



Australian Government
**Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry**

Requirements to Issue and Manage Organic Goods Certificates



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) is the Australian government authority responsible for certifying Australian food and agricultural exports. The department provides export certification and declarations in-line with Australia's export legislation and importing country requirements, including for exported organic goods.
- 1.2 Goods labelled and/or described as including ingredients that are organic, bio-dynamic, biological, ecological (or any other similar description) which are exported from Australia, must be certified by an approved certifying body (on the department's behalf) and accompanied by the department's 'Organic Goods Certificate' (OGC). This is a legal export requirement under the Export Control (Organic Goods) Rules 2021 (subsection 2-11 refers).
- 1.3 Australia's organic export legal and policy framework provides the basis for equivalence arrangements with trading partners and consists of:
- a) the Export Control (Organic Goods) Rules 2021 (the Rules) (a current version is available at <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2021L00339>)
 - b) the [National Standard for Organic and Bio-Dynamic Produce](#) (the National Standard). The National Standard is Australia's technical standard for exported organic goods.
 - c) Policy documents outlining certain requirements to ensure the organic export legal and policy framework is operating as intended. These include:
 - o Administrative Arrangements for Approved arrangements
 - o Requirements to Issue and Manage Organic Goods Certificates (this document)

2. Overview

- 2.1 This document was developed for Approved certifying bodies, certified organic operators and exporters. It outlines requirements for:
- a) the completion of OGCs by certified organic/bio-dynamic operators and exporters, and Approved certifying bodies; and
 - b) the issuance of OGCs by Approved certifying bodies on the department's behalf; and
 - c) the ongoing management of OGCs by certified organic/bio-dynamic operators and exporters and Approved certifying bodies.
- 2.2 The content for this document was prepared in accordance with the legal and policy framework for Australia's agricultural exports – which commenced on 28 March 2021, consisting of the [Export Control Act 2020](#) and the Rules, the National Standards for Organic and Biodynamic Produce and policy documents that govern the operations of certifiers and their management of government certificates.

3. Related documents and information

3.1 This document should be read in conjunction with the organic exports legal and policy framework information available on the department's [website](#), the Administrative Arrangements for Approved arrangements document, the Manual of Importing Country Requirements (MICOR) and [organic export notices](#).

4. Why is an OGC required?

4.1 The OGC ensures that organic goods have been subject to a regulatory system that guarantees the organic production system underpinning the organic claims. The OGC is a legislated export permit that allows organic goods to be legally exported from Australia.

4.2 On occasion, the OGC can also provide assurance to an importing country that the goods have been produced in accordance with Australia's organic export legal and policy framework and importing country requirements. In these instances, the OGC can function as both an export permit from Australia and an import permit for the importing country.

5. Export certification standards for organic and bio-dynamic goods

5.1 Organic and bio-dynamic goods for export can be certified in one of two ways, either:

- a) Certified to the Australia Government-owned National Standard for any market with which the Australian Government has an equivalence arrangement or other open market (no organic certification standard in place), or
- b) Certified to a standard recognised by a foreign government under a conformity assessment arrangement with an Australian-based certifying body. An OGC can be issued for organic goods certified to a private standard (one owned by a certification body, industry services body or a foreign government) that is required to meet a conformity assessment arrangement.

6. Conformity assessment arrangements

6.1 A conformity assessment arrangement occurs only between an Australian-based organic approved certifying body and the relevant importing country authority, with responsibility for certified organic goods.

6.2 Conformity assessment arrangements are made strictly in accordance with the requirements of the importing country. Certified organic operators and exporters who wish to access a conformity assessment arrangement, must be certified to the National Standard and the standard required by the importing country.

6.3 An OGC can be issued under a conformity assessment arrangement provided that the approved certifying body is satisfied that the National Standard and importing country standard requirements have been met and importing country requirements have also been met.

6.4 Goods produced, manufactured or processed under a conformity assessment arrangement cannot be exported to other countries unless written advice from the importing country's competent authority, managing this direct recognition system, confirms this is acceptable.

7. Role of Approved certifying bodies under the organic export legal and policy framework

7.1 Under the *Export Control Act 2020*, the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the Secretary) may, on application by a person, approve a proposed arrangement for export certification operations for organic goods.

7.2 Approved certifying bodies are holders of an approved arrangement for export certification operations for organic goods.

7.3 As holders of an approved arrangement, approved certifying bodies are responsible for ensuring export certification for organic goods complies with both the Australian organic export legal and policy framework and importing country requirements.

7.4 Approved certifying bodies undertake the following functions on behalf of the department:

- a) Assess organic operators and exporters to determine compliance to the National Standard and importing country requirements; and
- b) Provide recognition of an organic operator's and exporter's ability to comply with the organic export legal and policy framework; and
- c) Issue OGCs (export documentation) for consignments of organic goods being exported.

7.5 All approved certifying bodies are assessed by the department for both initial recognition of the Approved arrangement, and at least annually after that, to verify compliance with the organic export legal and policy framework and their respective approved arrangement.

7.6 In addition, some trading partners have additional importing country requirements that approved certifying bodies must meet should they wish to certify to a particular export market (For more information, see the Manual of Importing Country Requirements MICOR)).

- a) An example is the European Union (EU) requirement that all organic certifiers must be certified to ISO 17065. In this instance, organic goods bound for the EU market can only be certified by Approved certifying bodies who hold this certification.

8. Obtaining an OGC form (template)

- 8.1 The department will provide to all approved certifying bodies, a current version of the OGC form (template) to be used for the export of organic goods to all markets. This form (template) will be approved by the Secretary (Subsection 2-11(4) of the Rules, refers) and will be provided, by approved certifying bodies, to certified organic operators and exporters as required.
- 8.2 The OGC form (template) is subject to change based on Australian organic export regulatory requirements and importing country requirements. The Secretary will approve any necessary amendments to the OGC form (template), and a new version will be provided to approved certifying bodies where required.
- 8.3 Approved certifying bodies provide information on the completion of the OGC form to certified organic operators and exporters and ensure the form is completed correctly.

9. Requirements for handling official Australian Government documentation

- 9.1 As OGCs are official Australian Government export documentation and accountable forms, all reasonable care should be undertaken to reduce the occurrence of fraudulent use of export certification, including limiting and controlling its distribution.
- 9.2 The OGC form must not be amended with the addition or removal of content. The Rules require that the form (template) be approved by the Secretary (Subsection 2-11 (4) of the Rules, refers). Any change to the form (template) by an approved certifying body or certified organic operator or exporter is therefore in breach of the regulation and may be subject to regulatory action.
- 9.3 Management of OGCs as accountable forms must be documented in the approved certifying bodies approved arrangement. It must describe how the approved certifying body manages this process both at the certifier level and at the operator and exporter levels.
- 9.4 Additionally, approved certifying bodies must keep records to demonstrate how they manage OGCs as accountable forms (Subsection 11-7 (1,2) of the Rules, refers).

10. Conditions for the issuing of an OGC

- 10.1 For the purposes of subsections 62(1) and (2) of the Act, the Rules may make provisions for and in relation to the issue of an OGC in relation to prescribed organic goods that are to be, or that have been, exported.
- 10.2 Approved certifying bodies, and certified organic operators/exporters are responsible for confirming the following requirements have been met prior to an OGC being issued:
- a) The goods have been produced, prepared and labelled in accordance with the requirements set out in the National Standard;
 - b) the applicable requirements of the Act have been complied with;

- c) all importing country requirements have been met;
- d) all other Australian export requirements (including health, safety and biosecurity requirements) have been addressed.

10.3 Only organic goods which have been certified to the National Standard (or equivalent standard) or certified under a conformity assessment arrangement are eligible for an OGC

- a) Products and/or ingredients that are certified under a private standard (without a conformity assessment arrangement in place) are not eligible for an OGC.
- b) Imported organic and bio-dynamic goods or organic and bio-dynamic ingredients used in the manufacture of organic goods, must be produced, prepared and labelled in ways that are equivalent to the National Standard to be eligible for an OGC. *
 - i. For the purposes of subsection 28(4) of the Act, imported organic goods are not taken to be prescribed goods for the purposes of the Act if the organic goods are:
 - a) Imported into Australian territory and held in bond at all times before being exported; or
 - b) are imported into Australian territory and then exported in the same covering in which, and with the same trade description with which, they were imported.
- c) Approved certifying bodies that issue OGCs to exporters (e.g., third-party traders) upon request, must have a system in place, under their respective Approved arrangement to ensure the OGC is managed as an accountable Australian Government form.

10.4 An OGC **must be issued** prior to the consignment (to which the certificate relates) departing Australian territory (Subsection 2-4 of the Rules, refers).

- a) The export of prescribed organic goods from Australia is prohibited unless the exporter of the organic goods holds an OGC in relation to the organic goods and the OGC is in force at the time the organic goods are exported.
- b) An OGC will not be issued if it contains writing other than English (with no translation), is illegible, has been altered and contains missing information/data.
- c) The OGC must be completed in full and signed by the organic operator or exporter prior to the OGC being submitted to an approved certifying body.
- d) An OGC cannot be backdated.

10.5 An OGC must not be signed/stamped electronically by an organic operator or exporter, or an approved certifying body, unless prior approval has been given by the department.

10.6 A code/cipher/numbering system must be developed by approved certifying bodies for uniquely identifying each OGC.

- a) All reasonable care is to be undertaken to avoid duplicate OGCs being issued.
- b) If duplicate OGCs have been issued, the department must be immediately notified and advised of the corrective action(s) undertaken to rectify the non-conformance.

10.7 An OGC is not required for organic cosmetic goods (for both human and pet use) unless it is an importing country requirement seeking to confirm the organic claim (Subsection 2-1 (2) of the Rules, refers).

10.8 An OGC is not required for organic exports to New Zealand unless there is a specific importing country requirement (Section 2-1 (3) of the Rules, refers).

*Note: Under Country-of-Origin labelling requirements, imported products cannot be labelled/marked as 'product of Australia' or 'Australia Made' if it has not undergone a substantial transformation process in Australia. See the [Country of Origin labelling online tool](#) for further assistance.

11. Information required for an OGC

11.1 Approved certifying bodies can develop an application form for OGC applications and circulate this form to organic operators/exporters. The application form does not require approval from the Secretary as it is not considered an accountable form under the Rules.

11.2 All sections of the OGC must be completed (ideally electronically) by the organic operator or exporter and must be provided to the approved certifying body, prior to the consignment departure date.

11.3 Under subsection 2-12 of the Rules, an OGC must contain the following information:

- a) the kind and quantity of the organic goods;
- b) the name and accreditation/identification number of the last organic operator involved in the operations to produce or prepare the organic goods for export (for each good listed on the OGC);
- c) the importing country for the organic goods;
- d) the date the organic goods are proposed to be exported;
- e) the issuing body for the organic goods certificate;
- f) that the approved certifying body reasonably believes that:
 - i. export operations in relation to the organic goods have been carried out in accordance with the National Organic Standard (or equivalent standard); and
 - ii. all importing country requirements relating to the export operations and the organic goods have been met.

- 11.4 Where there is related export documentation, the product and consignment details on the OGC must match the product and consignment details contained in the related export documentation (e.g., Notice of Intention, health certificate, phytosanitary certificate, Export Certificates and Request for Permit (RFP)). This information must also be recorded in the area designated for 'related certification' on the OGC.
- 11.5 The description of the commodity and consignment to which the OGC relates must be clearly identified using a 'lot identifier' or date coding.
- a) The description area of an OGC should contain full product description details including the trade product description (name, size, volume, weight and quantity), batch numbers, expiry/ best before dates, container numbers/marks and the total number of packages.
- 11.6 After all the information has been added to the OGC by the organic operator/exporter; any blank areas remaining on the OGC must have a line put through the relevant field, to avoid any additional information being added, after the OGC has been issued.

12. Issuing an OGC

- 12.1 An authorised representative from the approved certifying body that has been assessed by the department as a 'fit and proper person' will review and verify the information provided on the OGC. An approved certifying body is considered an issuing body for organic goods certificates (Subsection 2-14 (a) of the Rules, refers).
- 12.2 Subsection 2-13 of the Rules dictates that an OGC may be issued when:
- a) Export operations in relation to the organic goods have been carried out in accordance with the National Standard
 - b) The applicable requirements of the *Export Control Act 2020*, in relation to export operations and the organic goods have been complied with
 - c) All importing country requirements relating to the export operations and the organic goods have been met.
- 12.3 Applicants are required to provide additional or corrected information to an approved certifying body or the Secretary as part of the OGC application process (Subsection 2-15 (a, b, c) of the Rules, refers) where:
- a) the applicant reasonably suspects that the integrity of the organic goods cannot be ensured;
 - b) the applicant reasonably suspects that operations to produce or prepare the organic goods for export have not been carried out in accordance with the National Organic Standard;
 - c) the applicant reasonably suspects that an importing country requirement relating to the export operations or the organic goods, has not been met.

12.4 If the goods are eligible for an OGC and meet importing country requirements, the authorised representative will certify the goods by signing and stamping the OGC.

- a) The signed and stamped OGC can be provided to the organic operator/exporter either electronically (email) or by mail.
- b) If an OGC has been issued by an approved certifying body, the organic operator/exporter, or other responsible person, must not alter the information contained thereon.
- c) The organic operator/exporter will then use the 'issued' OGC to facilitate the export of the consignment.
- d) The organic operator/exporter should ensure that the issued OGC has complete and accurate information before using it for export.

12.5 The use of attachments for OGCs is not permitted. Where all items do not fit onto the OGC form (template), the use of multiple OGCs for single consignments is the department's protocol. The department will consider, on a case-by-case basis, requests to allow the use of attachments for particular consignments.

- a) No attachments to OGCs are permitted unless prior written approval has been given by the department for that consignment.
- b) If approval is given by the department to use attachments, it must be clear that the attached pages constitute a single OGC. This is managed through each page being identified with the same unique certificate number, the pages being numbered (e.g., 1 of 2) and each page being initialled and stamped by the approved certifying body.

12.6 Where multiple OGCs are used for a single consignment, the related OGC numbers should be identified in the related certification box of each OGC. For example, if OGC's 11000, 11001 and 11002 were all used for one consignment, the related certification box of:

- a) 11000 would include "Page 1 of 3 refer to OGC 11000, 11001 & 11002"
- b) 11001 would include "Page 2 of 3 refer to OGC 11000, 11001 & 11002"
- c) 11002 would include "Page 3 of 3 refer to OGC 11000, 11001 & 11002".

12.7 Where organic goods are imported and not substantially transformed, the approved certifying body must, prior to the issuing of an OGC:

- a) assess an original export certificate issued by a competent authority (control authority) or government approved certification body (control body) from the third country for **each** consignment of goods. This certificate must include, at minimum, the following information:

- i. The kind and quantity of the organic goods;
- ii. The name and, (if available) identification/accreditation number, of the last organic operator involved in the operations to produce or prepare the organic goods for export (for each good listed on the OGC);
- iii. The exporting country for the organic goods;
- iv. The importing country for the organic goods;
- v. The date the organic goods were proposed to be exported;
- vi. The issuing body for the export certificate.

13. Refusing to issue an OGC

13.1 An application for an OGC may be refused on the following grounds (Subsection 2-16 of the Rules, refers):

- a) the applicant failed to provide sufficient evidence that operations to produce or prepare the organic goods for export were carried out in accordance with the National Standard (or equivalent standard);
- b) compliance with the National Standard (or equivalent standard) in relation to the organic goods is not sufficient to ensure that all relevant importing country requirements relating to the organic goods and the operations to produce or prepare them for export are met;
- c) the export of the organic goods could result in trade in the export of goods from Australian territory being adversely affected;
- d) Other grounds set out in paragraphs 67(3)(a) to (f) of the Act.

13.2 An OGC that does not meet the requirements for export, contains errors, is illegible, has been altered or is incomplete must not be processed by the approved certifying body.

13.3 The approved certifying body must notify the organic operator/exporter of the refusal and the reasons why the OGC application was refused.

13.4 The refused OGC and reasons for refusal must be documented by the approved certifying body and retained for a period of no less than 5 years.

14. Cancelling an OGC

14.1 An OGC that was issued prior to departure can be cancelled by the approved certifying body at the request of the operator or exporter.

- 14.2 If a consignment has already departed Australia, an OGC can still be cancelled.
- 14.3 An OGC can be cancelled when the organic goods are no longer intended to be exported to the country in relation to which the certificate was issued.
- 14.4 Where there is a need for an OGC to be cancelled and/or replaced, the operator/exporter must notify the approved certifying body as soon as possible to ensure an OGC can be issued prior to the consignment's departure.
- 14.5 It is the responsibility of the operator/exporter to ensure that all information provided on the OGC is accurate and correct to avoid the cancellation and replacement of an OGC.
- 14.6 Changes in transport arrangements are out of the control of an exporter and are a valid reason for cancellation and replacement OGC requests (see section 16 of this document for more information).
- 14.7 Repeated instances of OGC cancellation and replacement requests due to inaccurate product information on the OGC should be avoided where possible.
- 14.8 The cancelled OGC must be returned to the approved certifying body within 10 business days of cancellation (Subsection 2-19 (2) of the Rules, refers).
- 14.9 The cancelled OGC and reasons for cancellation must be documented by the approved certifying body on the OGC register, notified to the department as part of the end-of-month reporting process and retained for a period of no less than 5 years.

15. Revoking an OGC

- 15.1 An issued OGC can be revoked by an approved certifying body if the approved certifying body reasonably believes (subsection 2-18 of the Rules, refers):
 - a) operations to produce or prepare the organic goods for export have not been carried out in accordance with the National Standard (or equivalent standard);
 - b) compliance with the National Standard (or equivalent standard) in relation to the organic goods has not ensured, or is ineffective in ensuring, that all relevant importing country requirements relating to the organic goods and the operations to produce or prepare them for export are met.
- 15.2 If an OGC is revoked, the approved certifying body must notify the operator/exporter in writing of the revocation and the reasons for the revocation. The approved certifying body must also notify the department in writing, within 10 business days of the revocation and the reasons for revocation.
- 15.3 The revoked OGC must be returned to the approved certifying body within 10 business days of revocation (subsection 2-19 (2) of the Rules, refers) and retained for a period of no less than 5 years.

16. OGC replacement

- 16.1 An approved certifying body can issue a 'replacement' OGC as requested from the organic operator/exporter prior to the consignment's departure.
- 16.2 A post-departure OGC for a consignment that has already departed Australia can be issued by an approved certifying body, without the department's approval, under the following conditions:
- a) where it is a genuine replacement for reasons beyond the exporter's control including changes to travel arrangements (departure dates/ports, vessel names) and there is an issued OGC in place.
 - b) where it is a genuine replacement requiring changes to product information including trade description, name, type, weight, volume and there is an existing OGC in place.
- 16.3 Replacement OGCs issued by an Approved certifying body must have the following statement on them: **"Issued as a replacement for OGC #####."**
- 16.4 The approved certifying body and operator/exporter must comply with the OGC cancellation requirements listed in section 14 of this document.

17. Giving additional or corrected information to the Secretary or approved certifying body

- 17.1 Subsection 2-17 of the Rules, requires the holder of an OGC to give additional or corrected information to the Secretary or approved certifying body, where:
- a) The holder of the certificate reasonably suspects that the integrity of the organic goods cannot be ensured.
 - b) The holder of the certificate reasonably suspects that an importing country requirement relating to the organic goods has not been met and will not be, or is not likely to be, met before the organic goods are imported into the importing country
 - c) The holder of the certificate reasonably suspects that operations to produce or prepare the organic goods for export were not carried out in accordance with the National Standard.

18. OGC reporting

- 18.1 Approved certifying bodies must document and implement a system for the use, reconciliation and reporting of OGC's. The system must adhere to the requirements set out under the Export Control (Organic Goods) Rules 2021 and the Administrative Arrangements for Approved arrangements document. This will be reviewed as part of a departmental audit of the approved certifying body's approved arrangement.

18.2 **OGC register:** As part of these requirements, a register of OGCs must be maintained and include:

- a) exporter and importer details (including business name and address)
- b) country of destination
- c) certificate number(s)
- d) date of issue (date of signing and stamping by the approved certifying body)
- e) consignment departure dates
- f) type and quantity of goods exported
- g) The date the OGC was cancelled, lost, damaged (if required)
- h) The date the OGC was re-issued (if required)
- i) The reason for the re-issue of an OGC and re-issued OGC number (if required)
- j) The reason for the cancelled OGC (if required)

18.3 **Monthly reporting:** To fulfil OGC reporting requirements, approved certifying bodies are required to submit an electronic OGC monthly report to the department. The monthly report must be provided in Microsoft Excel.

- a) If no OGCs have been issued that month, an approved certifying body is obligated to notify the department. An email to the Organic Exports Program advising that no OGCs were issued in that month is an acceptable notification.
- b) Monthly reports are due to the department within 15 calendar days, of the last day of each month. If this timeframe is not possible, the department must be contacted to arrange an alternative submission date.

18.4 The end-of-month OGC report must contain the following information including:

- a) Exporter details (address, certification category (e.g., producer, manufacturer, processor, exporter)
- b) Importer details (business name, address)
- c) Product description
- d) Indication if the goods are imported goods from a certified third country control authority/body or Australian produced
- e) Quantity of goods

- f) Country of destination
- g) Consignment departure date
- h) The date the OGC was issued
- i) The date the OGC was cancelled, lost, damaged (if required)
- j) The date the OGC was re-issued (if required)
- k) The reason for the re-issue of an OGC and re-issued OGC number (if required)
- l) The reason for the cancelled OGC (if required)

19. Record keeping requirements

- 19.1 Approved certifying bodies must retain copies of any issued OGCs for a period of no less than 5 years (subsection 11-6 (2) of the Rules, refers). This includes any cancelled, revoked and damaged certificates.
- 19.2 Certified organic operators/exporters should retain a copy of the original OGC (including a copy of any cancelled, revoked, damaged certificates), for traceability purposes, for a period of no less than 5 years (subsections 11-5 (2) and 11-4 (2) of the Rules, refers).
- 19.3 Records must not be altered or defaced during the retention period (subsection 11-7 (1) of the Rules, refers).
- 19.4 Approved certifying bodies must retain copies of any import documentation in relation to section 12 and section 13 (1) (d) of this document.

20. Importing country requirements

- 20.1 Trading partners can have specific requirements for exports of organic goods from Australia.
- 20.2 The department publishes importing country requirements for organic export equivalence agreements on the Manual of Importing Country Requirements (MICOR) and via organic industry export notices available on the department's website.
- 20.3 Importing country requirements can change without notice.
- 20.4 It is the responsibility of operators/exporters to check, understand and comply with all importing country requirements.

21. Change Register

Item/section	Change	Changed by	Date
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			