

Working Material 1.6

The Environmental Policy as a Public Commitment

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This sheet puts the working parts of subchapter 1.6 into editable form: the Verification Pact, the review questions, the common mistakes as a self-check and the Operative Synthesis as an action plan. The empty columns are for your property. The reasoning behind each row is in the book.

GUIDING QUESTION

A policy that promises to protect coral reefs and sets no objective anywhere in the system that touches a reef has not been dishonest in any single sentence. What has it actually committed the organisation to?

Verification Pact: Market Claims Against the Standard

The first three columns are copied from the book. In the last one, note whether this claim circulates in your property — in a proposal, a brochure, a supplier's pitch or your own documents — and what you now hold instead.

What is claimed	Binding?	What actually holds	In our property
A well-written, aspirational policy satisfies clause 5.2 regardless of how objectives are later set	No	The clause explicitly requires the policy to provide a framework for setting objectives — an aspirational statement disconnected from the objective-setting process has not met this requirement	
Naming biodiversity or reef protection in a policy is required for a coastal or marine property	No	Annex A offers these as examples of commitments that may be relevant to context; the standard does not mandate any specific named commitment	
A policy drafted by a marketing or communications function, rather than by those managing the environmental system, is equally valid under the standard	Not automatically	Nothing in the clause prohibits marketing involvement, but the policy must still be appropriate to context and grounded in the organisation's actual aspects — authorship does not exempt it from that requirement	
A policy commitment not reflected in any current objective is simply aspirational and carries no consequence under the standard	No	A commitment the system never puts into practice — through objectives, controls, or other planned actions — shows a policy not functioning as the framework clause 5.2 requires; a persistent, structural gap of this kind can support a nonconformity, not merely a missed opportunity	
Once published and communicated, a policy's accuracy does not need revisiting	No	Like the other leadership and context requirements in this chapter, the policy is expected to remain appropriate to the organisation's current context, not fixed at its drafting date	

What is claimed	Binding?	What actually holds	In our property
Extensive public communication of a policy is itself evidence of genuine commitment	No	Communication satisfies a separate requirement from substance; the two are independently assessed, and strong communication of a hollow commitment satisfies neither well	

A Checklist for the Next Policy Review

Answer each question with Yes, Partly, No or N.A., and name the evidence: a record, a date, a person, a place someone can go and look. An answer without evidence is an opinion.

Question	Why it matters	Answer	Evidence
Can every commitment in this policy be traced to a current or planned objective, control, or other planned action?	This is the single test the Maldives policy would have failed on its most prominent sentence		
Was this policy drafted from our own aspects register, or from external language?	Origin predicts whether the policy will ever connect to real operational planning		
Has any subject-matter expert's proposal tied to a policy commitment gone two or more cycles without a decision?	An undecided proposal is functionally a rejected one		
Could an informed guest, journalist, or NGO verify our most prominent claim on request?	The test the published account applied, and the one every public policy should survive		
Does our public communication include current data, or only aspiration?	Aspiration alone invites exactly the scrutiny this subchapter describes		

Common Mistakes — Self-Check

Tick every mistake you recognise in your own property today, and write next to it where you saw it. A ticked box is not a nonconformity; it is a place to look before an auditor or an incident does.

☐	Mistake (from the book)	Where we see it
☐	Drafting a policy from industry or competitor language rather than from the organisation's own aspects register.	
☐	Including a prominent public commitment with no corresponding objective anywhere in the system.	
☐	Treating policy drafting as a marketing or rebranding exercise disconnected from environmental planning.	
☐	Filing a specific, resourced proposal away as a future consideration indefinitely.	
☐	Assuming strong communication of a policy substitutes for substance behind it.	
☐	Softening policy language in response to scrutiny rather than building the missing framework.	
☐	Naming a commitment because it reads well for the property's setting, without testing its connection to actual significant aspects.	
☐	Treating a subject-matter expert's proposals as a separate department's initiative rather than as the organisation's central commitment in action.	

☐	Mistake (from the book)	Where we see it
☐	Never revisiting whether a policy's commitments still match the organisation's current objectives and context.	
☐	Publishing performance claims without the underlying data to support them if asked.	

Operative Synthesis — Action Plan

The three horizons and their actions are copied from the book. Owner and due date are yours to fill: an action without both is a wish.

Horizon	Action from the book	Owner	Due date
Act on immediately	Take the current environmental policy and apply the traceability test to every sentence: for each commitment, name the adopted objective, operational control, compliance process, or other planned action that puts it into practice. Any commitment without an answer is a gap this subchapter exists to close.		
Plan for	Rebuild the policy from the aspects register outward rather than from competitor or industry language; add a formal traceability review to the annual policy reaffirmation cycle; and ensure that any subject-matter expert's proposal tied to a policy commitment receives a genuine hearing within the objective-setting process, not indefinite deferral.		
Monitor going forward	Track, for every policy commitment, the most recent objective, control, or action connected to it and the most recent result reported against it. A commitment with no result reported in over a year has, in practice, stopped being a commitment and become decoration. Closing One final observation belongs here, tying this subchapter back to the leadership discussion immediately before it: a policy's framework failure and a leadership team's accountability failure are, in practice, the same failure viewed from two angles. Top management signed a policy under clause 5.1 without ever ensuring, as that same clause requires, that its requirements were integrated into the organisation's actual business processes. The marine biologist's proposal disappearing into two cycles of no decision was not a separate problem from the policy's hollow central promise. It was the same gap, encountered twice. A policy is the one document in an entire environmental management system that an organisation chooses to put in front of every guest, every employee, and every journalist who asks. The Maldives case shows what happens when that document is written to sound right rather than built to be true — and shows, just as clearly, that strong communication of a weak commitment does not protect an organisation from scrutiny. It invites it. A policy with a genuine framework behind it still depends on someone holding the authority and the responsibility to make that framework work day to day — which is the question this chapter turns to next: not what the organisation has promised, but who, specifically, is answerable for keeping each part of that promise. Strong communication of a weak commitment does not protect an organisation from scrutiny. It invites it. Concept Card 1.6 Card 1.6 — The Environmental Policy as a Public Commitment Setting: the Maldives The picture shows the open-air reception pavilion of a small private-island resort in the Maldives in soft late-afternoon light: a thatched roof on dark timber beams, a long counter of pale wood, and beyond the open side white sand, palms and a turquoise lagoon. On the wall behind the desk hangs a large framed text with coral drawings, the environmental policy. A		

Horizon	Action from the book	Owner	Due date
	<p>guest of about forty-five, just back from a dive, with damp short sandy hair, a light blue rash vest, beige shorts and a dive mask hanging from her wrist, stands at the counter, one hand resting on it, looking expectantly at the front office agent. He, about twenty-eight, short black hair, white mandarin-collar shirt, sits behind a computer screen and looks up at her with no answer. On the sand path behind, the marine biologist walks past with a backpack and a small hard case, not looking. The card shows the moment a diving guest with a background in marine science asks the front office for the resort's coral cover data, the figure the policy on the wall implies the resort tracks. The policy, drafted by a marketing agency and printed in five languages in every villa's welcome folder, promises to protect coral reef ecosystems. The marine biologist the resort employs proposed a coral cover target, a nutrient threshold for the outfall and a bleaching-response protocol; her proposal was filed as a future consideration and never chosen, while energy and waste objectives were adopted. No one can produce the figure. The plaques at the top give the event: A promise in five languages, and No coral figure to show. The lower pair names the lesson. A promise needs a plan: a commitment in the policy must be carried into objectives, controls or planned actions, or the policy is not working as the framework clause 5.2 requires. Fund what the policy says: the policy's central promise needs resources and a monitored objective, not only well-written words. The card does not say that the energy and waste objectives were worthless; they are genuine targets, only disconnected from the promise. Nor does it suggest rewriting the policy so that it promises less: that may reduce exposure, but it moves further from what clause 5.2 asks. The gap it shows lies between what the policy says and what the system resources.</p>		

WHAT THIS SHEET IS NOT

ISO 14001 does not prescribe this form. No clause asks for this worksheet, its columns or a register of market claims; the standard sets requirements and leaves the means to the organisation. This sheet is a working aid drawn from the book: use it, change it or set it aside. Where it touches a requirement, the text of ISO 14001:2026 is the authority, not this page — and nothing on it replaces your own reading of that text.

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