurance rather than defining the instrument type itself. Organisations should clarify whether their project requires Gold Standard accreditation or domestic scheme compliance, or both.

What role can Northmore Gordon play in Gold Standard project assessment and management?

Our environmental certificate services encompass project registration, certificate creation and trading, alongside engineering and commercial assessment. For Gold Standard projects, we can assist with feasibility assessment, baseline establishment, measurement and verification design, documentation of sustainable development outcomes, and due-diligence support for certificate ownership and retirement. Our carbon advisory capabilities also extend to helping organisations understand how Gold Standard credits align with their emissions-reduction pathway and voluntary net-zero commitments, and how to treat them correctly in carbon-accounting boundaries and public claims.

How should an organisation treat Gold Standard certificates in its emissions inventory or sustainability reporting?

Gold Standard certificates represent real environmental benefits, but their treatment in an emissions inventory depends on whether they are being retired to support a specific emissions-reduction claim. Purchasing a Gold Standard credit does not automatically reduce an organisation's reported emissions - the boundary and accounting method must be specified first. Under GHG Protocol standards, if Gold Standard credits are retired to support a Scope 1 or 2 claim, the organisation must clearly document which emissions are being offset and explain the accounting boundary. Do not add Gold Standard credits to an inventory total without applying the relevant reporting framework correctly. We can assist in establishing the appropriate boundary and retention of supporting evidence.

What should an organisation check before committing to purchase Gold Standard certificates?

Before relying on Gold Standard certificates as part of an investment case or emissions strategy, establish the project's registration status, method, crediting period and issued-certificate records. Confirm the certificate quantity, ownership rights, price assumptions and retirement timeline. Check compatibility with any other incentives or schemes the project might participate in - for example, a renewable energy project creating Gold Standard VERs cannot simultaneously create REGOs or

I-RECs for the same electricity generation. Request an auditable commercial model showing projected issuance, pricing scenarios, and confidence in credit delivery. Do not treat an announced project or promotional claim as proof of certificate availability. We can support due-diligence assessment of Gold Standard projects and instruments.

Where does Gold Standard fit within a broader environmental certificate and renewable strategy?

The Gold Standard addresses voluntary carbon-offset and renewable-energy markets, typically used by organisations pursuing net-zero commitments beyond regulatory requirements. It sits alongside mandatory Australian schemes (ACCU, NSW ESS, VEU) and other renewable pathways (REGOs, LGCs, STCs, I-RECs), which operate within specific jurisdictions and regulatory frameworks. An organisation may use Gold Standard credits to address residual emissions that cannot be reduced through operational improvements or domestic renewable procurement. The choice between Gold Standard and other instruments depends on the organisation's geographical scope, the types of projects available, cost, sustainability criteria and accounting framework. We can help assess which instruments are most appropriate for a specific emissions-reduction goal.