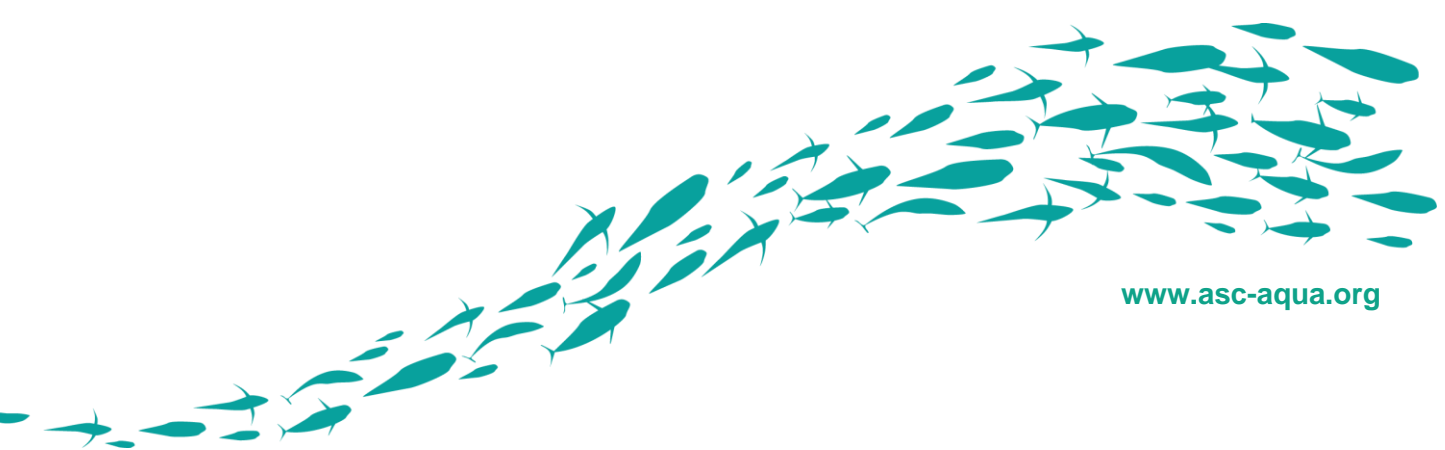


Terms of Reference (ToR) for the development of the aligned ASC Farm Standard

“Aligned where possible, specific where needed”

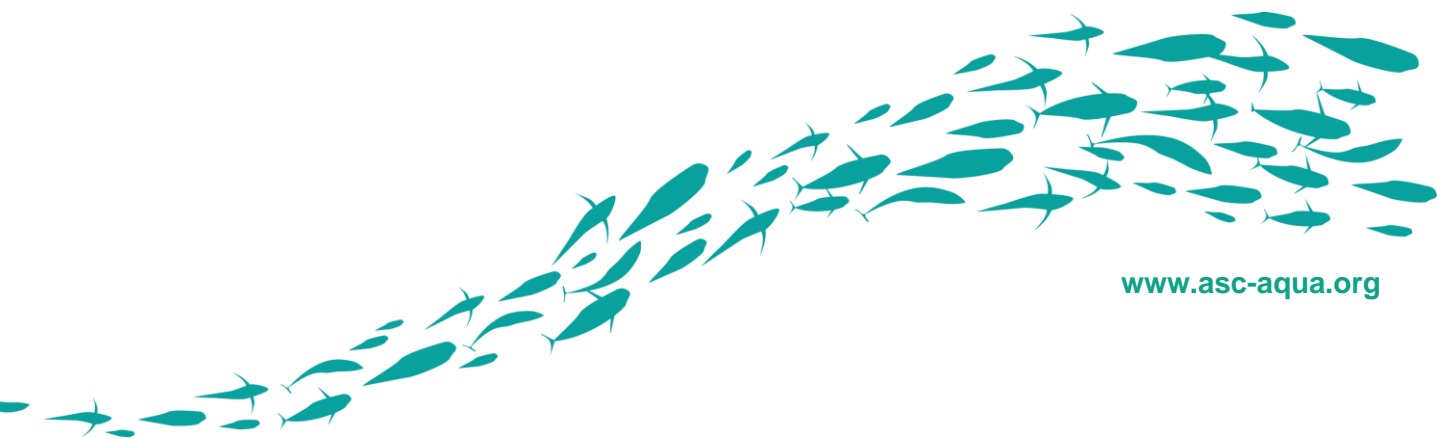
This TOR is publicly available on the [ASC website](https://www.asc-aqua.org). Comments are welcome and appreciated.

Version:	Date:	Description of amendment	Affected section
1.0	15.12.2014	Public version 1.0	
1.1	15.12.2015	Updated timelines	Section 6 on pp. 11-12
2.0	12.11.2021	Substantive update	All



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Introduction

The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that operates a voluntary, independent third-party certification and labelling programme based on scientifically robust Standards.

The Standards define Criteria that help to transform the aquaculture sector towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility, as per the ASC Mission.

ASC Vision

A world where aquaculture plays a major role in supplying food and social benefits for humanity whilst minimising negative impacts on the environment.

ASC Mission

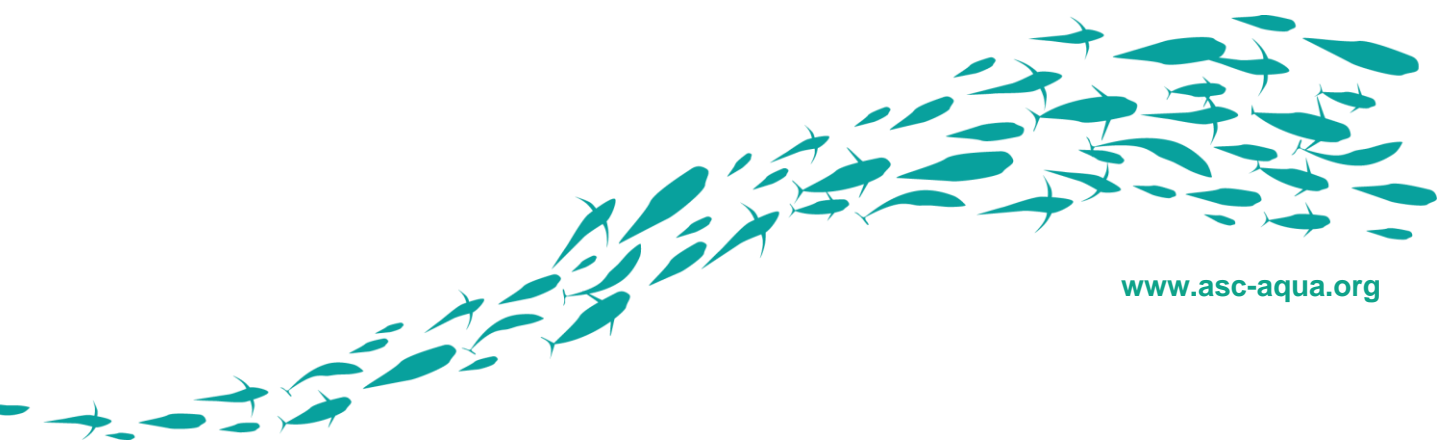
To transform aquaculture towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility using efficient market mechanisms that create value across the chain.

ASC Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (ToC) is an articulation, description and mapping out of the building blocks required to achieve the organisation's vision. ASC has defined a ToC which explains how the ASC certification and labelling programme promotes and rewards responsible aquaculture practices through incentivising the choices people make when buying seafood.

ASC's Theory of Change can be found on the [ASC website](https://www.asc-aqua.org).

Intended Change: ASC Standards are developed to deliver on the ASC Theory of Change by addressing key sustainability issues identified in the seafood sector and at the farm. Increased global demand for fish combined with rapidly growing and unregulated aquaculture practices will result in disruption of local ecosystems, negative impacts to biodiversity, wastewater, conflicts over resource use and poor working conditions. Certification against ASC Standards addresses these sustainability issues through market demand and recognition of responsible practices. The aligned farm standard defines the criteria aquaculture farms need to meet in order to qualify for ASC certification.



1. About this ToR document

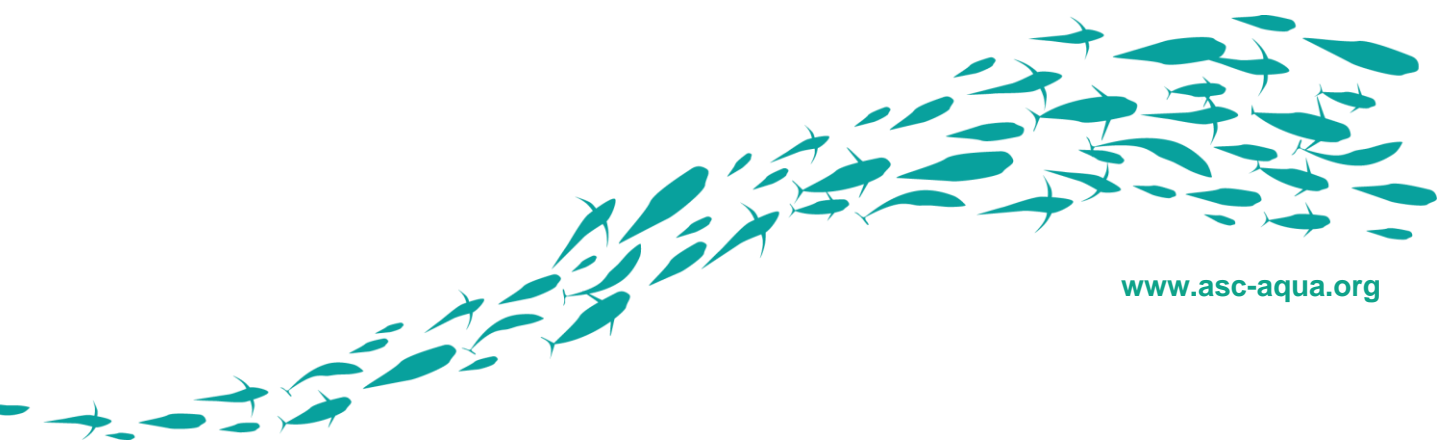
This document describes the objectives and scope and guiding principles of the aligned ASC Farm Standard and details the process to develop it. Further information, including records from consultations and technical working groups, are available on the ASC website.

2. Objectives of developing the Aligned ASC Farm Standard

ASC launched its initial standards in 2012 and the first farms were certified later that year. Since then, certified and labelled products have become increasingly available in a growing number of markets globally. ASC's standards are designed to address the key negative environmental and social impacts of the aquaculture industry.

The aligned ASC Farm Standard addresses key aquaculture impact areas including impacts on surrounding water bodies, wildlife and sensitive habitats, protection of animal health and responsible medicine use. The standard also addresses social impacts including working conditions on farms and interactions with surrounding communities. Currently, the criteria and associated requirements to address those key impacts are defined per species in eleven species-specific standards. The aligned Farm Standard aims to create a unified set of requirements applicable to all species and production systems and will contribute to the ASC Vision and Mission by reducing, mitigating or eliminating the negative impacts. ASC identified the need for an aligned Farm Standard and started initial scoping work in 2014.

Several regional or international standards have scopes and objectives partly or loosely overlapping with those of the ASC standards; with two set of standards being identified as having somewhat similar scopes: those of the Global G.A.P. (Finfish, Crustaceans and Molluscs Standard) & BAP (Best Aquaculture Practices - Finfish and Crustacean Farm & Salmon) standards. The latter two however differ substantially from ASC in how they address and aim to mitigate many of the environmental and social impacts of aquaculture. The ASC distinguishes itself, among others, by the higher stringency of many of its current standards' requirements (e.g. limits and metric performance levels) and by the accountability and transparency it requires from certified farms, and which the ASC Programme itself displays. ASC also excels in how it ensures involvement of and engagement with all stakeholders including local communities and indigenous people when applicable.



The development of the aligned ASC Farm Standard aims to maintain the high quality and rigour of the initial species-specific standards and increase the potential for scaling the standard by improving:

Consistency – Within ASC’s eleven species-specific standards, there is considerable variability between indicators that address the same impact area(s). These standards were developed individually on the basis of input from separate stakeholder groups. Aligning these standards will provide more clarity on ASC’s intent and more consistent requirements towards the industry. Species-specific metrics will be retained where necessary. This project will therefore lead to a consistent set of indicators.

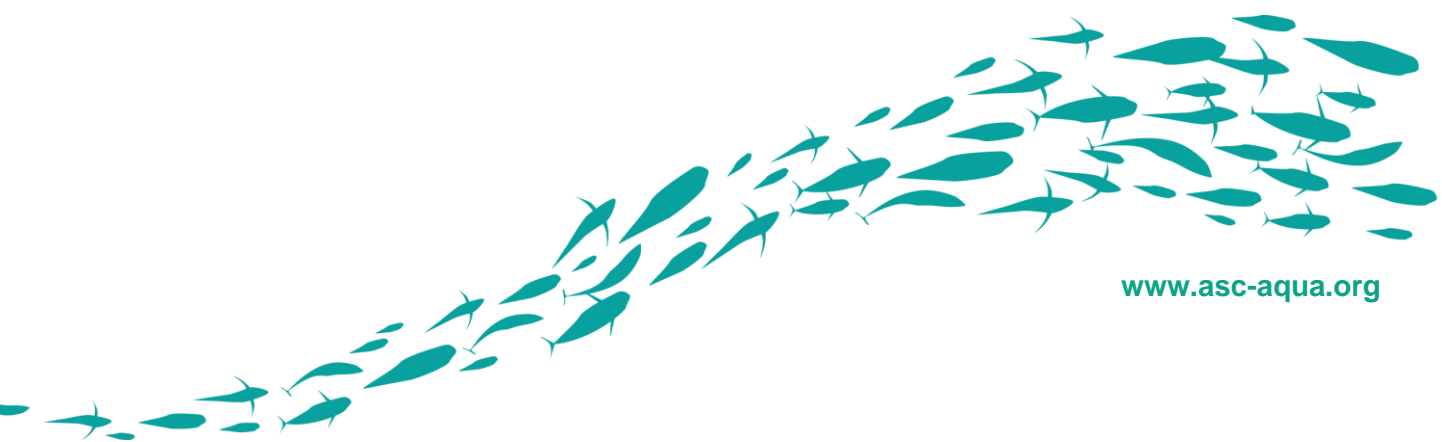
Effectiveness and Efficiency – Alignment will allow for a more effective and efficient verification process: applying a consistent set of indicators reduces variability and subjectivity during audits. This will bolster programme credibility. A single Farm Standard will also allow for more efficient Standard revisions. It will facilitate the addition of necessary metric performance levels for new species, regions, or production systems without the need to create entire new standards.

Relevance – The development of the aligned Farm Standard also provides an opportunity to incorporate evolving knowledge, science and best industry practices. These updates require development and scrutiny by dedicated expert Technical Working Groups. This process will ensure the Farm Standard requires the latest responsible practices of the aquaculture industry. Easier revisions across all species and production systems allows the standard to remain relevant over time.

Deliver more impact – In ASC’s mission to *transform aquaculture towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility*, a consistent, relevant, and efficient Farm Standard will allow for better tracking of impacts across farm and landscape scales. Indicators of environmental and social impacts will be commonly applied across production systems and species, allowing for an improved approach to evidence against the claims of the ASC Programme.

3. ASC Farm Standard Scope

The ASC Farm Standard will be applicable globally for the main aquaculture production systems. Initial species in scope will be those within the scope of current species standards (Abalone; Bivalve; Flatfish; Freshwater Trout; Pangasius; Salmon; Seabass, Seabream, Meagre; Seriola and Cobia; Shrimp; Tilapia; and Tropical Marine Finfish).

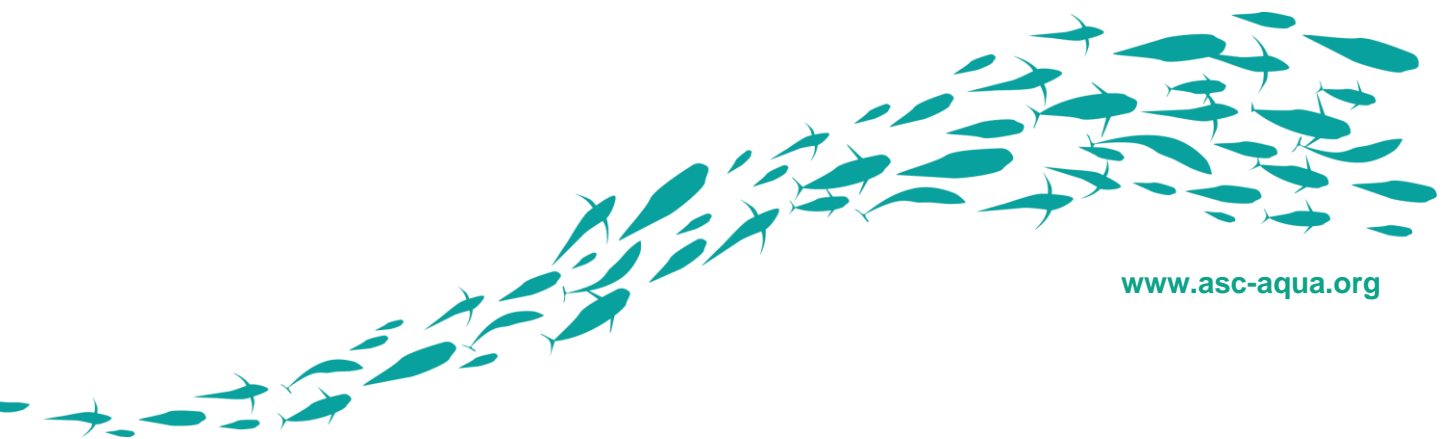


Periodic species scope expansion is expected following the completion of the Farm Standard and will reflect the programme's strategic priorities. The Farm Standard will apply to farms large and small globally.

The ASC-MSC Seaweed Standard will not be part of this alignment process. This is a shared standard with the Marine Stewardship Council, MSC, and as such must represent the needs of both organisations and is not suitable for inclusion in this process. ASC's Feed Standard is also kept separate since it deals with a different segment of the supply chain. However, where possible similar wording will be used, especially in the legal and social components of the Farm and Feed Standards. MSC's Chain of Custody Standard, as used by ASC, also is out of scope for the aligned Farm Standard. All other ASC Standards, including the new Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS) Module and recently revised Shrimp and Salmon Standards, will be incorporated in the aligned Farm Standard.

Included are:

1. [Abalone](#);
2. [Bivalve](#);
3. [Flatfish](#);
4. [Freshwater Trout](#);
5. [Pangasius](#);
6. [Salmon](#);
7. [Seabass, Seabream, Meagre](#);
8. [Seriola and Cobia](#);
9. [Shrimp](#);
10. [Tilapia](#); and
11. [Tropical Marine Finfish](#)

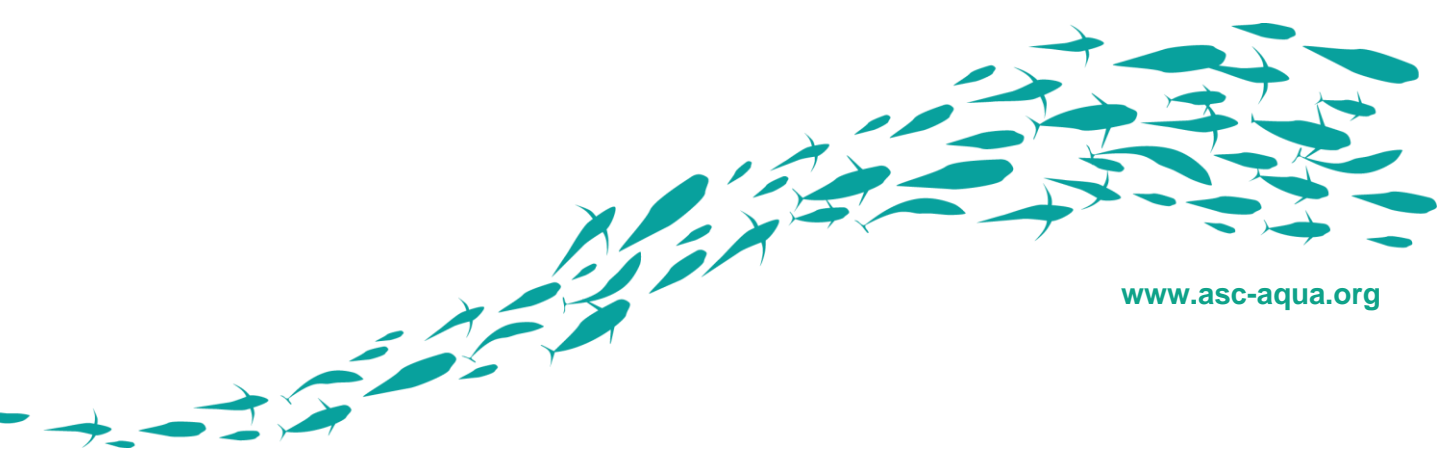
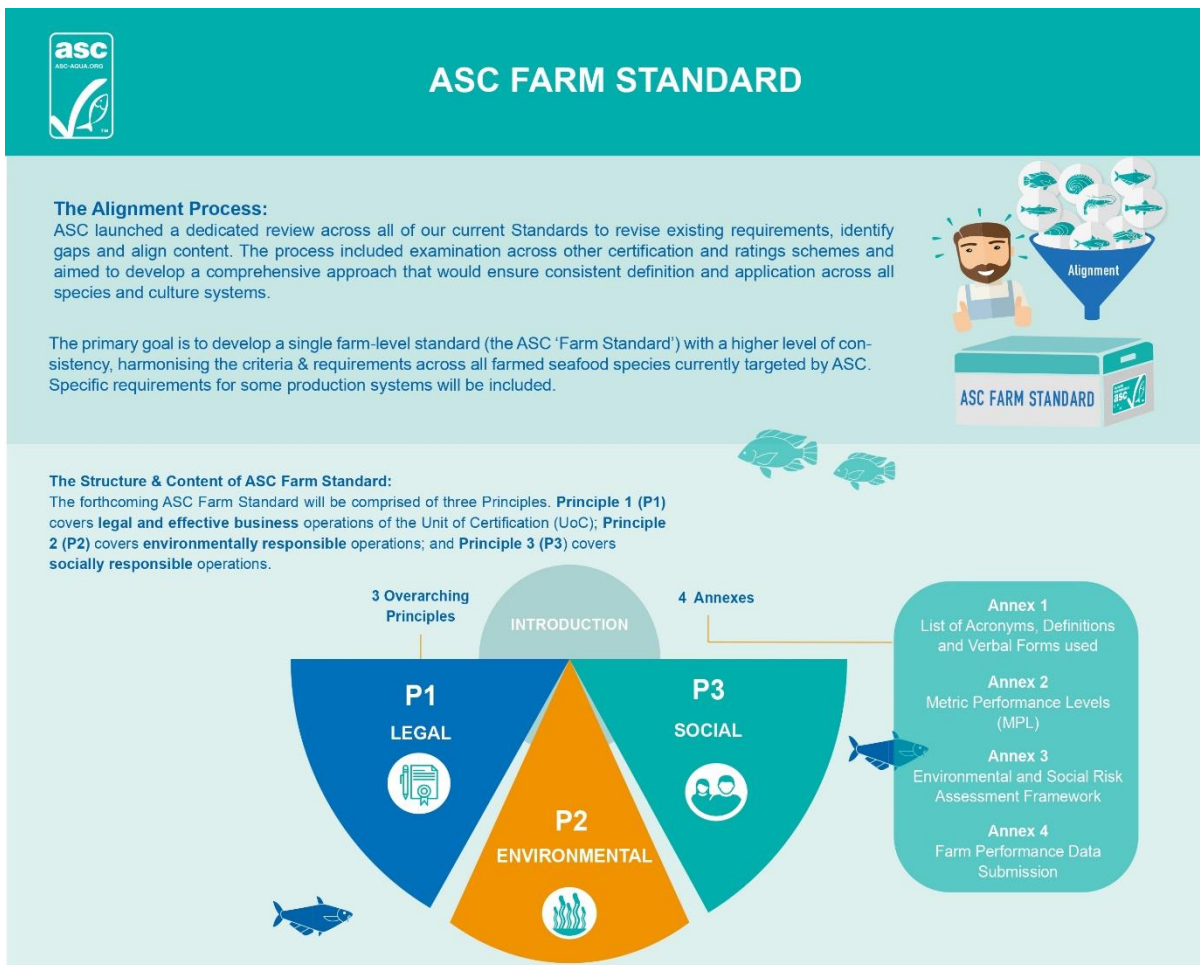


4. Structure of the ASC Farm Standard

The ASC Farm Standard consists of three components:

- Principle 1 (P1) – Legal – The UoC operates legally and applies effective business management
- Principle 2 (P2) – Environmental – The UoC operates in an environmentally responsible manner
- Principle 3 (P3) – Social – The UoC operates in a socially responsible manner

The graphic below shows the structure of the new Aligned ASC Farm Standard.



To achieve the objectives stated in chapter 2, the following documents will be published when the Farm Standard is launched:

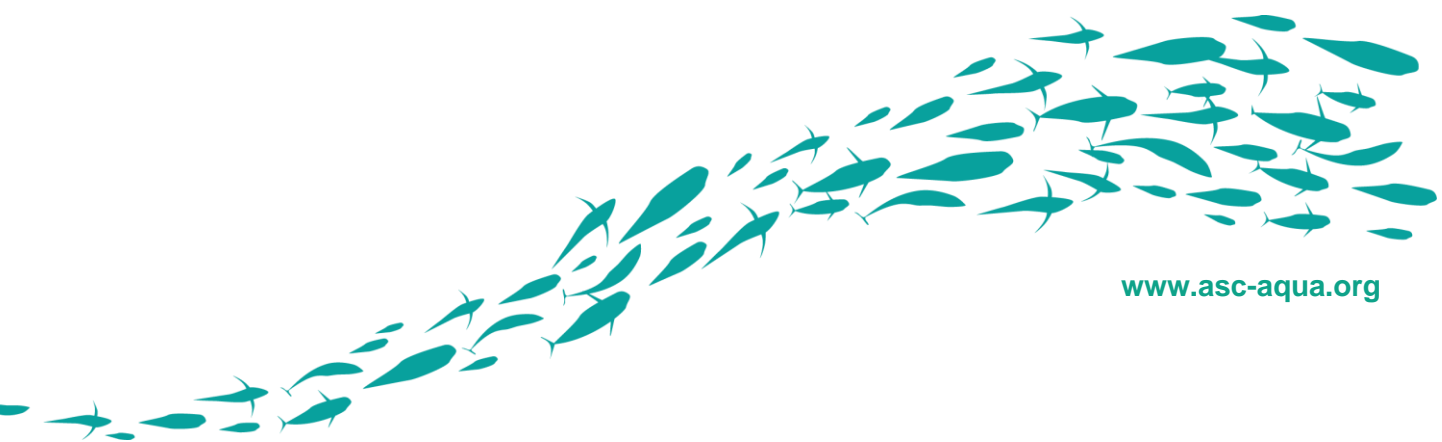
- **ASC Farm Standard** – Performance and reporting requirements for farms. Some indicators will be production system-specific. There will be an annex for species-specific performance metrics as well as annexes with requirements for data submission and an Environmental, Social and Workers Health and Safety Risk Framework. Principles 1 (Legal) and 3 (Social) will be effective before Principle 2 (Environmental), which is more complex and will take longer to complete.
- **Implementation Framework** – Guidance documents and support to facilitate the transition from existing standards and realise the implementation of the Farm Standard.
- **Requirements for Unit of Certification** – Requirements for farms to ensure the assurance programme can be implemented effectively.
- **Certification and Accreditation Requirements** – Revised audit requirements to align with the Farm Standard will be developed for Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs).
- **Auditor Guidance** – Guidance document to facilitate the assurance activities conducted by CABs.

5. Stakeholder involvement

Key ASC stakeholders in this process are:

- **Producers:** certified farms and those seeking certification across all species currently under the scope of the ASC standards, in all regions and of all sizes.
- **Processors/Supply chain:** including processors, suppliers and retailers, foodservice and consumers
- **Civil society:** environmental and social NGO's, animal rights organisations and civil society organisations
- **Scientists/Academia:** researching relevant aquaculture impacts
- **Governments/regulators:** including intergovernmental organisations
- **Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs):** and their auditors conducting ASC audits.

Specific attention is paid to including and reaching out to underrepresented and hard-to-reach stakeholders (e.g. communities with barriers to engagement or certain farms). A specific mapping exercise and participation plan will



be prepared for each main topic within the Farm Standard. ASC is employing a number of strategies to engage stakeholders with the development process. These include:

- Representation of stakeholders in decision making bodies (Technical Working Groups, Technical Advisory Group and Supervisory Board);
- Public consultations, by means of:
 - online surveys, and
 - regional, sectoral and/or criteria-based workshops in English as well as local languages as deemed necessary (e.g. Bahasa, Vietnamese)

and supported by communications materials, e.g.:

- a dedicated website landing page;
- short videos to summarise each technical topic and the consultation process; and
- social media to promote consultations and elicit feedback.

A pilot phase to test the Farm Standard in a near-final stage to assess its feasibility, practicability and auditability at farm and CAB level.

ASC is monitoring the participation of stakeholders aiming for effective and balanced representation during the standard setting process. Should stakeholders experience discontent with this process a procedural complaint can be filed through the public [ASC Complaints Procedure](#).

6. Guiding principles

The development of the ASC Farm Standard follows the ASC's Standard Setting Procedure and the Guiding Principles therein described.

7. Process of Standard development

The timeline for this standard development process reflects varying priorities of the programme through a period of fast growth. New ASC species-specific standards have been developed and existing standards revised as needed in parallel to the development of the Farm Standard (e.g. [ASC Shrimp Standard Revision](#)), to ensure the continued relevance of the ASC programme while the alignment process is conducted.

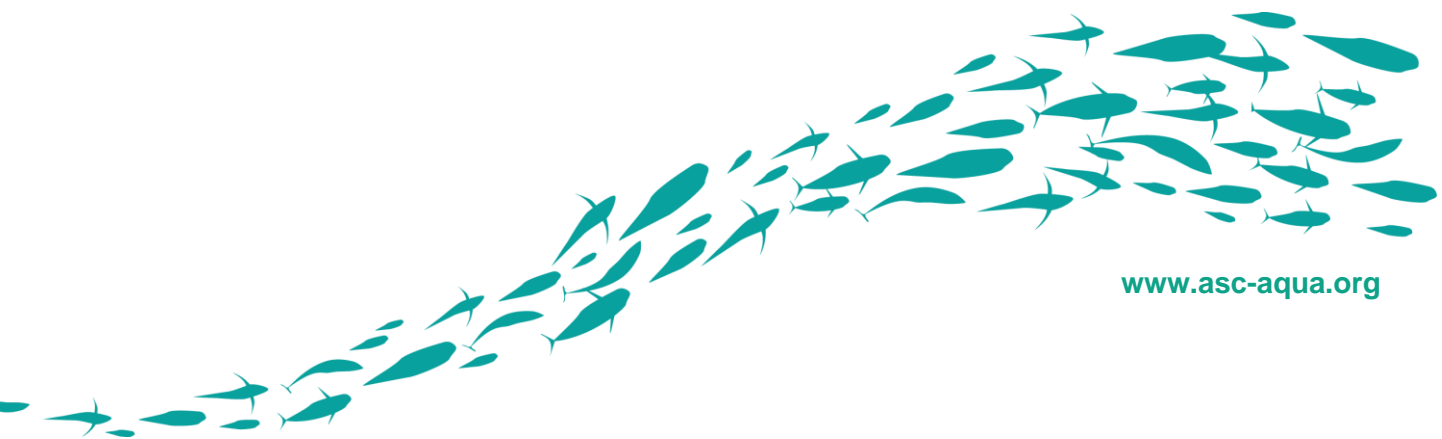
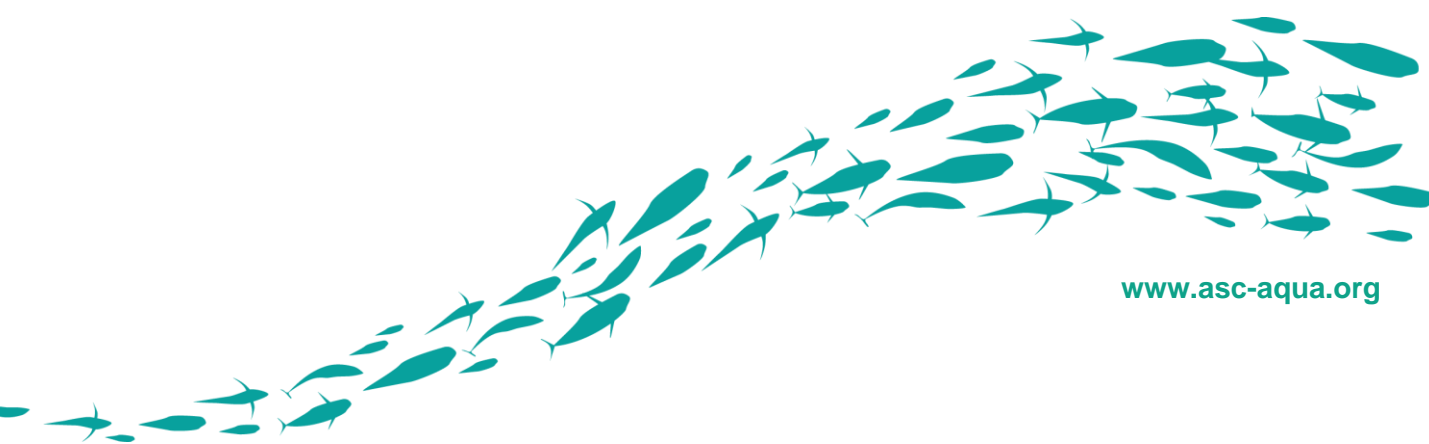


Table 1 summarises key development milestones within the alignment process. The ASC website includes information on the latest opportunities for stakeholders to engage in the process. The Principles P1 and P3 were approved by the ASC Supervisory Board, but development of similar elements in the ASC Feed Standard after board sign-off on P1 and P3 and the aim to create more consistency (see Chapter 2 in this TOR) has made the ASC decide to revise the criteria in P1 and P3 in the Aligned Farm Standard. For this reason the ASC has scheduled an additional Public Consultation in spring 2022.

Table 1 Alignment Project milestones and timeline

Date	Activity	Engagement opportunity
2014	Initial standard revision ToR published in ASC website	30 days
2015	Initial draft developed with TWG and endorsed by TAG for consultation	
2016 – August	Open 60 day consultation on 1 st draft Core Standard	60 days
2017		
2018		
2019 – March	Open 60 day consultation on P1 and P3	60 days
2019 – November	Technical Advisory Group recommend Board approval of P1 and P3	
2019 – December	Board approval P1 and P3	
2020 – Q2	Expert review of ASC Standards’ environmental criteria	
2021 - March	Open 60 day consultation on select P2 Criteria	60 days
2021 – Q3, Q4	(Technical) Working Group processing of consultation feedback	
2021 – September	Open 60 day consultation on Fish Welfare	60 days
2022 - March	Open 60 day consultation on P1, P3 and all P2 criteria excl. Fish Welfare	60 days
2022 – July	Technical Advisory Group recommend Board approval of P1 and P3	
2022 – September	Board approval P1 and P3	
2022 - September	Open 60 day consultation on complete P2 Aligned Farm Standard	60 days
2022 September – March 2023	Pilot testing complete P2 Aligned Farm Standard	6 months
2022	Release P1 and P3	
2023	P1 and P3 Effective	



2023 - July	Technical Advisory Group recommend Board approval of P2	
2023 - September	ASC Board Approval	
2023 – End	Release P2 / complete Aligned Farm Standard	
2024	Aligned Farm Standard becomes effective	

8. Governance and decision making

Following the first phase of development of the aligned Farm Standard in 2014, ASC undertook a comprehensive review of its technical governance. The result was a reformed Technical Advisory Group (TAG). The TAG's role is to provide advice and recommendations on the use of ASC's Standards and other technical issues, including (but not limited to) further development, modification and the technical and operational interpretation of the ASC Standards and the application of these interpretations.

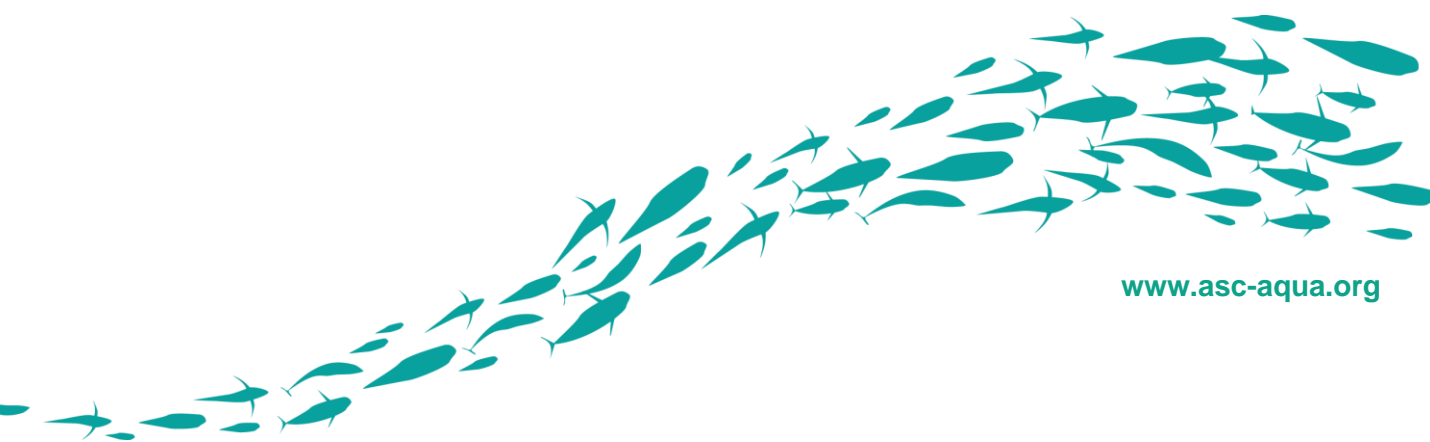
Where stakeholder feedback or internal review has identified areas where technical development was needed as opposed to simply aligning existing indicators, Technical Working Groups (TWGs) were formed to provide additional technical expertise and recommendations to the TAG. In the early stages of this project, a TWG reviewed an initial draft of aligned indicators.

TWGs formed for the development of the aligned Farm Standard are:

1. Antibiotics and other veterinary drugs
2. Mangroves and other wetlands
3. Marine litter and aquaculture gear
4. Benthic Impacts
5. Fish Welfare
6. Water Quality
7. Risk Management Framework (ad-hoc advisory group)

Please see the [ASC Farm Standard](#) and [Governance](#) webpages for information on TWGs' memberships.

TWGs develop recommendations for review by the TAG. The TAG reviews proposals and endorses drafts ahead of public consultation. The TAG then reviews consultation feedback and provides advice for next steps or



recommendations to the ASC Supervisory Board who take the final decision to adopt revised Standards. The [ASC Standard Setting Procedure](#) guides the development process.

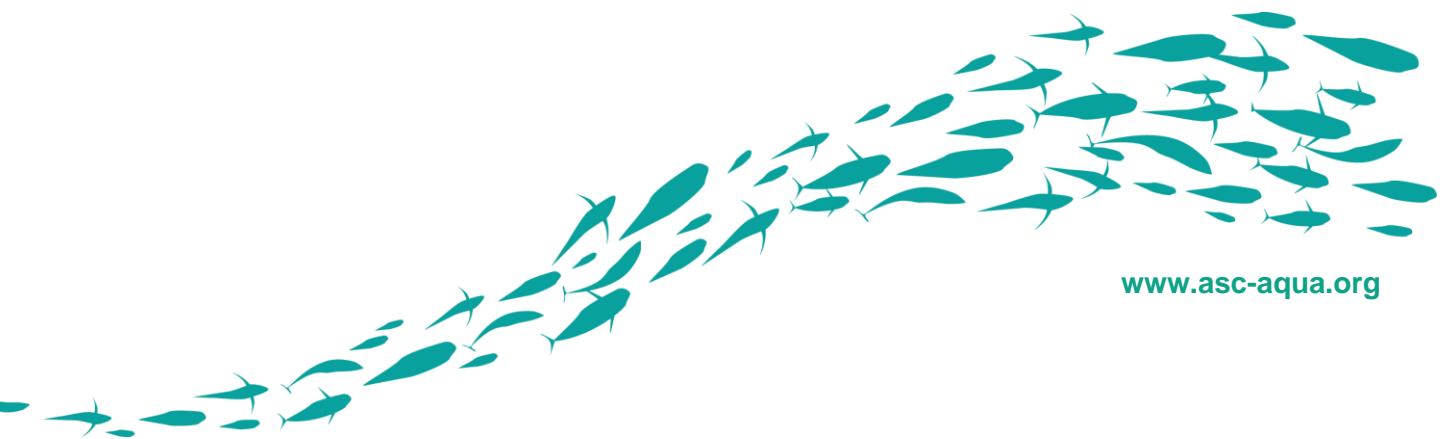
TAG recommendations are preferably made by consensus. If no consensus can be reached, agreement on advice by the TAG is made by simple majority of members. In such circumstances, the Executive prepares a report to the Board which clearly indicates a summary of the minority and majority positions.

Further information on ASC Governance is available [here](#).

9. Assessment of risks

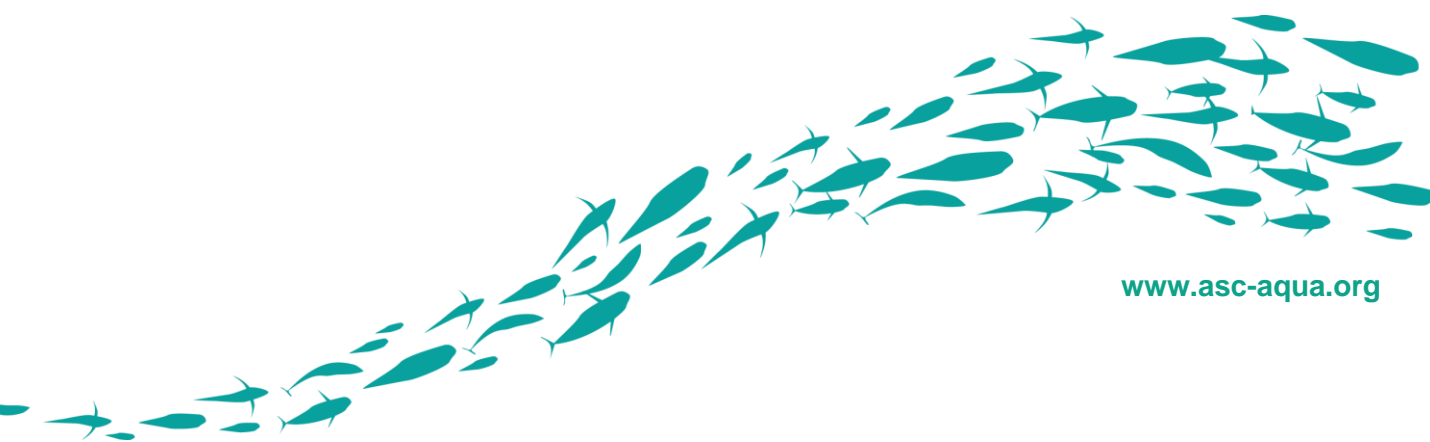
The ASC has identified the following risks and mitigation strategies for the alignment project and resulting ASC Farm Standard. The ASC M&E Framework will provide for the monitoring of the intended outcomes from the aligned Farm Standard and provide for the learning against these identified risks. These learnings will inform future review and revision of the aligned Farm Standard.

Potential unintended consequences	
Identified Risk	Mitigation strategy
The standard's implementation requirements and certification costs may create a barrier for small and medium sized farmers globally to get certified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group certification requirements help to limit certification costs. • Pilot testing and consultation will seek to evaluate this risk to allow informed decisions on trade-offs in delivering impact. • The development of the ASC's Aquaculture Improvement Programme provides a pathway towards certification and potential recognition for producers currently unable to meet the ASC Farm Standard.
Requirements within the Farm Standard may be perceived to be less rigorous (metric based) than in the species-specific standards, leading to a reputational risk for ASC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Species and production-specific requirements will be retained where needed to ensure performance requirements are tailored accordingly where necessary. • The aim to include metric and science-based requirements is maintained with the condition that these prove to incentivise farms to act in accordance with the intent of the criteria in the standard and/or provide for our ability to evaluate against the intended outcomes of the standard. • Requirements will only be considered for elimination where there is clear evidence (either in the shape of 1.

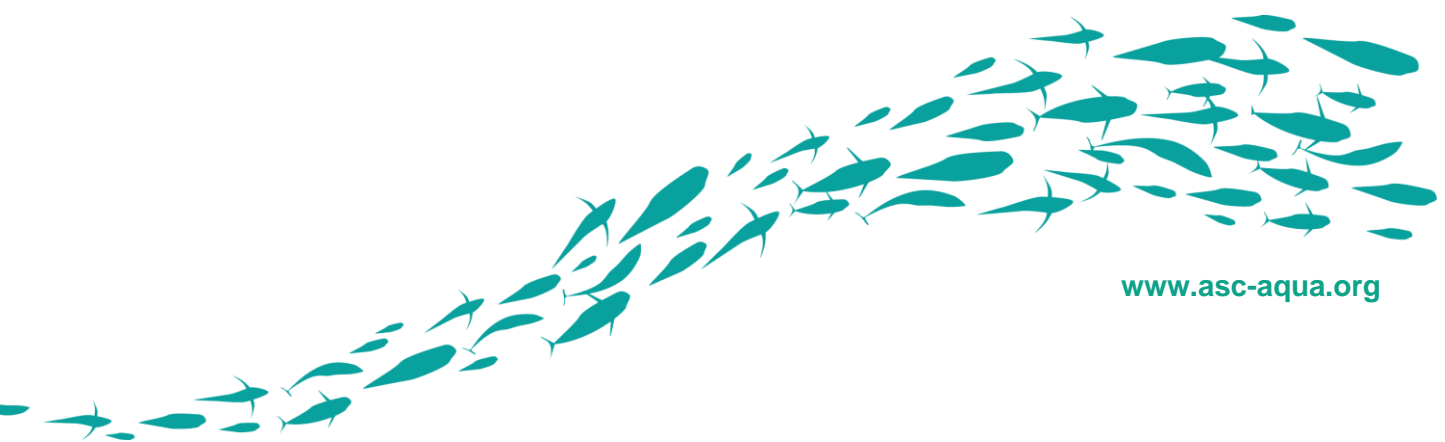


	<p>new scientific knowledge or data, or 2. current industry practices) that they are not needed to address a particular topic as part of the wider impacts that are addressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts of proposed changes on all stakeholders will be assessed and clearly communicated.
Extended development timeline presents reputational risk where weaknesses in species standards have been identified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New developments and revisions have been expedited as interim solutions to address key risks e.g. RAS Module and Shrimp Standard Revision.
Staggered introduction of the Farm Standard with P1 and P3 becoming operational before P2 is finalised and associated transition periods risks confusion within markets and with producers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, active communication with key stakeholders • Robust training and guidance materials for CABs will be developed and undertaken • Robust guidance and outreach materials will be developed for producers.
The ASC Farm Standard certifies farms as UoC but does (yet) not look at cumulative effects in water bodies. Stakeholders might assume that these effects are taken into consideration in the standard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear communication on the ASC's envisioned path forward to capture cumulative effects.

Risks to achieving outcomes	
Identified Risk	Mitigation strategy
Requirements within the Farm Standard may be more rigorous / more demanding on data collection, measuring and monitoring than in the species-specific standards, increasing cost, complexity and compliance issues for some farms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farms will be given a reasonable transition period to adapt to the Farm Standard. • New requirements will only be added where there is clear evidence that it is needed to assess and mitigate the key impacts of aquaculture. • Impacts of proposed changes will be assessed, e.g. through ASC staff assessment of the impacts, producers' workshops and pilots, and will be clearly communicated. • Species and production-specific requirements will be retained to ensure performance requirements are tailored accordingly where necessary.
The ASC's mission is to transform aquaculture towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility using efficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With over 1500 farms certified, we have an understanding of farm performance and what levels of improvement are achievable.



<p>market mechanisms that create value across the chain. If the requirements in the ASC Farm Standard are too lenient, 'business as usual' will be certifiable and no transformation will be achieved. If the requirements in the ASC Farm Standard are too strict, few aquaculture farms will be able to obtain certification and no transformation will be achieved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders are given the opportunity to provide feedback on the adapted requirements in multiple rounds of public consultation, in pilots and through engagement mechanisms provided on the website. Considering the ASC's strong history in the Aquaculture Dialogues stakeholders would certainly flag if the ASC Farm Standard becomes too lenient. Current certified farms would flag if the ASC Farm Standard becomes too strict.
<p>The resulting ASC Farm Standard does not incorporate the species required by the market, leading to retailers and consumers purchasing uncertified products.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All currently recognised production systems will be within scope of the new standard. The ASC has developed a New Species Selection Framework which offers a means to understand what species the market is interested in and methods for the incorporation of additional species within the ASC standards. Through this framework, the ASC can evaluate the applicability of the standard's requirements to new species production. On the ASC website all stakeholders can request for a new species to be added: Request a new species.
<p>Limited market demand for responsibly sourced aquaculture leads to stagnation of demand for the ASC logo and Farm Standard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Aquaculture Dialogues ensured that the ASC at that moment in time incorporated all relevant elements of responsible or sustainable aquaculture. Continual feedback mechanisms can be used by stakeholders to voice concerns over missed changing perceptions and scientific developments in terms of sustainable and responsible aquaculture. Ways to provide feedback are listed here. ASC communications campaigns highlight the need for and potential of responsible production and sourcing.



10. Contact information

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The Netherlands

11. Comments

ASC welcomes feedback on these Terms of Reference at any time. Please see <https://www.asc-aqua.org/programme-improvements/aligned-standard/> for more information about the latest opportunities to get involved.

