Meeting the world’s need for responsibly farmed seafood
Our vision

A world where aquaculture plays a major role in supplying food and social benefits for mankind whilst minimising negative impacts on the environment.

Our mission

To transform aquaculture towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility using efficient market mechanisms that create value across the chain.

Front and back cover image: © WWF
Boxed cover image: © ASC
The world’s appetite for seafood is growing fast. The aquaculture industry is already supplying more than half of all seafood consumed worldwide, but meeting that need increases its environmental and social impact. That’s why ASC is working hard to encourage responsible farming practices, and to promote the benefits of responsibly farmed seafood.

Who we are
The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that sets the most robust environmental and social standard for certifying responsible and well-managed aquaculture.

We work with people who share our goal of moving aquaculture towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility. We want aquaculture to have minimal impact on local communities and the environment. It’s a big remit. So to achieve our vision, we collaborate with aquaculture producers, seafood processors, retail and foodservice companies, scientists and conservation groups worldwide.

Our Theory of Change
Fish farms that meet ASC’s scientifically robust standards gain the right to sell their products bearing the ASC logo. This reassures consumers that they’re making a responsible purchase, and rewards the certified farms for their responsible practices. It also increases global demand and market access for certified seafood. In turn, this provides the incentives for farms that need to work harder at reducing any damaging environmental and social impacts to improve their practices so they can benefit from the market rewards. Ultimately, by buying ASC certified seafood consumers help to protect our environment, secure the livelihoods of local communities and ensure the availability of seafood for future generations.

It’s not just about the here-and-now
We’re looking to the future. Looking to reduce the environmental and social impact of aquaculture through market forces. We want to ensure every consumer and every company can trust the origin of their farmed seafood. So our programme brings accountability to the supply chain, ensuring traceability back to the farm through a clear chain of custody.

Our ambitions are shared by retailers, food service companies and brands, whose customers increasingly want and seek out environmentally and socially responsible food.

ASC’s seven principles
To meet the ASC standards, farms must show that they:

- Comply with national laws and local regulations
- Preserve the natural habitat, local biodiversity and ecosystem
- Preserve water resources and quality
- Use feed and other resources responsibly
- Preserve the diversity of the wild population
- Ensure the good health of their fish, including no unnecessary use of antibiotics or chemicals
- Ensure social responsibility towards their employees and local community
ASC sets the most robust environmental and social standards for responsible aquaculture based on clear, scientifically derived and metric-based performance indicators.

Why do we need responsible farming?
With production from wild capture fisheries having limited long-term capacity for increase, the onus is on the aquaculture industry to meet the growing worldwide demand for fish. Indeed, more than half of the seafood consumed globally now comes from fish farms. While this eases the burden on wild capture fishing, it can have adverse environmental and social impacts, including:

- Disruption to local ecosystems
- Pollution of water resources
- Substandard working conditions

How do we define responsible farming?
Our seven core principles present a challenging, but achievable set of standards, with measurable Performance Indicators (PI) for each principle. These indicators were reached by benchmarking the collective experience of more than 2,000 stakeholders globally.

ASC doesn’t assess farms or issue certificates itself: that would undermine our independence. Rather, a third party certification company audits farms against our standards and assesses their suitability for ASC certification.

After certification, farms can use the ASC logo and legitimately claim their products are responsibly produced. Similar endorsements by companies in the supply chain using the ASC logo and claim must also be independently verified to ensure certified product traceability. All companies processing seafood must have traceability systems in place to ensure no product mixing or substitution occurs along the chain.

Independent verification of our standards

Our standards are developed in line with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) Guidelines and the ISEAL Alliance Codes. And just like farms must show how they meet ASC standards, so ASC has to show that we meet the ISEAL standards and credibility principles.

In particular we have to prove the suitability of our systems governing standard setting, impact evaluation and assurance.
ASC’s standards, certification and labelling programme are making a difference. The progress ASC has made has resulted in some real achievements as a growing number of pioneering farms meet the robust ASC standards.

Many farms have already made the necessary changes to meet the ASC standards and are helping to transform the seafood market and ensure a responsible supply of seafood for future generations.

**CASE STUDY: Thuan An, a Vietnamese pangasius farm**

“*We would say to other farmers who want to be ASC certified that you should do it before your customers request you to do so.*”

Nguyen Khanh Ngoc, Quality Assurance Manager, Thuan An

Thuan An’s pangasius farm, Thu Binh, gained ASC certification in July 2014. The improvements they’ve made include:

- Increased feed use efficiency (FCR < 1.68), which has reduced production costs.
- Better disease control.
- Established systems to monitor the quality of discharge water, sludge accumulation and fish mortality.
- Reduced fish mortality to around 10 per cent.
- Invested in upgrading farm infrastructure, ensuring that there was enough space for a waste treatment system.
- Reinforced the pond embankments to prevent fish escapes.
- Documented growing techniques to ensure feed is used efficiently.
- Increased support for the local community.

**CASE STUDY: Lerøy Seafood Group, Norwegian salmon farms**

“Our aim is to offer a full range of ASC certified products to existing and new clients in all international markets.”

Anne Hilde Midttveit, Quality, Environment and CSR, Lerøy Seafood Group

For Lerøy Seafood Group gaining ASC certification was important to their long-term future:

- Lerøy aims to be the leading supplier of sustainable quality seafood so felt gaining ASC accreditation was the natural thing to do.
- Many of Lerøy’s customers have similar values and request ASC certified seafood.

Anne Hilde Midttveit on getting ready for ASC Certification

- To meet the ASC standards we provided education and training for staff and improved our record keeping.
- We carried out more extensive benthic surveys and introduced more comprehensive, regular auditing and reporting procedures.
- Our aquaculture sites are located in small communities along the coast of Norway; since implementing the ASC standard we set up regular local meetings in the communities and we now have closer contact with them.

**CASE STUDY: Tassal, Australian salmon farms**

“For a company to achieve ASC certification, it means that it’s paying close attention to its impact on habitats, wildlife, water quality and the health of the fish, as well as the local communities.”

Linda Sams, Head of Sustainability, Tassal

Tasmanian salmon producer Tassal is the leading producer of Atlantic salmon in Australia. They achieved ASC certification for all of their salmon farming operations in 2014. These are just some of the improvements they’ve made:

- Reduced dependency on fish meal and fish oil.
- Fish in/fish out ration of well below 1.5.
- Dedicated wildlife officer helps ensure protection for seals and birds.
- Better nets and fences keep native fish and other wildlife away from fish and food.
- Use of Kikkko netting and in-and out net washers removes the need for copper antifoulant.
- Ongoing improvements include introduction of fish health and welfare programme.
- Taking care of social improvements – Tassal is an employer of choice, dedicated to training and community engagement.

**CASE STUDY: Trapia Malaysia, tilapia farm**

“A positive aspect of the ASC standard is that it brings a stronger multi-stakeholder perspective in the company’s decision making processes, which at the end becomes ‘just the way you think’.”

Alejandro Tola Alvarez, Chief Technical Officer, GenoMar AS

Trapia Malaysia, a subsidiary of the Norwegian company GenoMar AS, gained ASC certification for its tilapia production in November 2012. For Trapia Malaysia ASC certification was important to secure a stable future for the business:

- We want to be with the best in the industry and show our stakeholders that we are a responsible organisation.
- What is important is that we keep the momentum going and translate the standard into company values guiding everyday actions by each employee.

Alejandro Tola Alvarez, on getting ready for ASC Certification

- We reduced impacts particularly in the supply of fish feed, through the substitution of untraceable and uncontrolled marine ingredients with marine byproducts or fish derived ingredients from sustainable fisheries.
- We also concentrated a lot of effort on evaluating the farm site, carrying out environmental impact assessments and carrying capacity calculations, to ensure that the area’s carrying capacity could sustain the farm without negative impact.
- The authorities can see that we “walk the talk” and we are taking responsibility over the common water resources.
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The momentum has begun. The drive towards a more responsible, more sustainable standard of operation is starting to trickle down to producers everywhere. ASC’s achievements are gathering pace.

Much of ASC’s success is founded on the power of the incentives it creates to catalyse change. Early adopters of ASC certification tended to be well run farms that were already operating at, or very close to the Standard’s requirements. Market forces dictate that others, seeing the move toward responsible operation, have followed suit.

**ASC’s biggest contribution to sustainability**

As more and more farms get involved, the resulting improvements will inevitably be more significant. Farms with more damaging environmental and social impacts will need to embark on a more substantial programme of change if they want to meet the ASC standards.

Improving the environmental performance of farms that may have been poorly managed has a greater impact on environmental sustainability. The improvements are bigger. The influence on other farms is greater.

ASC is seeing many examples of farms taking the steps they need to improve their environmental performance, using the ASC standards as a benchmark. They’re not just addressing existing environmental damage; they’re reducing the likelihood of future damage. These are the changes that will dictate the ongoing viability of the aquaculture industry.

With the increasing motivation for responsible farmed seafood growing throughout the supply chain, ASC certification is helping to drive environmental and social improvement. We’re moving towards a future where responsible aquaculture will become the dominant provider of seafood, worldwide… but there’s still more work to do before we get there.

The progress the ASC has made has resulted in some real gains – but more needs to be done to protect our marine environment and the livelihoods of the farmers and local communities, and to ensure a responsible source of seafood for the future.

The chain works… As shoppers buy products bearing the ASC logo, so certified farms reap the rewards for their diligence and commitment to environmental and social responsibility. As the demand for responsibly farmed fish increases, so the need – and the incentives – for more fish farms to undergo assessment also increase. The cumulative effect will continue to grow.

The power of the ASC logo

- It instils pride
- It enhances reputations
- It ensures accountability
- It promotes growth
- It provides assurance
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“ASC certification gives us access to the higher-end market and ensures the long-term sustainability of our organisation.”

Nguyen Khanh Ngoc, Quality Assurance Manager, Thuan An

“Working in the right way to ensure responsibility is extremely rewarding. Having ASC certification really allows us to instil pride in our organisation and to instil operational excellence in what we do.”

Linda Sams, Head of Sustainability, Tassal

“Our people are dedicated to responsible management and ASC certification makes us accountable, we take responsibility and it makes us more confident.”

Anne Hilde Midttveit, Quality, Environment and CSR, Lerey Seafood Group

“It sends a positive message to sustainably-minded investors that they are in a business with a long term outlook and that their management team is doing things correctly.”

Alejandro Tola Alvarez, Chief Technical Officer, GenoMar AS

“Having ASC certification supports and enhances our reputation, both internally and externally.”

Anne Hilde Midttveit, Quality, Environment and CSR, Lerey Seafood Group