

Terms of Reference (ToR)

for Development of ASC Group Certification Methodology

This document is publicly available on the ASC website.

Document history

Version	Date	Description of amendment	Affected section/ page
1.0	November 2015	New TOR	n/a
1.1	Jan. 2016	Updated names of TWG members	Page 5

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1. Introduction

Originally created for farm-specific audits, the ASC is now adjusting its requirements to enable groups of farms to also work collectively towards compliance and collective certification with ASC Standards for responsible aquaculture. These requirements will support a so-called group certification approach.

As the majority of the aquaculture globally is done by small to medium sized farmers/enterprises, it is key to make sure the ASC's set up also offers possibilities for these farms to adopt the ASC Standards' requirements. Group certification is a means aimed at contributing to that. It will become a key component of the ASC certification programme for responsible fish farming and will help the ASC to transform aquaculture globally towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

Group certification will enable ASC to operate as an inclusive programme, ensuring that certification is attainable for a broad range of producers, small and large, to become certified. For that, a methodology needs to be developed that will outline specific requirements for groups management as well as Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs).

The group certification project was initiated back in 2013. It was put on hold due to other priorities and limited staff availability. Now the project is re-started and will be completed within 2016 as set out in this TOR.

About this document (TOR):

This document provides an overview of and guidance for both ASC, including the Technical Working Group (TWG), and stakeholders to develop the Group Certification Requirements. It is organized in 8 sections: Introduction, objectives, scope, definition, reference materials, guiding principle, work plan, and decision making procedure.

2. Objectives of this project

The primary objective of this project is to develop a robust methodology that would, on the one hand guide groups of operations (e.g. farmers) to effectively implement ASC standards and other requirements, and on the other hand allow CABs to assess the associated risks of certifying groups of individual operations in different jurisdictions, in a consistent manner using a risk-based sampling protocol.

3. Scope

This project is focused on the development of two sets of requirements: one is for groups of farmers/enterprises who wish to be certified against ASC standards and the other is for CABs for assessing those groups. Both sets of requirements will be included in the ASC Certification and Accreditation Requirements.

4. Reference materials

The ASC system strictly follows the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) guidelines for aquaculture certification. Also, the ASC is a full member of the ISEAL Alliance and commits to complying with ISEAL Codes of Good Practice. One of the Codes is for assurance practices that cover group certification. Below is the list of FAO and ISEAL documents that the ASC adheres and references to.

- 4.1 FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture certification
- 4.2 ISEAL Assurance Code V. 1
- 4.3 ISEAL Group Assurance Guide V.1, March 2013
- 4.4 ISEAL Common requirements for the certification of producer groups, P035 – Public version 1 – November 2008

5. Definitions

For consistency purposes, the following terms are used throughout the process of developing of and Group Certification document:

5.1 **Group**

An organised body of persons or enterprises that share similar characteristics and being part of a shared internal management system and, for assessment purposes, are considered as a single unit of certification (e.g. groups of farmers, of feed manufacturers, etc.) (adapted from ISEAL Assurance Code)

5.2 **Group member**

The individual enterprise (e.g. farmer, feed manufacturer, etc.) that is enrolled in a group assurance scheme.

5.3 **Group certification**

Certification for a group of (small-scale) aquaculture farmers or aquaculture farmer cooperative who has key characteristics in common in term of nature of production, proximity of farm location, common marketing as a group. The group has an Internal Management System to ensure compliance with the standards by all members of the group. (adapted from FAO, Technical Guidance on Aquaculture certification)

5.4 **Small-scale aquaculture**

Aquaculture farms with small production volume, and/or relatively small surface area, mainly without permanent labour, and typically lacking technical and financial capacity to support individual certification (FAO, Technical Guidance on Aquaculture certification).

5.5 **Internal assessment**

The inspection and review of group members performed according to the internal management system. (adapted from ISEAL Assurance Code)

5.6 **Internal Management system**

The set of documented processes that a group implements to ensure it can achieve its specified requirements, including compliance with the ASC certification requirements. (adapted from the ISEAL Assurance Code)

6. Guiding principles for developing the methodology

Guiding principles are meant to guide the TWG when developing the Group Certification requirements and public when commenting on them. They are also the objectives that the Group Certification methodology is expected to achieve in contributing to the ASC's credibility.

- **Accessibility.** The mission of the ASC is to transform the sector towards environmentally sustainable and socially responsible. The mission could not be achieved without having a system that is accessible to majority of the sector – small-scale farmers/ enterprises. Group certification methodology using risk-based approach which is based on auditing a sample of group members (as opposed to 100%), will help reduce administrative burden and implementation costs for farmers/ enterprises.
- **Rigour.** Requirements are to be set in such a way that facilitates production of accurate audit results to the extent possible. This includes but not limited to requirements for managing the group, the sample size, (risk-based) approach to sampling and auditing, internal/external audit frequency, what to audit, how to engage stakeholders, etc.
- **Impartiality.** Audit results by both group’s personnel and external auditors must be objective in order to effectively drive improvement and at the same time give a good level of assurance to stakeholders who rely on the group compliance with the ASC standards.
- **Competence.** The effectiveness of the programme depends on the key personnel engaged in group’s internal management system and CABs’ certification process.
- **Transparency.** Engagement of stakeholders in the certification process and availability of related information to the public are good measures for building confidence in the system and managing risks to the system’s integrity.

7. Work plan

Activity	Tentative timeline	By	Means
Finalising TORs for project and pilots	23.11.2015	ASC secretariat	Email/Website
Providing TWG with relevant documents	26.11.2015	ASC secretariat	Email
Teleconferencing with TWG members	December 2015		
Finalising the draft	End January 2016	TWG/ASC or Consultant(s)	In-person meeting or consultant(s)
Last commenting round by TWG	Mid February 2016	TWG	Email/ telcon
Finalising the draft and preparation for public consultation and pilots	29.02.2016	ASC secretariat	N/A
Public consultation	01.03 - 31.03.2016	ASC secretariat/ stakeholders	Email/Website
Pilots	15.03 - 15.04.2016	CABs, volunteering groups	On-site
Receiving audit reports & feedback from the pilots participants	30.03 - 15.05.2016	CABs and farmer groups	Email

Publishing comments	01.06.2016	ASC secretariat/ stakeholders	Email/ Website
Analysing public comments	15.05 – 30.05.2016		
Sending the TWG recommendations for the final draft	05.06.2016	ASC secretariat	N/A
Receiving final feedback from TWG	20.06.2016	TWG	
Preparing and sharing final draft with TWG	05.07.2016	ASC Secretariat	Email
Approval by TAG	End Jul. 2016	TAG	
Group certification is published	End Jul. 2016	ASC secretariat	Email/Website
Preparing for webinars for CABs and groups	Aug. 2016	ASC secretariat	
Conducting webinars	2 workshops/Sep. 2016 2 workshops/Oct 2016	ASC secretariat	Virtual

8. Decision making procedure

A Technical Working Group (TWG) has been formed according to the decision of the ASC's Supervisory Board (SB) to support the work of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). The ASC secretariat will coordinate the project throughout. The TWG consists of seven (07) members from:

Non-industry

- Henk Peters (Oxfam Novib)
- Aldin Hilbrands (IDH)
- Chadag Vishnumurthy Mohan (Individual)
- Daniel Knoop (Solidaridad)

Industry:

- Dominique Gautier (Sea Farms)

Service providers:

- Efrain Calderon (Control Union Peru)
- Sönke Fischer (ASI)

TWG's responsibility

The TWG has the task to:

- Provide inputs into finalizing the requirements for group certification
- Approve applications from farmer groups and CABs for the pilots
- Steer the implementation of the pilots
- Report and recommend the final version of the document to the Technical Advisory Group

(TAG)

Decision-making procedure

The TWG strives for consensus. If TWG is unable to reach consensus, it will apply the principle of 'majority voting' and will report the different options, the number of votes for each option and a summary of each of the points of view. TWG will share its advice with the TAG. The TAG will advise the ASC's Supervisory Board (SB) for the SB to take a final decision on approving the methodology.

Meetings and expenses

Members join the TWG on a voluntary basis. There is no remuneration for TWG's members. 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. If attendants come from different time zones participants will determine meeting times in such a way that all participants can attend at reasonably convenient times.

Need for an in-person meeting will be decided as the process progresses. Upon request and at the explicit discretion of the Chair, members of the TWG may be paid all reasonable travelling, hotel and other expenses properly incurred by them in connection with their attendance at meeting or otherwise in connection with the discharge of their duties.

Confidentiality

Original public comments will be published on the ASC website with no specific personal names but their associated organization unless otherwise indicated explicitly by the commentators.

Pilot results and feedback will also be added to the list of original comments with clear indication that they are from the pilots without mentioning the names of the participating groups and CABs.

Contact information

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