



ICN TOOLKIT · VOLUNTARY CARBON CREDITS · EDITION 1

Carbon Credit Buyer's Due-Diligence Kit

Carbon credits vary hugely in quality, and a weak credit can turn a climate claim into a reputational problem. This kit gives you a clear way to judge any credit before you buy it, the questions to ask the seller, the contract points that protect you, and how to make claims that stand up.

WHAT'S IN THE KIT

- This guide: credit types, the quality tests that matter, red flags, 25 questions for sellers, contract essentials and claims guidance
- Credit Quality Scorecard (Excel): weighted scoring across 12 criteria with automatic red-flag checks, so you can compare offers side by side

Infinite Carbon Private Limited ("ICN") · CIN U66190MH2025PTC463011 · icn.earth

Information correct to the best of our knowledge on 29 October 2026. This is ICN's own guidance. It is not a credit rating, nor investment, legal or tax advice. Licensed for use inside the buying organisation only.

01 What you're actually buying

A carbon credit is a certificate, held on a registry, that represents one tonne of CO₂-equivalent avoided or removed from the atmosphere. Its value depends entirely on whether that tonne is real, additional and counted once.

Type	What it is	Typical examples
Avoidance / reduction	Emissions that would have happened but didn't.	Renewable power, efficient cookstoves, avoided deforestation (REDD+), methane capture
Nature-based removal	CO ₂ taken out of the air and stored in plants and soils.	Afforestation and reforestation (ARR), agroforestry, mangroves, soil carbon
Engineered or durable removal	CO ₂ removed and stored for a long time, often centuries.	Biochar, enhanced rock weathering, direct air capture, BECCS

Buyers increasingly prefer **removals** for net-zero claims, because science-based frameworks expect residual emissions to be neutralised by removals. Avoidance credits still have a role, for example in contributing to climate finance beyond your own value chain.

WHERE CREDITS LIVE

Every credible credit sits on a public registry with a unique serial number: Verra (VCS), Gold Standard, Puro.earth, Isometric, ACR, Climate Action Reserve, Plan Vivo, Global Carbon Council and others. India's own CCTS issues Carbon Credit Certificates (CCCs), but those are compliance instruments that trade only on Indian power exchanges, and aren't part of this guide.

02 The quality tests that matter

Test	The question	What good looks like
Additionality	Would this have happened anyway, without carbon finance?	Clear financial or barrier analysis; not required by law; not already profitable on its own.
Baseline and over-crediting	Is the "without project" scenario realistic, or inflated?	Conservative, dynamic baselines; recent methodology versions; independent ratings consistent.
Permanence	How long is the carbon kept out of the air, and what if it's reversed?	Buffer pool contributions, long monitoring periods, durable storage for removals.
Leakage	Did the activity just move elsewhere?	Leakage assessed and deducted.

Test	The question	What good looks like
Measurement (MRV)	How is the tonne measured, and how often?	Direct measurement where possible, frequent monitoring, digital evidence trails, third-party verification.
No double counting	Could anyone else claim the same tonne?	Unique serials, retirement in your name, clarity on whether a corresponding adjustment applies.
Safeguards and co-benefits	Are local communities and ecosystems better off?	Free, prior and informed consent; benefit sharing; grievance process; credible SDG claims.
Methodology standing	Has the method been judged high-integrity?	Methodology approved under the ICVCM Core Carbon Principles (CCP label), or eligible for CORSIA, where relevant to you.

The CCP label. The Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM) assesses programmes and methodologies against its Core Carbon Principles. A credit can carry the CCP label only if it comes from an approved methodology under an eligible programme. The list grows through the year, so check the ICVCM site on the day you buy.

ARTICLE 6 AND CORRESPONDING ADJUSTMENTS

Under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, a host country can authorise credits for use toward another country's target or for compliance schemes like CORSIA, and then make a **corresponding adjustment** so the tonne isn't counted twice. India has published a list of activities it will consider for Article 6. If you need credits for CORSIA or for a claim that relies on a corresponding adjustment, ask for the Letter of Authorisation up front; most voluntary credits don't have one.

03 Red flags

- The seller can't or won't give you the registry, project ID and serial range before you sign.
- The project ID doesn't exist on the registry, or the project name, country or vintage don't match.
- Credits are offered as already "retired", or the seller can't show a clear chain of title.
- Old vintages (for example, more than 8–10 years) from methodologies that have since been tightened or withdrawn.
- REDD+ or cookstove projects on older methodologies known for over-crediting, with no recent re-assessment.
- Prices far below the market for that project type, or pressure to pay quickly in full upfront.
- Payment requested to a personal account, an account in another name, or crypto.
- Indian CCTS certificates (CCCs) offered for private sale. They may only trade on the power exchanges.
- Claims of "guaranteed" returns from buying credits.