Introduction to ASC certification

The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) promotes responsibly farmed seafood through its certification and labelling programme. Working together with the aquaculture industry, seafood processors, retail and foodservice companies, scientists and conservation groups, it helps to guide the industry towards an environmentally sustainable and socially responsible future.

Fish farms that meet ASC’s standards gain the right to sell their products bearing the ASC logo. This gives farms a public endorsement of their responsible practices, and gives consumers the reassurance that they’re making an ethical purchase.

The ASC standards

The ASC farm standards were developed by more than 2,000 stakeholders globally. The standard development process adheres to ISEAL’s1 Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards.

The ASC standards focus on both the environmental and social impact of farming.

- Environmentally, farms must show that they actively minimise their impact on the surrounding natural environment. This extends to careful management of the fish health and resources.
- Socially, farms must be a good and conscientious neighbour; that means operating their farm in a socially responsible manner, caring for their employees and working with the local community.

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1 ISEAL is the global membership association for sustainability standards, it defines what good practice looks like along with the core characteristics of credible standards. ISEAL members demonstrate their ability to meet ISEAL’s Codes of Good Practice and accompanying requirements, as well as commit to learning and improving to deliver increased positive impacts.
The ASC Shrimp Standard

A widely publicised problem with the shrimp farming industry is its impact on local environments – particularly the clearing of mangroves. But it isn’t just the environment that is affected. Poorly managed shrimp farming can have a detrimental effect on local communities. ASC certified shrimp farms must meet these challenges head on:

- **Biodiversity.** ASC certified Shrimp farms minimise impacts on their neighbouring ecosystem in a number of ways, such as partial restoration of lost mangrove forest, the development and implementation of a biodiversity-focused environmental impact assessment (B-EIA) and ensuring farms are not sited in critical habitats. Since shrimp farming often occurs along coastal areas, a permanent coastal barrier must be in place between the farm and the coastline.

- **Feed.** ASC certification requires shrimp farms to adhere to strict limits to minimise use of wild fish as an ingredient for feed. In addition, the standard requires farms to ensure full traceability back to a responsibly managed source, preferably certified, for wild fish, but also for palm oil and soy.

- **Pollution.** ASC certified shrimp farms are required to measure water quality parameters (nitrogen, phosphorus, oxygen levels, etc.) at regular intervals and remain within set limits. Treatment systems for waste water need to comply with strict requirements. Discharge of sludge is not allowed.

- **Diseases.** ASC certified shrimp farms must adhere to rigorous requirements to minimise disease outbreaks. A health plan for the shrimp must be developed and implemented on the farm. This plan details steps for biosecurity management, including the use of pathogen-free shrimp larvae for pond stocking. In addition, the use of medicines before a disease is diagnosed (prophylactic use), is prohibited. ASC certified shrimp cannot be treated with antibiotics or given feed containing medicine. Producers need to manage farms in such a way that shrimp survival rates are high.

- **Social.** ASC certification imposes strict requirements based on the core principles of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), these include prohibiting the use of child labour or any form of forced labour. All ASC certified farms are safe and equitable working environments where employees earn a decent wage and have regulated working hours. Certified farms need to consult and engage with local communities, to ensure they provide access to vital resources and deal with complaints or conflicts in a proper manner.

Why the ASC matters

ASC’s standards set performance indicators across all of the criteria. Farms must not exceed metric-based limits to ensure their output meets all the requirements for certification. During the certification process the independent certifiers’ reports are published for public consultation, which informs the certification decision.

Farms that meet the ASC standards deliver real benefits: a cleaner seabed, cleaner water and healthier fish. They also help to preserve local biodiversity, and work in a way that supports their community.

Through chain of custody certification, you can be sure that ASC labelled seafood can be traced back through every step of the supply chain to a well-managed farm that meets the strict requirements of the ASC standards.