Our Strategic Plan

ASC’s second statement of its strategic thinking and plans sets out an ambitious response to the challenges it still faces in promoting an ever more responsible global aquaculture industry. Building on the success of the organisation’s first years of growth it shows how, over the period 2017-2021, demand for responsibly sourced farmed seafood will be strengthened in receptive markets; how new markets will be built for ASC-certified seafood; how the supply of ASC-certified seafood will be increased; how ASC will communicate about and promote responsible seafood to a wide audience; and how the organisation itself will develop and be strengthened to deliver the job it has to do.

While the challenges are many and considerable, I am confident that the ASC will meet them. We will do so partly through our own efforts, but we will also actively seek to collaborate with other like-minded partners working to promote environmental sustainability and social responsibility in the aquaculture industry. Only in this way will the ASC’s Vision be realised.

ASC looks forward to the next period of its development, knowing that we will be building on a solid foundation of six years of very productive work. If, at the end of it, we have delivered the various outputs that we have identified in this plan, then the cause of more responsible aquaculture will have been moved a significant step ahead. Your support for our Mission will help us to go further, faster. I commend this plan to you.

Peter Cook
Chairman ASC Board of Trustees
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Executive Summary

The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) is now a leader of the movement for certification and labelling in the global aquaculture industry. However, to increase our global impact we must navigate a number of increasingly complex scientific, technical, political, operational and fiscal challenges over the period ahead. But while this second strategic overview is launched in a world of greater complexity where there are many issues to tackle, it is also replete with opportunities too that the ASC can grasp.

The first ASC strategic plan, “Strategic Guidelines for 2012-2015”, focused on demonstrating that the overall ASC concept could work. It also set out how the operational fundamentals of the certification system would be developed and acceptance and uptake of the programme built in selected markets and supply areas. Much work was accomplished. And as the new plan period begins some important initiatives that are already underway will be carried forward. The most important of which aim to improve the operational effectiveness and efficiency of the ASC standards, improve their content and develop information technology infrastructure to manage certification information.

ASC’s strategy for development over the next five years has five central objectives:

1. Strengthened global standards and certification programmes
2. Increase globally the number of certified farms
3. Increase communication and educate key stakeholders
4. Collaboration with other certification and ratings organisations
5. Continue strengthening our own organisation for success

ASC’s strategy for development over the next five years has five central objectives:

ASC global standards and certification programme strengthened and developed.
The ASC’s value proposition to all of its partners depends on its reputation as the world’s leading certification and labelling programme for responsibly farmed seafood. The ASC has an ambitious portfolio of projects underway and planned to maintain this reputation. We will take additional steps to maintain future credibility as we experience rapid uptake of farm certification and of labelled products entering the market.

Output of certified seafood and availability of labelled products increased through focus on key countries particularly in Asia, Europe and the Americas.
Demand currently exceeds the supply of certified-responsible seafood in many markets and categories. The ASC will continue its work to expand the number and range of certified farms. The ASC will continue to promote effective farm outreach work through direct support, partnerships, training and a new “Aquaculture Improvement Programme” (AIP).

ASC promoted successfully with stakeholders, including consumers, and awareness of the programme raised.
Effective communications are central to maintaining and enhancing the value of ASC for its partners. Priorities include continued work to build and protect the reputation of the ASC programme, to inform and educate key stakeholders on the environmental and social benefits of ASC certification and to differentiate the ASC from the growing number of alternative assurance schemes.
ASC collaboration with other relevant certification and ratings organisations agreed and made operational.
ASC is not alone in providing certifications for and ratings of farmed fish. To the extent that others share our Vision we will work with them to try to achieve it, even though we may compete for supply, market attention and funding. It is inimical to our Mission to create market confusion amongst multiple certification bodies. The ASC works with many organisations to avoid this outcome.

ASC organisational development strengthened.
While most of this plan focuses externally, the ASC will also address its own organisational issues as it grows. This strategic overview sets objectives and outlines actions to attract and retain top quality staff; ensure high quality communications; support the organisation with effective information technology and assure the long-term financial stability needed to deliver our Mission. As it grows, the ASC faces an ongoing need to review and refine its business model to ensure that it continues to work well. It will take action to do so.

In order to meet these high-level strategic priorities more detailed work plans, targets and metrics are being worked up. They will ensure that the plan is implemented consistently.

This new strategic plan comes at an exciting and important juncture for the ASC. As 2016 closed, predictions of the income from the use of the ASC logo show it will be sufficient to cover all core operating costs at current levels of expenditure. This is a significant achievement given that the first own-generated income stream from ASC products only began in 2012.

Over the period of this plan key metrics show continued growth is expected within markets demanding certified responsible seafood. With it comes a real opportunity to solidify the ASC’s programme as the most sought-after mark of responsibility amongst the world’s leading seafood farms and markets. But building momentum will not by itself guarantee continuing growth in the ASC programme. The ASC cannot be complacent. Alternative certification programmes compete strongly in some markets or offer additional services and ratings. Other advisory services are proliferating, evolving and increasingly competing. There is still significant work to do to strengthen demand within receptive markets, build new markets for ASC-certified seafood and to increase the supply of ASC-certified seafood.

There is still significant work to do to:
- Strengthen demand within receptive markets
- Build new markets for ASC-certified seafood
- Increase the supply of ASC-certified seafood
Background

ASC has made remarkable progress over its first six years of operation (2010-2016). Strong support in many important markets in Europe has been established and of the 7,348 labelled products available (end 2016) in 64 countries and territories, over 50% of them are to be found in 5 key markets (The Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and Sweden). Supplying this demand are 417 certified farms in 37 countries and territories globally with a total production volume of about 1.1 million tonnes. More than 1,100 chain of custody (CoC) certified companies are involved in the supply of these products and 523 of these are also logo licensees who actively promote the programme by using the ASC logo.

The growth achieved is all the more encouraging given the limited resources that have been available. The ASC was not the recipient of significant, multi-year funding from the major foundations active in our sector. While staffing and activities have been constrained as a consequence, the ASC has emerged as an efficient and lean organisation, with minimal overheads and a willingness to partner and outsource to secure essential services.

The priorities articulated in this plan, “Strategic Overview 2017 – 2021” chart the ASC’s course over the next five years towards achieving our Vision and Mission.

ASC’s Vision, Mission and Recent Trajectory

The ASC’s Vision is of a world where aquaculture plays a continuing and major role in supplying food and social benefits for mankind whilst minimising negative impacts on the environment. To do this we seek to deliver our Mission, to use our certification and labelling programme to help transform aquaculture towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility using efficient market mechanisms that create value across the supply chain by:

- Recognising and rewarding responsible farming practices;
- Influencing the choices people make when buying seafood; and,
- By working with our partners to transform the seafood market to a more responsible level.
To achieve our Mission, the ASC works collaboratively with the aquaculture industry, seafood businesses, governments, the scientific community, environmental groups and all other interested parties.

The ASC programme recognises and rewards responsible farming practices, by assessing farms against environmental and social standards and building recognition for those farms that are certified as meeting the ASC standard. When any large or small seafood buyer chooses to purchase ASC-certified seafood, certified farms benefit from their responsible practices through the impact of that preferential decision on their market access and market share. The growth of market demand for responsible seafood also helps to create a ‘pull’ for less well-managed farms to improve their environmental performance and to be able to access new market opportunities. The bigger the demand for responsible seafood the stronger this effect will be. This is at the heart of how the ASC programme contributes to promoting positive change within global aquaculture.

The world in which we work continues to change. The ASC’s first six years were a time of transition and focused on bringing the Standards - the principles of responsible farming resulting from the Aquaculture Dialogues - into operation. We also concentrated on building the assessment tools and rules to deliver these standards; designing and registering the ASC logo and the mechanisms to deliver them to the market; creating a universe of certifiers accredited to assess farms against the ASC standards and cultivating farm and market interest in the programme.

Over this period the ASC has grown fast with the support and active engagement of our many partners and become a recognisably global programme. The first Strategic Guidelines (2012 - 2015) set aspirational goals for bringing farms into ASC assessment and certification, achieving wide market presence in Europe and laying a foundation for market penetration with North American and Japanese retailers. While progress in the USA market has been hampered by a lack of certified supply and staff, those goals have otherwise all been met and exceeded in Europe, Canada and Japan, along with a great deal of additional progress not anticipated in the first strategic overview.

The ASC has secured market interest from retailers and other seafood buyers in many countries, but particularly in The Netherlands, Germany, Belgium Switzerland, and Sweden. Similar interest in being shown increasingly in other Northern Europe markets (for example France, UK). As the supply of certified seafood increases the potential of these markets will be unlocked further. Committed buyers will deepen the range of products sold, especially within private label categories. Increased supply will also reinforce the initial progress made in other significant markets including Japan, Australia and Southern Europe. As one indicator of the success so far, the number of ASC-labelled certified-responsible seafood products has grown briskly. There are now (December 2016) 7,348 products bearing the ASC logo in the market, with an estimated total wholesale value of over $600 million, as opposed to 847 at the end of 2013 and 4462 at the end of 2015.

In tandem, the ASC and its partners have translated this major buyer interest in Europe and elsewhere into a rapid uptake of the programme by the world’s most responsible seafood farms. At the start of this new plan 417 farms are ASC certified with a total production of about 1,100,000 tonnes. The total number of certified farms is up from 65 at the end of 2013 to 195 at the end of 2015. If the number of certified farms continues to grow at the same rate over the next period, the ASC will be in a dominant position relative to other seafood certification programmes.
Core Challenges

This new Strategic Overview 2017-2021 was developed with three core challenges to the ASC programme's continued success clearly in view that need to be addressed. These are to:

1. **Increase the supply of species covered by existing standards and develop the supply of new species.**
   The ASC programme has been most successful with Salmon (560,000t) and Pangasius (209,400t) certifications, respectively 10% and 23% of global production. Tilapia (120,000t) and Shrimp (140,000t) volumes, while significant, each represents less than 5% of global production. Increasing ASC certifications for Salmon and Pangasius farms is important. But an increase in the number of Shrimp and Tilapia certified farms and supplies is required for the ASC to expand its global influence across major production sectors. A dependable supply of Shrimp and Tilapia is essential for the ASC to make inroads into the American market.

2. **Deepen the demand for the ASC programme in core markets and develop interest in new ones.**
   The ASC’s success depends on engagement from both buyers and sellers of seafood. As a voluntary, market-driven programme, our continuity is not guaranteed; farms can choose to leave the programme, buyers can seek other forms of assurance and consumer interest can shift. Over the next five years ASC must continue to build a value proposition that results in an evermore plentiful supply of seafood raised responsibly and that ensures continuity of the ASC programme. This will be a major challenge in many key markets. In the American market, for example it will require adaptations of the ASC programme and its tools to engage producers, distributors, food service providers and retail markets effectively.

3. **Maintain the integrity of the ASC programme against a backdrop of increasing supply and demand.**
   Key to the continued success of the ASC will be our ability to maintain programme integrity. Risks to the ASC’s credibility will emerge both as a consequence of our own or of our proxies’ (certified farms, certifiers, accreditation) actions (or lack of them) and from the perception of others about those actions. Coordinated responses from across the ASC’s functional teams (commercial, communications and standards) will be required increasingly. It may also require improvements in the ASC scheme documents and procedures.
ASC’s Strategic Priorities 2017-21

To respond to these core challenges facing the ASC, while also navigating and delivering on the exciting array of opportunities that exist to expand the programme, this new Strategic Overview 2017-2012 is built around five high-level strategic priorities:

Priority 1: Strengthen and develop the ASC global standards and certification programme.

The ASC standards articulate a framework of principles, criteria and specific performance requirements that define and measure responsible aquaculture. Implementation occurs through a third-party system of accredited certifiers (Conformity Assessment Bodies - CABs) who apply the framework in a consistent and transparent manner. The value proposition of the ASC depends on the extent to which this overall framework and the processes to apply it are seen as credible, meaningful, effective and efficient by the broad community of stakeholders that are engaged in the ASC’s programme.

The primary objective for the ASC in this area is to maintain and strengthen its position as a leading farmed seafood certification system. As a result we will seek to:

- Reduce the time, cost, and complexity of the ASC standards by concluding the development of a new core standard that aligns the existing 8 standards, allows for the easy addition of new species and new service modules and separates guidance on species-specific and services from the generic standard.
- Support the efficient uptake of the certification programme and ensure that it makes provision for the potential participation in it of a variety of aquaculture farms organised and managed in different ways. This will recognise the needs of small-scale farms, many of which are in the poorer countries of the world, by concluding the development of multi-site and group certification methodologies and, in parallel, developing an Aquaculture Improvement Programme (AIP) initiative. The AIP will be based on a measurable data driven farm performance approach.
- Establish a formal and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation programme. This will systematically measure and document the impacts of seafood farming in accord with the performance criteria of the ASC standard. It will shed light on the effectiveness of the ASC programme. It will have the added advantage of being a quality check for ASC on the criteria used in the assessment process and highlight any that are of minimal consequence for achieving the desired outcome.
- Digitalise farm level data and link it to the relevant analytical capacity to generate management information and advice for farmers and strengthen the business case for ASC certification.
- Conclude the development of new standard content through existing initiatives such as the operational review of the Salmon, Tilapia and Pangasius standards and the creation of a seaweed standard. It will also involve developing new species content, for example for seabass, seabream, grouper, snapper, barramundi, flatfish, sturgeon, crayfish, catfish, bluefin tuna.
- Conclude the feed standard dialogue and begin implementation and promotion of its use to the global aquaculture feed industry.
Develop an integrated approach to maintain the credibility and integrity of the ASC programme by: improving the quality and consistency of the assessment process; reviewing the function and quality of accreditation of CABs and of auditor training; improving the Quality Assurance programme; and by implementing key recommendations from the ASC’s Credibility Working Group. A staff position to lead the work needed, reporting to the CEO, is planned.

Through engagement with the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), ensure that the CoC traceability system provides improved accessibility and efficiency of engagement for all levels of the supply chain and ensures that key risks such as product substitution are controlled, monitored and minimised.

Enhance the ability of stakeholders to provide feedback to the ASC by first reviewing the systems, methods and procedures in place for this purpose and developing improvements where necessary. The ASC will take on more active outreach to key stakeholder associations.

Priority 2: Increase the Output of certified seafood and availability of labelled products through focus on key countries particularly in Asia, Europe and the Americas.

Market demand is the main driver of the ASC’s theory of change. Demand has grown rapidly and has been reflected in the marketplace. The underlying commitments to use ASC certified seafood are helping to ensure benefits for ASC farms.

Demand will not materialise without an adequate supply of ASC certified seafood. To date, growth in the number of farms in the ASC programme has been brisk. But, generally, market demand currently exceeds the supply of certified responsible seafood in many markets and categories. ASC must continue its work to expand the number of certified farms.

The primary market objective over the next five years is to enhance demand that doubles market share for ASC-certified seafood. That will equate to a market share of around 20% in receptive markets in Northern Europe; a quadrupling of current market share in the USA, Japan and Canada; a growing ASC market presence in Australia, Southern Europe and China; and introducing the ASC concept in other selected markets in Asia.
In the next five years, the main priorities for expanding markets for ASC-certified seafood are to:

- Increase retail engagement in Northern European markets to achieve market share targets.
- Establish engagement in the North American, Australian and similar markets.
- Help drive growth of ASC-certified products and awareness of the ASC logo through targeted joint-marketing activities in the most receptive markets, currently in Europe.
- Build on current commitments through new investments to expand buyer engagement in Southern Europe and Japan. By 2021, ASC will aim to have at least a dozen major corporate commitments to the ASC in Southern Europe and Japan.
- Take new steps into Asian markets other than Japan. The ASC now has staff in Japan and China, to build these markets. We will work to link producers with retail and export outlets in relevant markets in Asia.
- ASC will also take steps to diversify our revenue base wherever market conditions make this feasible by building on the growth of the business-to-business model use of the ASC programme, through a broad-based CoC surcharge coupled with associated value offerings for business-to-business users.
- Work with the MSC to improve uptake of the programme in foodservice and at retail fresh fish counters. Continued growth in these venues will provide more direct opportunities to expand consumer awareness of the benefits from certification.

The primary objective of this Strategic Overview as far as supply-side targets are concerned is to double current certified volumes by 2019 and quadruple them by 2021. Targeted engagement, including through the operation of an AIP programme, will focus particularly on increasing uptake with Tilapia and Shrimp producers along with certifying early volumes for new species standards (including the newly operational Seriola/Cobia standard).
The main targets for the ASC’s farm engagement work are to:

- Maintain engagement with aquaculture producers that already have links to key markets in Northern Europe, North America, Australia and Japan and elsewhere. We will do this through direct ASC staff outreach, by working with and supporting other organisations with capacity to undertake this work and through the AIP programme.

- Expand our ability to undertake farm outreach work in key producing countries where the interest in and demand for such services in more than current capacity can service.

- Encourage farm-level improvement work leading to ASC certification undertaken by third parties by contributing to discrete projects and activities that work to demonstrate how to overcome key barriers and obstacles that farms face in meeting the ASC standard. ASC will also develop tools and innovative funding mechanisms that help farms to progress towards ASC certification within an ASC AIP programme.

- Take steps to influence a collaborative approach towards the agenda and content of the growing number of aquaculture improvement partnerships such that they develop in ways that build a pipeline towards ASC certification. Ensure that if a 3rd party verification partnership programme for aquaculture improvement emerges it is consistent with and can lead to the ASC programme.

- Develop a farm performance tool that can be at the heart of AIPs and that strengthens the value proposition for farms that are not targeting ASC certification in the first place. It will allow farms to provide data into the ASC database (or another neutral standard if ASC is not targeted directly) and provide feedback on farm performance. It could also link farmers to a pool of experts who can provide technical advice to the farms, support the diagnosis of diseases and so on.

Since its inception, ASC has had great success in working with some of the world’s best-managed aquaculture farms to help them become ASC certified. To ensure these farms stay in the programme, ASC needs to maintain and improve the efficiency of its systems and the overall value proposition it offers to such producers.

In addition to current farms maintaining certification, we anticipate that the rate of uptake will be sustained, doubling by 2019, and largely driven through organic growth in response to existing market demand. Thereafter we anticipate growth being partly sustained through the development and operation of an AIP programme.

A key need within the aquaculture sector is to facilitate production improvements by developing a collective and pre-competitive approach to delivering such improvements. Some elements of this work are underway within existing collaborations (such as the work ASC is proposing to do with Ocean Outcomes in Japan and China). While ASC plans to develop its own strategic position within this arena through an AIP programme, it will also seek to play a coordinating role in fostering this movement more widely. Key to the success of this operation will be coordinating market demand and support for such an initiative and developing the tools, materials and systems to deliver the necessary knowledge and help to farmers. Such an initiative is likely to have wider benefits in helping to deliver important sustainable development goals related to: aquatic ecosystems, food security, livelihoods and poverty alleviation. ASC will seek project funding to undertake this work.
The AIP programme will be a significant initiative. ASC will develop tools and systems that will enable producers to be ‘coached’ to make the improvements needed to follow a pathway leading to attainment eventually of ASC certification. ASC will collaborate with other organisations that have the technical capacity to work with aquaculture producers who want to follow this route towards responsible production. In order for aquaculture producers to be interested in engagement in an AIP direct and tangible access to markets will need to be created that justify the activities and expenditures certification entails for the farms. In this spirit ASC will link new Asian producers with the USA and Canadian markets. We anticipate 10% of our revenues being generated from North America by 2021.

Priority 3: Promote ASC successfully with stakeholders, including consumers, and raise awareness of the programme.

The ASC is distinct from other assurance schemes (both ratings and certifications). We need to communicate widely the essence of the environmental and social benefits that result from ASC certification and how they provide value through the seafood supply chain. To do this the communications programme must be further developed and implemented.

The staff and financial resources devoted to communications work have been limited. There has been an over-reliance on work in a small number of markets and a dependence on partners to deliver priority communications content. We have also tended to be more reactive than proactive than is desirable in shaping the public profile of the programme.

Looking ahead, the ASC has a number of attributes that we can and must utilise as fully as possible:

- Commitments from high profile retailers.
- Commitments from a variety of seafood farms - from the largest players to smallholders.
- Strong partnerships.
- ASC is easy to work with.
- ASC is well respected and has a positive reputation.
- ASC adds value to farms of all sizes globally.

On the other hand there are issues that are problematical or there are missing attributes. They include:

- ASC is unknown in many markets.
- We don’t have consumer-facing communications materials.
- An outdated website.
- A general lack of public awareness about aquaculture as an industry and what is known is often not positive.
- Lack of solid data and evidence for the positive impact of the programme.
Against this background the overarching communications strategy will be to:

1. Create and promulgate positive awareness of the ASC as the leading global certification programme for farmed fish.

2. Raise awareness of the central role responsible aquaculture plays in food security and environmental stewardship.

In order to deliver these objectives our communications programme will focus on messages and approaches that reflect different levels of media and consumer awareness commensurate with ASC product availability and penetration in key and new markets. We will seek to expand our communications activities in strategic areas; use insights to add value for partners; lever our strong record to make introductions in new markets; develop media strategies tailored to target markets and make key hires in them and contribute to a body of knowledge about the industry.

ASC will seek to increase awareness of the organisation and drive greater involvement by key partners through taking the initiative to:

- Build and maintain relationships with partners and key stakeholders.
- Build greater awareness of ASC, involvement in ASC and collaboration with stakeholders, partners and academics.
- Encourage key stakeholders, such as respected industry opinion leaders and academic researchers and teachers to be willing to discuss the credibility of ASC and the rigour of the ASC programme in public.
- Deliver communication that reinforces compelling messages about who ASC is, what we do and how we work with partners to transform the industry.
- Drive recognition for ASC partners.
- Advocate for aquaculture.

Specific activities with key partners will include:

- **With Retailers:**
  The continued development of our brand presentation and brand consistency (“marketing”) toolkit that can be tailored for the production of in-store materials and in broader communications undertaken by our partners. We will participate in relevant promotional campaigns such as “Think Fish Week”, although this format will not limit our approach.

- **With Foodservice Channels:**
  Building on the development of improved CoC models for food service applications, we will partner with the MSC to build our market presence (currently less than 5% of logo use). We will target retail chains that feature seafood promotions, work with contract caterers and suppliers to push certified products into ‘public’ service catering, including a focus on the leading universities in key markets (for example Stanford, Cornell, University of Texas Austin, Arizona State, UCLA, University of Michigan, UC Davis and others in the USA).

- **With Public:**
  Educational establishments and events: develop collaborative programmes with zoos, aquaria and museums (for example the National Aquarium and Aquarium of the Pacific in the USA).
ASC will endeavour to meet the communication expectations of stakeholders by collaborating with them to maximise the value of the programme and its reach for each of the main groups. The essential messages that the ASC will seek to convey are that ASC:

- Is transparent and accountable
- Has a robust traceability system
- Offers a credible solution for all aquaculture farms meeting best practice
- Provides proof of fewer environmental and social impacts through certification
- Recognises products from responsibly farmed sources
- Recognises responsible aquaculture as the norm
- Maintains an independent certification programme
- Enables consumers to make responsible seafood purchasing choices easily

With the specific audience of the somewhat engaged Public: the ASC will not attempt to deliver broadcasted messaging through various media channels, but we will attempt to drive greater awareness of responsible aquaculture by:

- Amplifying partner activity
- Leveraging traditional electronic and print media
- Expanding coverage in social media
- Maximising involvement in unique events
- Encouraging positive messaging about ASC by key opinion leaders, academics and influencers
The following major projects will be undertaken:

1. **Continued Website development:**
   While the ASC website needs to be continually updated, more importantly, as our major communications tool for the foreseeable future, the website’s content, style and functionality all need major overhaul. The website caters for a wide range of users and compromises in design are needed to deal with this. It has to provide information relevant to the industry as well material that is essentially aimed at informing and influencing consumers. The existing software limits its functionality. We particularly need to provide services to clients that will help buyers to find certified supplies. Preliminary work has been done to scope the project and work will be completed in 2017. The website will serve as the entry point for an on-line portal to deliver access for stakeholders to a range of certification-related content.

2. **Undertake surveys of consumer interest in and understanding of ASC:**
   The ASC will continue with limited numbers of consumer surveys in markets that have demonstrated their receptiveness to the ASC to provide continued insight into consumer understanding and perceptions of the ASC and its logo. In other markets (such as the USA) survey work will focus on getting a better understanding of attitudes to responsible seafood consumption.

3. **Develop online training materials for staff and stakeholders:**
   The ASC programme is complex and has increasing engagement with a broader array of stakeholders. As the ASC grows, so too does its complement of staff. It is important that all those new to the programme must not be left to struggle to understand its underlying principles and their application. The technical content of the standards and audit manuals is significant. Providing tools to make this information easily available and understandable will benefit staff. It will also help with the induction of those involved in governance functions. It will enable the development of a cadre of more informed stakeholders and will improve their ability to engage effectively with the ASC. Auditor training will be reviewed and further developed in late 2017. It will provide a range of materials that will cover the technical content of the scheme documents and how the assessment process works. This project will explore a range of delivery tools and formats for this material to engage other audiences.
Priority 4: Agree and make operational ASC collaboration with other relevant certification and ratings organisations.

Purpose of Collaboration: The ASC recognises that to achieve its Mission it must do so in collaboration with many different organisations from the for-profit, the not-for-profit and government sectors. In some cases ASC will actively seek collaborative opportunities. It wants to work with groups that seek to ensure that global aquaculture is environmentally sustainable and socially responsible. Key amongst potential partners will be other certification and ratings programmes that are often seen to be working in competition with the ASC. There is also a range of activities that can be considered pre-competitive on which we will seek closer collaboration. These involve work to provide complementary and coordinated tools, incentives and strategies for measuring and improving aquaculture performance, particularly for producers that may be moving towards ASC certification; to create operational effectiveness and efficiencies from our collective engagement with farms faced with multiple requests for certification or other assurances; and to coordinate messaging to buyers within markets faced with choices about which services they should choose.

In forming collaborative partnerships ASC will seek to ensure that potential partner organisations recognise the following:

- That businesses play an important role in demanding sustainable seafood and incentivising fisheries and farms to improve their management and practices to meet this demand.
- That certification and ratings systems are key components of this approach because they measure fishery and aquaculture performance and provide a means whereby businesses can choose products from fisheries and aquaculture that are environmentally sustainable and socially responsible, or are making improvements toward these states.
- That they are committed to providing incentives to aquaculture producers to undertake continuous improvement toward environmental sustainability and social responsibility.
- That they are seeking to explore ways to increase their collective, and their own individual, effectiveness in delivering aquaculture producers towards achieving environmental sustainability and social responsibility.
- That they are seeking to create mutual operational efficiencies to minimise the costs to aquaculture operations, funding organisations and businesses of generating environmental sustainability and social responsibility; and,
- That they will communicate internally about key initiatives that are relevant to this work.
Progress to Date:
The ASC is an active collaborator with many organisations. Some of these collaborations are recognised in Memoranda Of Understanding (MOUs), for example with the MSC (signed in December 2015), the tripartite agreement between the Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA), Global GAP and ASC (signed in April 2012), The Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and with Ocean Outcomes (signed in November 2016). Other MOUs are under discussion (for example with China Blue in China). Other collaborative work is under discussion with FairTrade USA and the UK based Soil Association. In both cases the intent is to help provide additional services to farms that are already ASC certified through additional modules that would allow further claims to be made on fair wages and organic production.

The ASC has also actively sought to outsource non-core functions or partner with others that have already developed the required services. The most important example is with the arrangement negotiated with MSC enabling ASC access to their CoC standard and support from their logo licensing team to undertake ASC product approvals. Both auditor training and quality assurance functions are outsourced to a company providing access to a pool of well-qualified aquaculture experts.

Over the last two years the ASC has been working alongside the MSC, FairTrade US, GAA, Sustainable Fisheries Partnership and Seafood Watch, in an initiative called “the Certification and Ratings Collaborative”. The Packard, Gordon and Betty Moore and Walton Family Foundations fund this initiative and current work plans will extend through 2017. It aims to improve the collective delivery of the participating organisations, to help them scale their impacts and to provide clear market messaging as to the roles each plays in doing this

Priority 5: Strengthen ASC organisational development.

At the time of the drawing up of the Strategic Guidelines for 2012-2015, the ASC had five staff. It now has 18 full time equivalent staff, with the need and intent to expand further as we execute this plan. Growth carries with it the necessity to address staff development and training as well as organisational challenges. We must address a range of issues to maintain and expand the knowledge and skills of staff and ensure that internal teams work in a cohesive and cooperative way. We must also ensure that critical functions to maintain and improve ASC’s effectiveness and efficiency are in place.

Central Services:
As the organisation expands its geographical footprint it needs to develop central service policies and guidelines to support a global staff. Amongst these are improved financial management, expanded human resource management capability and staff training and operational guidelines. Logo license revenue growth necessitates expanding the financial management team and ensuring that systems are in place to meet the ever more sophisticated challenges of managing more own-generated revenue.
**Organisational Structure:**
ASC expansion means that changes need to be made to the current organisational structure of four functional groups (standards, commercial outreach, communications, central services). In the future, staff deployment must meet a mix of imperatives such as market needs, securing supply to meet those needs and taking account of regulatory, legal and governmental policy affairs (such as tax liability, establishing not-for-profit status). An immediate change is to create programme management structures for three regions - Europe (for EU, UK, Africa, Middle East), the Americas and Asia (including the Pacific Rim). In the longer-term we will move to seven regions (North America; Latin America; Europe; North Asia; South Asia; Southeast Asia; Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific). Our aim is to anticipate organisational needs and be prepared to implement changes when we receive signals that change helps us to deliver our Mission.

**Financial Stability:**
Achieving the priorities set out in this plan will require sufficient and stable resources to fund and operate the organisation. The ASC has been successful up to now at securing ad hoc philanthropic contributions and increasing the volume of revenue from logo licensing and fees. In 2016 own source generated revenues will cover the existing level of in-year core operational spend for the first time. Maintaining this position is our intention going forward. All future philanthropic support will be directed towards funding for time-bound projects that help us achieve our Mission more quickly than our self-generated income will allow.

**IT Infrastructure:**
In 2016 we embarked on the development of a limited IT infrastructure system to automate assessment report uploading onto the website and to manage the quality assurance inputs. This was part of a more detailed process to document all certification-related work flows and their computational needs. This system will be the central hub for much of what ASC will do into the future. It will be an analytical tool driving future management and improvement of the audit and certification processes. Without it we will not be able to scale up our current work processes. Initial IT development will commence in Q2 2017 and will continue over the next 2 years.
Looking Forward

In conclusion, the ambition implicit within ASC’s Vision is significant and beyond the capacity of a single organisation to deliver. But the ASC’s Mission is achievable over time. Over the next period, 2017-2021, we will deliver a significant range of outputs that will contribute to achieving the outcome that we seek:

- We will continue to promote the uptake of the ASC programme globally.
- We will create efficiencies for those partners that are engaged with us.
- We will expand the range of services we offer.
- Key to all this will be to develop further and to deepen existing collaborations with like-minded partners.
- But we will also seek to engage with new organisations to further the promotion of our Vision.

This document outlines the outcomes ASC will have achieved by 2021. It builds on the foundations laid by the organisation over the last six very productive years. To achieve our strategic intent, we will identify annual goals, develop the plans to meet them and implement the programmes to fulfill the plans. While plans and programmes may vary and change those changes will always be in the service of transforming aquaculture towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility. They will be consistent with the intent outlined in this Strategic Overview 2017-2021. They will be the foundation on which we will build progress over the next 5 years.

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transforming the global seafood market