

Certification Review and Complaints Process

Social Traders provides the only social enterprise certification in Australia. The certification framework is world-leading in its depth and adaptability, and the process is rigorous. Originally co-designed with Minter Ellison and EY in 2018, the certification framework has evolved over time to cater for new models of social enterprise that have emerged. The Social Traders certification advisory group has guided the evolution of the framework and provides an independent third-party perspective on complex applications and emerging social enterprise models. In 2021, our certification framework was reviewed and strengthened by EY, ensuring our framework is still fit-for-purpose as the sector evolves.

Recertification, Audit and Review

Social Traders certification framework includes various safeguards that ensure that certifications are periodically reviewed and the information collected is up-to-date and accurate.

Recertification: Certification is renewed every three years for an established business, or one year for startup business with less than two full years of trade.

Audits: For enterprises on a three year certification, we conduct an annual audit of a random sample of enterprises, using a risk-based approach.

Terms & Conditions: Social Traders T&Cs require that where there are any changes to the ownership, governance, organisational objectives or solvency status during a certification period, Social Traders should be advised. Where this occurs, Social Traders will conduct a review of the certification.

Complaints: From time to time, questions or issues about a social enterprise may be raised by the broader community. This may also prompt a review of the social enterprise. Refer to following pages regarding our complaints handling process.

Complaints about your certification experience

Outcome review

For enterprises that have applied for certification and have had their application declined, Social Traders offer the option of a secondary review. In this instance, the application would be referred to our [Certification Advisory Group](#)

Complaints regarding the process

For enterprises that have complaints about their experience through the certification process, complaints can be made to:

- Georgina Cohen, Head of Certification at Georgina.Cohen@Socialtraders.com.au; OR
- Alex Hooke, Executive Director, Advocacy and Engagement at Alex.Hooke@socialtraders.com.au

Complaints about certified social enterprises

Social Traders will undertake a thorough review in response to stakeholder questions and complaints that raise concerns regarding a certified social enterprise, to ensure appropriate action is taken where there is evidence of misconduct or misrepresentation.

As the certifier for social enterprise in Australia, the scope of any review will be limited to credible and specific claims against a certified social enterprise including:

1. The social enterprise is not aligned with the criteria outlined in our certification framework.
2. The social enterprise is operating in a way that compromises the values and mission of Social Traders.

Concerns of applicability of certification criteria

In the first instance, the review will focus on re-assessing the social enterprise against our key criteria:

1. Has a defined primary social, cultural, or environmental purpose consistent with a public or community benefit,
2. Derives a substantial portion of its income from trade, and
3. Invests efforts and resources into its purpose such that public or community benefit outweighs private benefit.

There are 6 guiding principles that we use to help determine primacy of purpose, these are outlined in our [certification guidance notes](#) (page 5), and will provide an indication of the areas we review. In addition, we look at governance and ownership, and ask questions about approach to wages and wages policy.

Concerns of integrity of a certified social enterprise

Social Traders exists to create a thriving social enterprise sector that significantly contributes to a more inclusive and equitable Australia. Certification of social enterprises underpins this vision. So, where the integrity of certification is compromised, we consider this to be to the detriment of the reputation of the wider social enterprise sector, along with the brand and reputation of Social Traders. As such, instances of this nature will be taken seriously.

Our terms and conditions outline:

“Social Traders, in its sole discretion, may restrict, suspend (and lift any such suspension) or terminate a business’s status as a Certified Social Enterprise Member (...) if in Social Traders’ reasonable opinion, the business engages in a conduct which is materially prejudicial to the goodwill or reputation of Social Traders.”

Where there is evidence that conduct of a certified social enterprise has brought Social Traders into disrepute and is in breach of our terms and conditions, this will prompt further investigation to assess the integrity of the social enterprise and may result in suspension or termination of the certification.

Process

Where a review is prompted by a community member raising concerns or questions, the review will always include at a minimum:

- meeting with the complainant to understand the context and details of the complaint or question being raised,
- meeting with the social enterprise to flag that a complaint has been raised. Social Traders will present the areas of concern and provide an opportunity for the social enterprise to respond.

Where appropriate, Social Traders may also conduct reference checks with related stakeholders relevant to the complaint. Social Traders will advise all parties prior to a reference check being completed.

The identity of anyone raising complaints or questions will not be shared with the social enterprise without the explicit permission of the complainant. Where there are concerns about anonymity, the framing of the issues to be presented back to the social enterprise will be reviewed and agreed upon with the complainant.

Contact Us

If you have a complaint that you think falls within the parameters outlined above, please submit an enquiry via email to certification@socialtraders.com.au

Include in your email:

- Your name and contact details,
- The name of the social enterprise that is the subject of your concern,
- Specific details of your complaint,
- Any supporting documentation or evidence, if available.

Social Traders will endeavour to respond promptly, at most you can expect a response within 10 business days.