

The Project

The aim of harmonisation across the ASC standards¹ is to ensure practicality, quality, consistency and ease in understanding among the requirements covered by the standards and ultimately contributing towards the ASC's objective of minimising the environmental and social impacts of aquaculture.

This is the motivation behind the reorganisation of the current standards into a Core Standard, with the following aims:

- Scalability of ASC certification, with new species being introduced far more easily, expanding the reach of the standards.
- More effective response to updates and changes within the market, due to a more efficient approach to integrating such modifications into the standard.
- Consistency when applying the standards as there will be less scope for variety in the interpretation of indicators when the wording is harmonised

ASC launched its first standards to the market in 2012 and the first farms were certified later that year. Certified and labelled products have become increasingly available in a growing number of markets globally since. The ASC has now gained practical implementation experience of the certification programme, and is now in a good position to consider how to restructure the content of its scheme documents to improve collective efficiency in their delivery and consistency in their application. This will provide a foundation to develop a simpler structure for the standard content and the supporting documentation found in the certification methodology, audit manuals and training materials. Additionally, while the current set of 7 standards covers 12 species 'groups' that represent most of the main commercially farmed species traded internationally, to truly deliver on its vision - to transform aquaculture at large towards sustainability - the ASC will need the ability to add more species to its programme. The development of a core standard that contains the content that lends itself to harmonisation will be the future building block for new standards. This core standard will be supported by 'species' and/or production-based modules (TBD) consisting of requirements specific to that 'species' that do not lend themselves to harmonisation.

The Harmonisation Process

Agreeing a common set of indicators is the first step (Phase 1) in creating a Core Standard that will lead to harmonisation of ASC's standards. Once these are agreed then the second step is to agree harmonised applicability, requirements and methods that will finalise the Core Standard and species specific annexes. The species specific annexes will set out requirements for a given species or species group where harmonisation cannot be achieved.

The information to be harmonised within the standards included around a thousand data-points from 8 species standards produced by the dialogues, consisting of: principles, impacts, criteria, rationale and indicators. In addition there are many audit manual requirements, annexes, footnotes and definitions. An overview of these indicators was created and groups were formed of the comparable information across the standards (by row). These groups were then reviewed to be harmonised with suggestions for the Core Standard written where possible. The 'key' document provided shows how the current standards have been harmonised into one set of indicators with differing applicability across the species. Potential core language should be

¹ Salmon, Shrimp, Tilapia, Bivalve, Abalone, Pangasius, Trout (and draft Seriola/Cobia) Standards

consistent with metric reporting, be performance based and science based as well as considered as best practice to ensure that the standards are not weakened or compromised in the process.

In some cases the current indicators are actually requirements and so these have been revised and associated to the new indicator with an additional requirement. Often the indicator was a description of how to do something rather than a description of what was being measured (the what).

Development of a Core Standard

The ambition for the project is to have a 'Core Standard' for all current and future species. This will be a much shorter and more accessible document than the currently available ASC standards, allowing the ASC's overarching principles in certification to be more understood and consistently applied. Information that is more technical or contains the actual requirements will then be presented in species specific annexes.

The Core Standard will retain many of the features of the current standards, such as the presentation of the principles, impacts, criteria, rationale and indicators. However, the structure will differ from the current standard in the following ways:

- 1 Core Standard
- Common definitions and references
- Detailed methodologies and species specific requirements will not be presented within the Core Standard, they will appear in species specific annexes

The 'key' matrix shows how the principles and indicators from each of the 7 current ASC species specific standards have been harmonised into the Core Standard. The purpose of grouping these indicators is to rationalise and simplify the standards making them wherever possible to be common. This of course means that some detail is lost when multiple indicators across multiple standards is merged into one core indicator. And although detail in the description may be lost the rigour of the standard, its intent and the requirement level is not changed at all at this stage. All the requirements, applicability, methods remain the same for the species as these will be discussed during consultation Phase 2.

Presently, harmonised suggestions have been drafted for the Core Standard for all of the principles, impacts, criteria, rationale and indicators. This process is ongoing for the requirements, annexes, footnotes and definitions which will be released as part of this project for consultation at a later date.

Public Consultation

The documents have been drafted following ASC's ISEAL compliant standard setting procedures. Consultation on the draft Core Standard is now open and feedback is sought from stakeholders. This consultation will run for 60 days from the initial date of publication.

Please complete the forms available on the ASC website and submit them to the ASC before the deadline 1st October 2016 and these will be included in the review and subsequent re-drafting.

Comments are to be submitted to the ASC using the forms provided by email: standards@asc-aqua.org. Comments will not be attributed to organisations or individuals but we will provide a public response from the ASC to stakeholders generally on feedback received and also provide feedback to individual people/organisations who/which handed in feedback.