

Terms of Reference (ToR)

Developing New ASC Farm Standards

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Introduction

The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) was founded in 2010 by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH) to host of the standards developed by the WWF Aquaculture Dialogues.

The ASC farm standards became operational in 2012 after a system of accreditation and certification was established. Since then the ASC has made great strides with steady growth in the number of certified farms and certified products available around the world. The ASC has established a reputation within the seafood sector and beyond as a credible certification program for farmed seafood. The ASC farm standards are performance-based, scientifically robust and were developed through a transparent multi- stakeholder standard setting process. ASC currently manages (8) eight standards covering 14 different species groups. These include standards for farmed salmon, trout, tilapia, pangasius, shrimp, bivalve shellfish, abalone, seriola and cobia. There are over 500 ASC certified farms and more than 100 farms in assessment.

The first public consultation period for 3 new farm standards ended on July 31. The new farm standards cover the following species groups: sea bass, sea bream, meagre, flatfish, grouper, snapper, barramundi and pompano.

In addition to the three standards up for public consultation the ASC is also working on developing new farm standards for sea cucumber, sturgeon/caviar, Amazonian native finfish, closed-cycle bluefin tuna, recirculating aquaculture systems, crayfish, and carp.

ASC vision and mission

The vision of the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) is a world where aquaculture plays a major role in supplying food and social benefits for mankind whilst minimizing or eliminating negative impacts on the environment.

The ASC will do this by using market mechanism to incentivise and create value across the chain to transform aquaculture towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

About this ToR document

This document gives an overview of and guidance for both ASC and interested parties to develop ASC standards for new species and production systems.

It explains (i) why the standards are needed, (ii) the objectives of ASC in developing these standards, (iii) to stakeholder groups how they can engage in the standards development process, (iv) detailed process steps as well as (v) presumed risks of implementing the developed standard, measures to mitigate and/or avoid those risks.

Justification of need

Increasing global demand for healthy sources of protein relies more and more on aquaculture. In

2014, human consumption of farmed fish overtook that of wild fish for the first time¹.

This trend in farmed fish consumption underlines the ASC's mission to transform aquaculture towards environmentally sustainable and socially responsible.

Being a market-based program, an important consideration in creating standards for new species is based on the market demand. Since being launched, the ASC has received many requests for the development of new standards; these requests include sea bass and sea bream, barramundi, sea cucumber, flatfish, sturgeon/caviar, and close-cycle bluefin tuna.

In developing new standards, the main consideration remains the potential to reduce the negative impacts of aquaculture. There are concerns about the effects of farming fish on the environment, which include dependence on wild fish for feed; discharges of excess nutrients and organic matters; fish escapes; transfer of diseases and parasites between farmed and wild fish; introduction of non-indigenous species, among others. Any adverse effects that fish farming has on the environment has a direct impact on the livelihoods of those who depend on these resources.

While there are standards for responsible fish farming that set out best management practices to help farmers and improve their operations, ASC's approach is complementary. ASC performance metrics, which are a unique feature of the program, are a useful tool to measure impacts of farming fish and shellfish. The ASC also develops standards that set real challenges for the industry to achieve; based on the level of performance exhibited by only perhaps 20% of the sector. With ASC's metric approach, together with the best practices of the industry at the time of the standard's launch, the ASC can make a significant contribution to mitigating the negative impacts of fish and shellfish farming, especially in those countries where best practices, especially for social issues, are not yet the norm.

Overlap with other standard development processes

The ASC is also currently developing a standard for the production of fish feed used in aquaculture. The draft standard is now available for the 2nd public consultation. The ASC and MSC are jointly developing a seaweed standard, which is also open for public comment. In addition, the ASC is running a process (i.e. ASC Aligned Farm Standard) to simplify and harmonise the structure of all current standards aiming to improve implementation efficiency, simplify accreditation and auditor training, promote further program uptake and to facilitate the expansion of the farm standards to cover new species and production systems.

Objectives and scope of the standards

The main objectives of the standards to be developed for other aquaculture species and production systems is in line with the current ASC standards, which are highlighted in the Theory of Change. That is to credibly develop comprehensive and measurable performance-based standards that minimise or eliminate the key negative environmental and social impacts

¹ [Food Outlook, FAO 2015](#)

of aquaculture, while permitting the industry to remain economically viable. The standards are to apply to respective species, regardless of their production systems, size of operation and geographic location.

Approach to developing new ASC species standards

Based on the market demand for new standards, the ASC has moved forward with developing draft standards for the following species groups: Sea Bass, Sea Bream, and Meagre, Flatfish, and Tropical Marine Finfish. The draft standards for Sea Bass, Sea Bream, and Meagre, Flatfish, and Tropical Marine Finfish are currently published on the ASC website and available for public comment. They will be finalized by the end of 2017.

Building upon similarities of both farming practices and types of impacts of certain aquaculture systems, the ASC has taken a practical approach to developing these new standards; basing them on the existing multi-stakeholder derived ASC standards content.

For Flatfish and Sea Bass, Sea Bream, and Meagre, and with the help of NGO and industry partners (e.g. WWF Greece, WWF Croatia, WWF International, WWF Korea, WWF Japan, Andromeda Group, Nireus, Cromaris, Sürsan, Sogn Aqua, China Aquatic Products Packaging and Marketing Association, Jeju Fish-Culture Fisheries Cooperative, Ehime Prefecture Fishery Association) the ASC field-tested combinations of the existing standards that were relevant to the new species. Site visits for Sea Bass, Sea Bream, and Meagre were conducted during the early part of 2017 in Greece, Spain, Croatia, Turkey, and Japan. For Flatfish, site visits were conducted during the latter part of 2016 in South Korea and China and at the beginning of 2017 in Norway. The objective of the field-testing exercise was to identify any gaps between the existing standards content and farming practices and performance of the new species. It followed the pilot assessment approach that had been undertaken against early versions of the ASC standards and the testing of the applicability of the original ASC audit manuals. These draft standards are the result of that gap analysis and incorporate input and recommendations from NGOs and industry.

The draft Tropical Marine Finfish Standard is the culmination of a WWF Coral Triangle Aquaculture Dialogue process that began in 2013. During the three year process, almost 100 stakeholders including producers, civil society organizations, seafood buyers, scientists, academics and government representatives have participated. The draft standard was finalized after a meeting in Bali, Indonesia in December 2016. Species included in this standard are Grouper, Snapper, Barramundi, and Pompano. The standard follows closely in line with the other new draft standards and builds off of the expertise and knowledge base of the original Aquaculture Dialogues.

As mentioned in the introduction the ASC is also working on developing new farm standards for sea cucumber, sturgeon/caviar, Amazonian native finfish, closed-cycle bluefin tuna, recirculating aquaculture systems, crayfish, and carp.

Stakeholder mapping

Like in other standard setting processes that ASC has been running, the major groups of stakeholders include:

- Farmers
- Communities adjacent to farms
- Industry, including suppliers and retailers
- Social and environmental civil society organisations
- Scientists
- Conformity assessment bodies (CABs)/ auditors
- Other standards schemes.

The table below outlines major stakeholder groups, their respective relevance and interest in this standard setting process, and how ASC will be reaching out to them. Based on this stakeholder groups mapping, for each new species standard ASC will be monitoring their participation throughout the process in order to strive for balanced and effective stakeholder participation.

Main stakeholder groups	Relevance <i>(why they should participate in the process)</i>	Interest in the process and standards	Outreach strategies for participation in revision	Communication means	Participation goal
Aquaculture farms of related species (including farm trade bodies / representative organisations)	Most directly affected group. In order for standards to be effective, requirements must be possible in practice. Farms can provide these practical insights.	Attainable standards that create added value when farms get certified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - direct contact with farms - where necessary, translation of necessary documents (e.g. this TOR, draft standards, synopsis, final standards) - via Conformity assessment bodies (CABs) - local/regional workshops, where and when necessary - participation in pilot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E-mail newsletter (if possible) - Website (if possible) - Webinars (if possible) - In person to the extent possible (e.g. workshops) - Through trade associations - Through local civil society organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Farms in all active countries and regions of the related species
Communities (around farms growing related species) (This group may be represented by SNGO's, see below)	Directly affected group. Some standards requirements are about local communities.	Standards that take care of reducing negative impacts of adjacent farms on their livelihoods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - where necessary, translation of certain process documents (e.g. this TOR, draft standards, synopsis, final standards) - via social ngo's where possible - local/regional workshops, where and when necessary - participation in pilot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E-mail newsletter (if possible) - Website (if possible) - Webinars (if possible) - In person to the extent possible (e.g. workshops) - Through (local) social / environmental ngo's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People living around certified farms in all active countries and regions
Industry (retails, processing/ trading companies)	Indirectly affected group. Credible standards that do not challenge their continued and consistent supply, and	Attainability of standards that do not create high costs for certified products. Facing end consumers, retail likes to make	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct contact with these companies (e.g. through ASC Outreach colleagues) - Face-to-face meetings at or around conferences/trade fairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E-mail newsletter - website - webinars - In person to the extent possible (e.g. workshops) - Trade press 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Companies trading related species - Companies in all active countries and regions

Main stakeholder groups	Relevance <i>(why they should participate in the process)</i>	Interest in the process and standards	Outreach strategies for participation in revision	Communication means	Participation goal
	yet help strengthen their reputation.	sure relevant issues will be covered in standards.			
Civil society organisations – both environmental and social (NGOs)	Experience/knowledge of and insights in issues that will be in the standards	Key environmental and social concerns are addressed in the standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct contact with these organisations - Face-to-face meetings at or around conferences/trade fairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E-mail newsletter - website - webinars - In person to the extent possible (e.g. workshops) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both local and international NGOs
Governments (including inter-governmental agencies)	Alignment with national and international sustainability development goals (SDGs)	No impose of technical barriers to trade (TBT) in standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - direct contact with government officials (or through consultants) - where necessary, organise discussions with government officials - Public consultation workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E-mail newsletter - website - webinars - In person to the extent needed (e.g. workshops) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representatives of governments where related species are widely farmed
Scientists/Academics	Knowledge and their scientific approach	Standards are science-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - direct contact with scientists - where necessary, organise discussions with them - Where necessary, have them do specific research on identified topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E-mail newsletter - website - webinars - In person to the extent possible (e.g. workshops) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scientists/researchers of the related species
Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs)	Besides farmers and local NGOs, CABs have practical insights on field implementation of standards	Auditability of the standards and reasonable auditing costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct contact with these organisations - Face-to-face meetings at or around conferences/trade fairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E-mail newsletter - website - webinars - In person (e.g. workshops) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both ASC accredited and non-accredited CABs - CABs familiar with the related species

Main stakeholder groups	Relevance <i>(why they should participate in the process)</i>	Interest in the process and standards	Outreach strategies for participation in revision	Communication means	Participation goal
Funder(s), funding this project	These will not participate in the project will be informed on the progress.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E-mail newsletter - website - webinars - In person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To fund the project - To fund the project-related pilots
Farm inputs suppliers and service providers (e.g. feed, broodstocks, consultants for BEIAs or p-SIAs)	Practical experience and knowledge of the areas of their business	No adverse effect to their business due to the standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct contact - Indirect contact via CABs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E-mail newsletter - website - webinars - In person (e.g. workshops) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At least one representative of each type of suppliers and service providers
Other aquaculture standards schemes (e.g. GlobalG.A.P., BAP, etc.)	Knowledge and experience of the related species.	Minimal to no overlaps with their standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct contact - Workshops/ meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E-mail newsletter - website - webinars - In person to the extent possible (e.g. workshops) - As observers in relevant meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At least representatives of GlobalG.A.P. and BAP

Guiding principles

The overall principles of the ASC programme include:

- **Credible:** ASC standards are developed and implemented according to FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification and ISEAL Codes of Good Practices – multi-stakeholder, transparent, incorporating science-based performance metrics.
- **Meaningful:** including science-based performance metrics, the requirements in the standards are relevant to managing major impacts, realistic, measurable, and auditable.
- **Effective:** a globally recognised, market-oriented programme that aims to promote meaningful improvements in aquaculture production in a credible and cost efficient way that adds real value to producers and buyers of certified products.

This standard setting process also adheres to the guiding principles described in the Standard Setting Procedure as follows:

- **Improvement** – The standards are reviewed and revised (as needed) every five years, at a minimum. This allows the ASC to incorporate learning from stakeholders’ feedback and from the Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) programme. Performance levels will be adjusted over time to reflect new data, improved practices and new technology.
- **Relevance** – The standards focus on key social and environmental issues that have been collectively identified and agreed to be addressed by stakeholders through various dialogues. The ASC strives for science-based, metrics and performance-based requirements that are objectively verifiable. The standards’ requirements are formulated in a way that facilitates consistent understanding.
- **Rigour** – The standards are based on performance data from standards implementing facilities that represent the sector’s best practices across different regions. The standards are based on impact (i.e. the issue that the ASC intends to minimise), principle (i.e. the guiding principle for addressing the impact), criteria (i.e. the areas to be focused on to address the impact), indicator (i.e. the measurement determining the extent of the impact) and requirement (i.e. the performance level that must be reached to determine if the desired impact is achieved).
- **Engagement** – Multiple stakeholder groups are proactively engaged throughout the standard setting process, from the initial feedback through the decision-making stages. Final decisions are taken by the Supervisory Board, which is also multi-stakeholder.
- **Transparency** – All information of the standard setting process is made publicly available on the ASC website. The information is up-to-date, including the TOR, synopsis of public comments, draft version(s) of the standards, and the final (valid) version of the standards.
- **Accessibility** – The standards’ requirements are not overly burdensome. The standards do not create obstacles to trade or exclude small-scale farms from market access. Standards and guidance documents are translated into different languages as deemed necessary.

Process of standard development

Timelines are roughly estimated and the progress of the project (this table) is updated on a regular basis (every 3 months)

Activity	Timelines	Output	By
1 st public consultation on new ASC species standards (ASC Sea Bass, Sea Bream, and Meagre Standard, ASC Flatfish Standard, and ASC Tropical Marine Finfish Standard)	June-July 2017	Received comments from the public	Public/Interested Stakeholders
Process received comments for the 1 st public consultation on new ASC species standards (ASC Sea Bass, Sea Bream, and Meagre Standard, ASC Flatfish Standard, and ASC Tropical Marine Finfish Standard)	August 2017	Summary of comments + amended draft standards	ASC Secretariat
Post draft ASC Sea Bass, Sea Bream, and Meagre Standard, ASC Flatfish Standard, and ASC Tropical Marine Finfish Standard for 2 nd public consultation round	August-September 2017	Received comments from the public	Public/Interested Stakeholders
Finalize and approve new standards	September-October 2017	Standard v.1.0 published and ready for use	- ASC Secretariat - SB approve
Developing Audit Manuals	September-October 2017	Audit Manuals for Sea Bass, Sea Bream, and Meagre Standard, Flatfish Standard, and Tropical Marine Finfish Standard	- ASC Secretariat - TAG approve
Site Visits and Field Testing for Sturgeon/Caviar	June-December 2017	Draft Standard for 1 st Round of Public Consultation	ASC Secretariat
Site Visits and Field	June-December	Draft Standard for 1 st	ASC Secretariat

Activity	Timelines	Output	By
Testing for Amazonian Finfish	2017	Round of Public Consultation	

Decision making procedure

The ASC’s Supervisory Board (SB) supported by the work of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) will provide decision making oversight. The ASC secretariat will coordinate the project.

TAG’s responsibility

The TAG has the task to:

- Review the new draft standards and related logged issues; and,
- Provide inputs on proposed changes based on stakeholder input;
- Advise ASC’s Supervisory Board (SB) on the final decision to approve and publish the new farm standards

TAG membership

- Members of the TAG are able and willing to share relevant knowledge and expertise on accreditation, certification, and relevant, related issues and will be able to spend sufficient time to support this project.
- Members must demonstrate affinity with the ASC’s objectives and the membership must reflect necessary representation from relevant technical areas and a broad background.
- The TAG Chair, will be the main point of contact to ASC’s Head of Standards & Science.

Reporting requirements:

- The Chair shall ensure minutes of all proceedings at meetings of the TAG are kept, including the names of those members of any required Working Group present at each such meeting, and all views, advice, recommendations and opinions of the Working Group.
- Chatham House Rules will be applied for all public documents related to this project.

Decision-making procedure:

- When consensus is not possible, the TAG will apply the principle of ‘majority voting’ and will report the different opinions, the votes attributed and a summary of each opinion. The TAG will advise ASC’s Supervisory Board (SB) for the SB to take a final decision.

Meetings:

- The ASC strives to work in a cost and time efficient manner and has a strong preference to work primarily via e.g. teleconference and e-mail. Meeting schedules will be set to allow participation at reasonably convenient times.
- Need for in person meeting(s) will be decided as the process progresses.

Assessment of risks

The following are identified factors that may affect ASC to achieve its intended changes (impacts) as defining in the ASC Theory of Change.

Disease outbreaks and natural events

Infectious disease is a major problem for aquaculture. An outbreak can wipe out the entire stock and requires enormous efforts and resources to implement corrective measures.

Similar or even more adverse effects on the sector can be created by nature. Algal bloom (allegedly caused by El Niño that raised the ocean temperature) has recently cost \$800m for the salmon sector in Chile. The Early Mortality Syndrome, an on-going threat has devastated shrimp production in parts of Asia at a cost of US\$ billions.

When such things happen, a farmers' priority is switched to business recovery. And that affects ASC's uptake, a precondition for any standard scheme to be able to create mid to long term changes (impacts).

Low level of advancement in farming practices

When farming practices are not very advanced and the standard is set at a high level, the gap in performance would discourage farmers to embrace the standards or it will take a long time for changes to take place.

Unregulated expansion

Success with certification may lead farmers and their neighbours to expanding production areas. In some places the expansion is unregulated partly because of its rapid pace driven by economic gains while the formal process of application for license takes time. On the other hand, in some origins, socio-economic reasons that are more prevalent for the livelihoods of local communities may persist even if regulation forbids such practices, especially if enforcement is not strict.

Regardless the reasons, unregulated expansion usually couples with less to no environmental and social stewardship.

Measures to manage the risk factors

ASC is actively working with other standard schemes (BAP) and other initiatives and governments to promote zonal management approach to aquaculture. Not only does this approach help with effective disease management on a large scale it also addresses issues like water resources, which are as critical for aquaculture as for any other commodity produced in a particular zone.

ASC also cooperates with local governments on various aspects. A stepping-stone path to first comply with national/regional standards and then step up to ASC certification to access to large important markets is foreseen to be a good incentive for farmers.

Group certification methodology is another tool to encourage more farmers especially smallholders to grow fish in a responsible manner.

Contact information

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