

ASC Standards and CAR-Related Question for Interpretation Procedure



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1. Introduction

The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established in 2010 to set and operate global standards for responsible aquaculture. Certified farmed products are promoted to consumers through the use of its logo. The aquaculture industry is growing strongly and is already supplying more than half of all seafood consumed worldwide. This growing demand increases the environmental and social footprint associated with the industry. The ASC certification and labelling programme incentivises improved farming practices by promoting the benefits of responsibly farmed seafood and encourages industry to work towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility. ASC works globally with aquaculture producers, seafood processors, retail and foodservice companies, scientists, conservation groups and the public to promote the best environmental and social choice in farmed seafood. All of the ASC's standards have been developed following the [ISEAL Codes of Good Practice](#) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification](#).

ASC Vision and Mission

The vision of the ASC is a world where aquaculture plays a major role in supplying food and social benefits for humanity whilst minimising negative impacts on the environment.

The mission of the ASC is to transform aquaculture towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility using efficient market mechanisms that create value across the chain.

Question for Interpretation

Certificate holders, Conformity Assessment Bodies ("CABs"), ASC's appointed accreditation body Assurance Services International ("ASI") and stakeholders may encounter a situation where an interpretation of the language and/or the intent of an indicator or a requirement is needed. To address this need, ASC has developed the Question for Interpretation ("QA") process. The QA process is connected to ASC's Standard Setting and ASC's Certification and Accreditation Requirements ("CAR") Development and Revision procedures. Interpretations provide temporary additional guidance and information between revisions to programme documents. All interpretations will be evaluated for inclusion during the development of new standards or the review and revision of existing standards or the CAR.

To ensure transparency, all QAs are publicly available on the [ASC's Variance Request and Interpretation Platform](#).

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2. Purpose

This procedure outlines the steps for submission, processing, and publishing of QAs. The procedure ensures that all QAs are processed in a consistent manner and that the outcomes are clear and replicable.

3. Scope

This procedure applies to QAs regarding the ASC's standards, ASC CAR and other requirements applicable to certificate holders or CABs. These QAs are submitted via the ASC's Variance Request and Interpretation Platform (for ASC, CAB and ASI submissions) or via e-mail: vr@asc-aqua.org (for stakeholder or certificate holder submissions).

4. Effective Date

The procedure will be effective from 15 December 2021.

5. Referenced Documents

Not Applicable.

6. Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Days	Refers to working days applicable to the country of the ASC Head Office (The Netherlands).

7. Roles and Responsibilities

- 7.1** Aquaculture Stewardship Council ("ASC") – Responsible for following and updating this procedure, administrative processing, issuing QAs, and publishing QAs.
- 7.2** Question for Interpretation Applicant ("Applicant") – Certificate holder, Stakeholder, CAB or ASI submitting a Question for Interpretation using the process as described in this procedure.
- 7.3** Question for Interpretation Technical Reviewer ("Reviewer"):
 - 7.3.1** Standards-related QAs – ASC Standard and Science Department assigned reviewer responsible for drafting an interpretation to present to the QA Committee.

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7.3.2 CAR-related QAs – ASC Programme Assurance Department assigned reviewer responsible for drafting an interpretation to present to the QA Committee.

7.4 Question for Interpretation Review Committee (“QA Committee”) – Responsible for reviewing and approving QA responses prior to publication.

7.4.1 The standards-related QA Committee consists of the Director of Standards and Science and the Head of Standards.

7.4.1.1 The Head of Certification Assurance will participate as an observer.

7.4.2 The CAR-related QA Committee consists of the Director of Programme Assurance and the Head of Certification Assurance.

7.4.2.1 The Head of Standards will participate as an observer.

8. Procedure

8.1 Question for Interpretation – Submission

8.1.1 QAs can be submitted by:

- ASI via ASC’s Variance Request and Interpretation Platform (“the Platform”).
- CABs via the Platform.
- Stakeholders via vr@asc-aqua.org.
- Certificate holders via contacting their CAB to submit a QA on their behalf or via vr@asc-aqua.org.

8.1.2 ASC can also issue QAs when clarifications on its standards or requirements are necessary. All CABs will be notified by ASC of such QAs.

8.2 Question for Interpretation – Formulation Requirements

8.2.1 All requests shall:

8.2.1.1 Be written in clear and concise English.

8.2.1.2 Be related to Indicator(s) from a single Criterion of a Principle, if the QA is related to an ASC standard, or a single clause if the QA is related to the CAR.

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8.2.1.3 Not request that ASC decide compliance of a Unit of Certification (“UoC”), or how to demonstrate compliance, nor request approval of a corrective action to close a non-conformity raised by a CAB.

8.2.1.4 Not request ASC to adapt standards or CAR content, but only seek interpretation. In case an adaptation of standards or CAR content is requested, the [ASC Variance Request Procedure](#) shall be used.

8.2.1.5 Not be previously addressed by ASC via another published QA on the Platform.

8.3 QA Receipt

8.3.1 Upon receipt of a QA, ASC within three (3) days will:

8.3.1.1 Assign a number to the QA.

8.3.1.2 Send confirmation of receipt to the Applicant.

8.4 QA Administrative Review

8.4.1 ASC will assess the QA’s compliance with the Formulation Requirements in Section 8.2 within five (5) days.

8.4.2 If the QA meets the Formulation Requirements, ASC will:

8.4.2.1 Inform the Applicant that their QA has passed Administrative Review within two (2) days of the decision.

8.4.2.2 Proceed to Section 8.4.3

8.4.3 If the QA does not meet the Formulation Requirements, ASC will inform the Applicant within two (2) days of the completion of the Administrative Review with the reason for the failure.

8.4.3.1 Applicants may revise their submitted QAs after notification of failure to meet Formulation Requirements.

8.4.3.2 For standards-related QAs:

- a) The Applicant shall revise their submitted QA within ten (10) days after notification of failure.

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- i. If the Applicant does not revise their submitted QA, the QA will not be processed further, and it will be categorised as “Closed”.
 - ii. ASC will inform the Applicant within two (2) days.
 - b) If the revised QA meets the Formulation Requirements, ASC will proceed to Section 8.4.4.
- 8.4.4** ASC will publish the QA on the Platform as “Open” within five (5) days of the completion of all Administrative Review steps.

8.5 Standards-related QA – Technical Review and QA Committee

- 8.5.1** After publishing the QA, ASC will assign a Reviewer within two (2) days.
- 8.5.2** The Reviewer will provide ASC with a draft Interpretation within fifteen (15) days of its assignment.
- 8.5.3** ASC will send the draft Interpretation to the QA Committee within two (2) days.
- 8.5.4** Within five (5) days of receipt, the draft Interpretation will be reviewed by the QA Committee.
- 8.5.4.1** If a revision to the draft Interpretation is required by the QA Committee, ASC will send the rationale for revision to the Reviewer within two (2) days.
 - 8.5.4.2** The Reviewer will revise the draft Interpretation within ten (10) days. ASC will send the revised draft Interpretation to the QA Committee within two (2) days.
 - 8.5.4.3** The QA Committee will review as per step 8.5.4.
 - 8.5.4.4** All QA Committee steps will be completed within fifteen (15) days following step 8.5.3.
- 8.5.5** The final Interpretation will be submitted to ASC for publication within two (2) days following the QA Committee’s approval.

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8.6 CAR-related QA– Technical Review and QA Committee

- 8.6.1** The Technical Reviewer will provide a draft Interpretation to the QA Committee within fifteen (15) days of its assignment.
- 8.6.2** ASC will send the draft Interpretation to the QA Committee within two (2) days.
- 8.6.3** Within five (5) days of receipt, the draft Interpretation will be reviewed by the QA Committee.
 - 8.6.3.1** If a revision to the draft Interpretation is required by the QA Committee, ASC will send the rationale for revision to the Reviewer within two (2) days.
 - 8.6.3.2** The Reviewer will revise the draft Interpretation within ten (10) days. ASC will send the revised draft Interpretation to the QA Committee within two (2) days.
 - 8.6.3.3** Within five (5) days of receipt, the updated draft Interpretation will be reviewed for approval by the QA Committee.
 - 8.6.3.4** The QA Committee will review as per step 8.6.3.
 - 8.6.3.5** All QA Committee steps will be completed within fifteen (15) days following step 8.6.2.
- 8.6.4** The final Interpretation will be submitted to ASC for publication within two (2) days following the QA Committee’s approval.

8.7 QA Publication

- 8.7.1** Within two (2) days following receipt of a confirmed final Interpretation, ASC will:
 - 8.7.1.1** Publish the final Interpretation on the Platform.
 - 8.7.1.2** Categorise the QA as “Closed” on the Platform.
 - 8.7.1.3** Send confirmation of the closing the QA to the Applicant.

8.8 Applicant Requested Further Clarification

- 8.8.1** The Applicant may request further clarification on a published interpretation.

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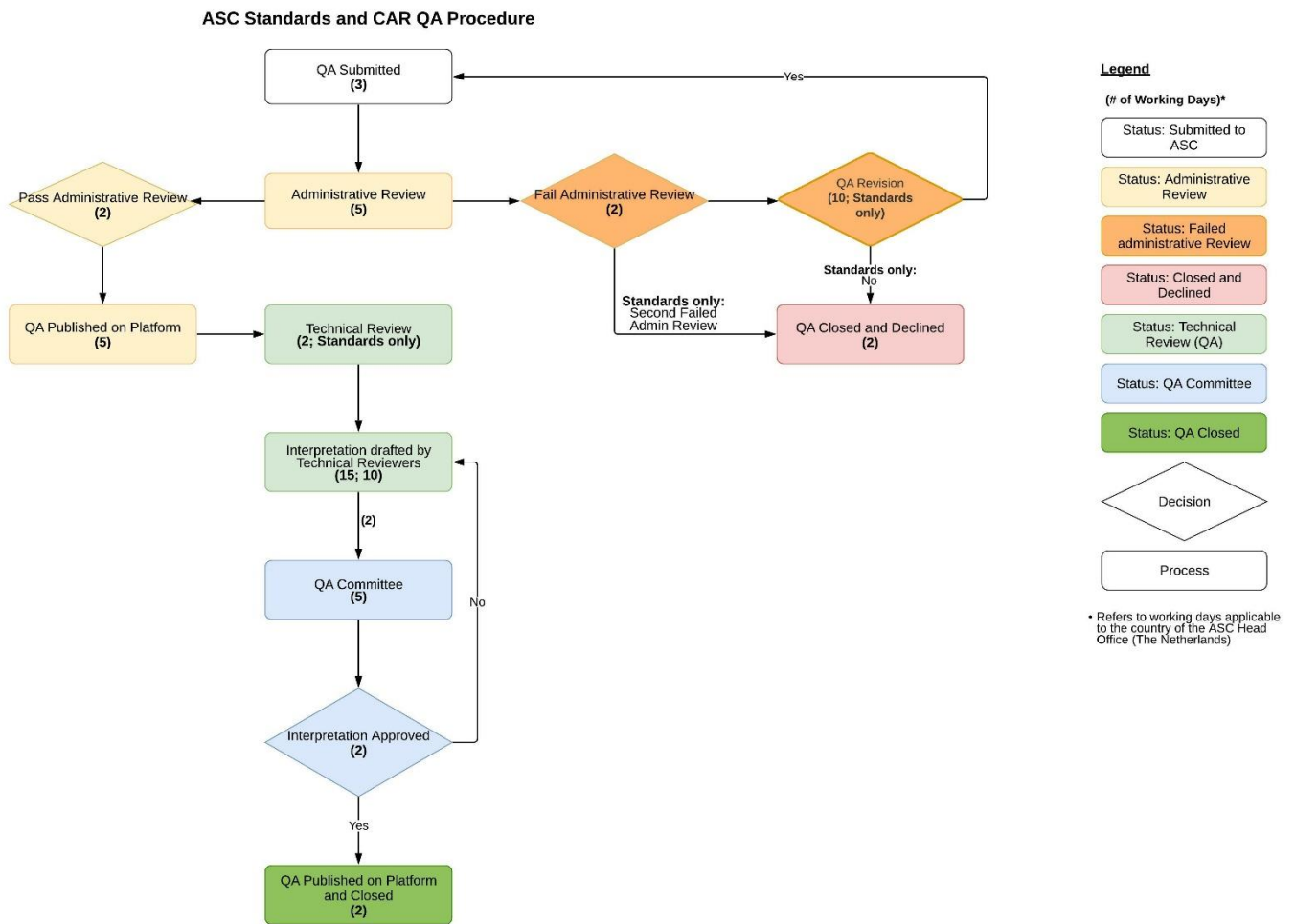
8.8.2 ASC will process the requests for further clarification as per Section 8.5 – 8.7 of the ASC’s Standards and CAR-related QA Procedure.

9. Amendment History

Date:	Version:	Summary of Amendment:
25 OCT 2021	1.0	New document

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10. Annex 1 – ASC Standards and CAR QA Procedure Flowchart



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