



ASC Farm Standard Criterion 2.6 and Criterion 2.14a-c Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1 September – 31 October 2022

Public Consultation

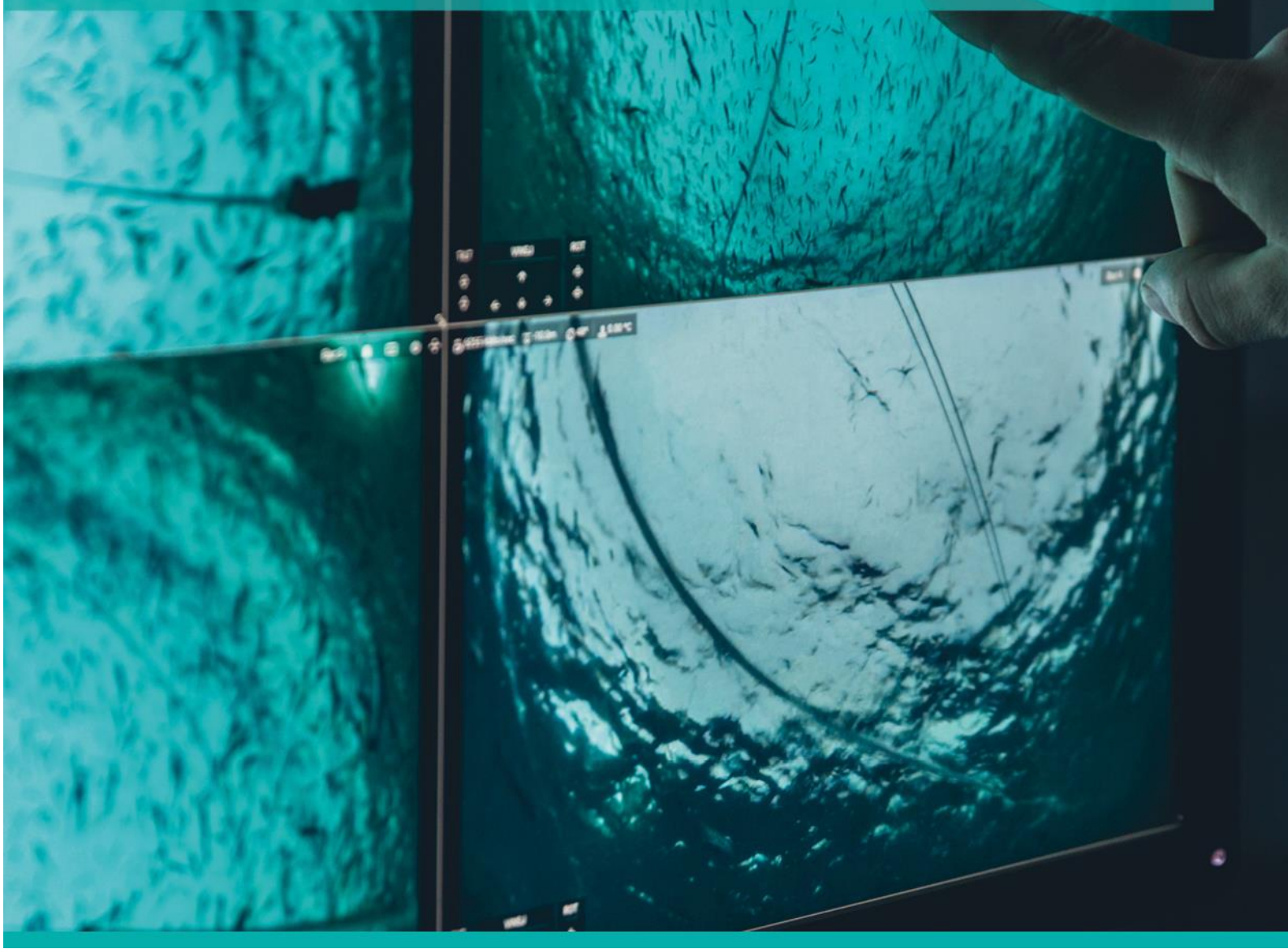


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ASC Farm Standard – General FAQs

1. What is the ASC Farm Standard?

The ASC Farm Standard aims to provide a higher level of consistency and harmonise the applicability, criteria, and requirements across all farmed seafood species currently certified by the ASC. This will enable a more efficient and consistent approach to the future addition of new species, and to the process of revising the ASC Standard.

Once the ASC Farm Standard is finalised, it will replace the current eleven species standards (but not the ASC-MSC Seaweed Standard, Chain of Custody Standard or the Feed Standard).

2. Why is ASC aligning its current standards into one ASC Farm Standard?

Having one standard provides several benefits to ASC's stakeholders and aids progress towards meeting ASC's mission. Not only does it provide greater consistency and fairness across different species, it also greatly improves the efficiency of the ASC programme and allows ASC to react more quickly to changes in the industry. Currently, if ASC wants to update a requirement, it must be done separately for every standard. In future, only a single revision will be necessary to cover all species. Moreover, if new species should be added, a lengthy process must be undertaken. Under the Farm Standard, the process for adding new species can focus just on the specific requirements/impacts of that species. In this way, none of the ASC's rigour is lost, but ASC's processes become more efficient and agile.

3. What is the scope of the ASC Farm Standard?

The ASC Farm Standard will be applicable globally at all scales for the main aquaculture production systems. Initial species in scope will be those covered by 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 this will reflect the programme's strategic priorities and market demand.

Linked to the ASC's mission, the Farm Standard addresses the key negative environmental and social impacts associated with aquaculture production from egg to harvest. An ASC certified farm contributes to the ASC Vision by reducing, mitigating, or eliminating such negative impacts.

4. What does the ASC Farm Standard cover?

In line with the current ASC Standards, the ASC Farm Standard encompasses three principles that apply to every Unit of Certification (UoC).

- **Principle 1** - The UoC operates legally and applies effective business management,
- **Principle 2** - The UoC operates in an environmentally responsible manner,
- **Principle 3** - The UoC operates in a socially responsible manner.

Each of these principles contains multiple criteria. The tables below show complete lists of all the criteria in the three principles.

Principle 1 - The UoC operates legally and applies effective business management	
	Criteria
1.1	Legal Compliance
1.2	Management System
1.3	Business Ethics
1.4	Traceability and Transparent Disclosure

Principle 2 - The UoC operates in an environmentally responsible manner	
	Criteria
2.2	Ecologically Important Habitats
2.3	Wildlife Interactions
2.4	Non-Natives
2.5	Escapes
2.6	Benthic Impacts
2.7	Water Quality
2.8	Salinisation
2.9	Biosolids
2.10	Freshwater Use
2.11	Energy Use and Greenhouse Gas Emissions
2.12	Material Use, Waste and Pollution Control
2.13	Feed
2.14	Fish Health and Welfare

2.15	Parasite Control (incl. Sea lice)
2.16	Antibiotics and other Veterinary Therapeutants
2.17	Hatcheries and Intermediate Sites
2.18	Area Based Management (ABM)

Principle 3 - The UoC operates in a socially responsible manner	
	Criteria
3.1	Rights Awareness
3.2	Forced, Bonded, Compulsory Labour and Human Trafficking
3.3	Child Labour
3.4	Discrimination
3.5	Health and Safety
3.6	Collective Bargaining and Freedom of Association
3.7	Transparent Contracts
3.8	Wages
3.9	Working Hours
3.10	Workplace Conduct Response
3.11	Employee Accommodation
3.12	Grievance Mechanism
3.13	Community Engagement

5. What is the structure of each ASC Farm Standard Principle?

Each Principle consists of multiple criteria which define outcomes that contribute to achieving that Principle. Each criterion consists of several indicators outlining the specific performance required to achieve the criterion intent.

Several indicators in the ASC Farm Standard require adherence to a specific Metric Performance Level (MPL). The applicable MPL is either directly defined in the indicator or listed in Annex 1 'Species Performance Levels'.

Both Principles and criteria include rationale statements which provide reasons (backed by reference notes if needed) as to why the content is needed.

6. Which criteria and their respective indicators are open for consultation between September 1 and October 31, 2022?

Criterion 2.6 – Benthic Indicators and Criterion 2.14 Fish Health and Welfare, which includes newly developed Fish Welfare content will be included in the upcoming consultation.

7. Do all criteria apply to every Unit of Certification (UoC)?

No. The required scope is defined for each criterion. The criteria may apply to:

- Every UoC (e.g., criteria related to legal compliance or labour)
- Only UoCs that operate a specific production system or production process (e.g., criteria related to marine cage culture or requirements for use of copper nets)
- Production of certain species

Indicators may be deemed “not applicable” by auditors depending on the scope and context.

8. How was the proposed draft standard developed?

ASC launched a dedicated review across its current standards to revise existing requirements, identify gaps and align content. The process aims to develop a comprehensive approach that ensures consistent definition and application across all species and culture systems. Technical working groups have been convened on select topics to advise the development of these criteria.

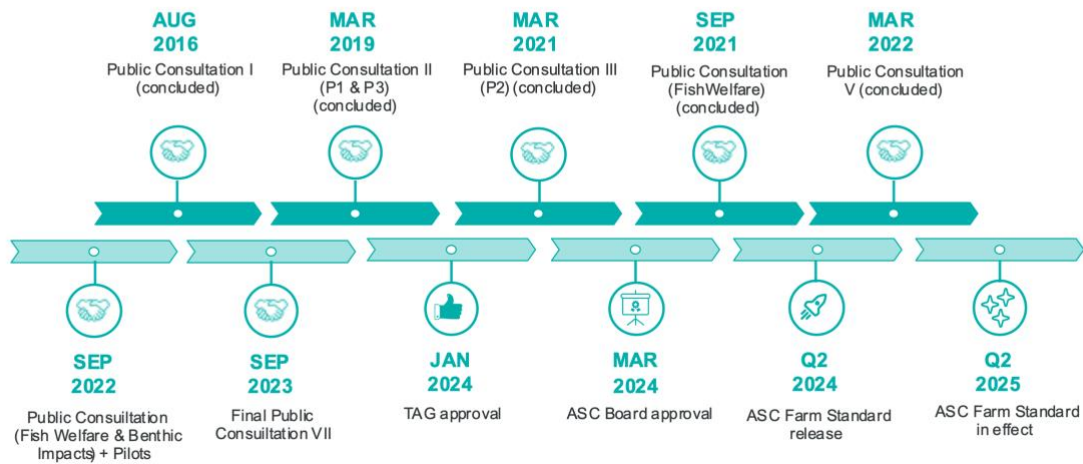
Revised rationale, intent and indicators were developed for review and endorsement by ASC’s Technical Advisory Group (TAG) prior to public consultation. Further refinement across all criteria, associated guidance, definitions, and species-specific requirements, will be completed following feedback from the public consultation.

9. What is the timeline for the development of the ASC Farm Standard?

The next consultation period, focusing only on Criterion 2.6 – Benthic Impact and 2.14 Animal Health and Welfare, will run September-October 2022. After this, feedback received will be processed, and used to update the ASC Farm Standard. Pilots will begin in late 2022, with consultation on all aspects of the ASC Farm Standard taking place in September 2023. This is the final step for assessing applicability and feasibility of the Standard. If all feedback allows ASC to progress as envisioned, the Standard will be launched in Q2 of 2024.

See timeline below for reference:

Alignment Process – ASC Farm Standard



10. How will stakeholders' feedback be used?

All feedback received will be reviewed by ASC. Revisions to criteria and indicators will be made where supported by credible evidence. Additional research will be undertaken as needed and the ASC's Technical Advisory Group will provide their endorsement before the final revised proposal is presented for a last public consultation in September 2023.

All feedback from this round of consultation will be published by ASC on the [Alignment webpage](#) once compiled after the public consultation period ends. Further information related to the ASC Farm Standard, including results of previous consultations, can be found [here](#).

11. Is ASC introducing new requirements?

In some cases, yes. With the goal of alignment and consistency in mind, requirements may be introduced that are absent from current species standards. Evaluation of the efficacy and auditability of some current requirements has identified areas where changes will allow ASC to better drive improvements.

12. Will the ASC Farm Standard still recognise the importance of species and culture system contexts?

Yes. A species-specific annex details the metrics to be achieved by each species covered under the scope of the Standard. Where relevant, scope will identify the specific culture systems covered.

13. Will the ASC Farm Standard include requirements for Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS)? How?

Yes. Certain elements of the Standard apply only to RAS systems, as identified in the scope.

14. Will additional species be added to the ASC Farm Standard in the future?

Yes, see Q.2. The ASC maintains a database of requests for new species; all stakeholders can make requests [here](#).

15. Will the alignment bring auditing efficiencies?

The standardized content of the ASC Farm Standard will allow auditors to more easily assess different species. There will remain species-specific content where specific training may be needed.

16. How will alignment affect the cost of certification?

The cost of certification depends on many factors, of which standard content is only one. ASC will conduct an extensive piloting phase starting in 2022 to evaluate the financial implications of the ASC Farm Standard on operations. This will inform the final draft of the ASC Farm Standard.

17. How will CABs be trained for this new standard?

As with current species standards, ASC will provide an auditor training on the ASC Farm Standard. Auditors will no longer need to undergo training for each individual species.

18. Where can I find more information?

If you want to read more about the ASC Farm Standard and its development process, please [click here](#).

19. How can I participate and provide feedback?

ASC welcomes and encourages all interested stakeholders to take part in our survey or our workshops, please [click here](#) for the survey and [here](#) for all other information on ways to engage in the consultation.

20. Does the ASC Farm Standard include animal welfare requirements?

Yes, initial indicators will be part of the September-October 2022 consultation period. The introduction of welfare requirements will be a phased process, with specific content applicable to finfish species first.

21. To what extent does the ASC Farm Standard help protect human safety?

Several indicators protect the people working in aquaculture. For example, Criterion 3.5 has 20 wide-ranging indicators covering health and safety topics. Criteria 3.2 and 3.3 cover forced labour and child labour and Criterion 3.9 covers working hours. In addition, Indicator 1.1.3 requires that the Unit of Certification (UoC) complies with all applicable labour-related laws and regulations and Indicator 1.1.1 ensures that the UoC is in possession of all required legal licenses and permits. The Risk Management Framework (RMF) focuses on health and safety risk assessment and requires the UoC to put a Risk Management Plan in place for the protection of employees' safety.

22. Currently, Area Based Management requirements are only included in some ASC Standards. Is this still the case in the ASC Farm Standard?

Area Based Management is now broadened to all cage culture farms, with emphasis on disease and parasites. Requirements specific to salmon will remain.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ON PRINCIPLE 2

2.6 BENTHIC IMPACTS:

23. Will the scope of the benthic Criterion be limited to cage production?

No, some aspects of the analysis of benthic impacts will apply to other production systems. The draft standard includes requirements for marine cage systems and suspended molluscs. For the first three years, the indicators for freshwater cage production (e.g., lakes and reservoirs) will require reporting only, rather than metrics limits for compliance. This will allow ASC to generate required information to set appropriate metrics for freshwater environments. Production in rivers will use the requirements currently outlined in the ASC Freshwater Trout Standard and Section 8 of the Salmon Standard, which require macroinvertebrate surveys in the receiving waterbody to quantify impact.

24. How does the tiered approach work?

The current proposal requires farms to conduct increasingly detailed benthic analysis if initial results do not meet the established limits. A farm that meets the limits in Tier 1 or Tier 2 does not need to conduct analysis in Tier 3. Therefore, well managed farms are granted cost efficiencies in benthic monitoring.

25. Does this tiered approach eliminate the need for modelling an Allowable Zone of Effect (AZE)?

Yes, the requirement for modelling an AZE has been removed for two reasons. First, monitoring is a more generic approach that addresses the uncertainty of impact predictions. Second, the organic waste deposition rate threshold--originally believed to define a significant adverse effect-- is now known to be highly variable and site-specific owing to variations in the capacity of local physical, chemical, and biological processes to assimilate these wastes. Any predicted AZE based solely on physical particle deposition modelling can be expected to include a high degree of uncertainty.

It is important to note that the sampling ranges shown in the revised requirements do not preclude the continued use of deposition models to define sampling locations, if the predicted site-specific AZE does not fall outside the specified 30 metre boundary of the farm. Permitting the extension of this boundary would conflict with the definitions of the acceptable spatial scale of impacts as defined by the revised requirements.

26. How will the proposal treat producers operating in regions where reference sites have 'poor' or 'bad' status, e.g., the Baltic Sea where conditions are naturally anoxic?

The standard qualifies as unacceptable benthic status situations where the reference zone shows a poor or bad EQS category. Farms located in areas of naturally occurring anoxic

conditions might submit to ASC a User-Defined Monitoring Program. Submissions will be pre-screened within the ASC for compatibility with the revised requirements' purpose, rationale and intent. Those programmes that appear to meet general criteria will be reviewed externally by a panel consisting of international science experts in aquaculture-environment interactions to ensure that they fulfil the overall intent of the criterion and specific requirements.

27. If monitoring of both sulphides and redox is required, what happens if they result in two different classifications? E.g., sulphides show 'good' EQS and redox shows 'poor'?

The draft standard refers to "dominant EQS" to determine the EQS category for a monitoring zone. The draft standard provides an example of how to determine the dominant EQS (for biotic indicators). See footnote 4, p.11 in the Benthic Impacts criteria.

28. At what stage is the user-defined monitoring program submitted? Can the UoC change their approach to monitoring mid-cycle?

Specific details of this remain under development. It is likely that submissions for user-defined approaches will be required prior to audit.

29. What is the benefit of this change to producers or consumers?

Producers will have more flexibility on how to demonstrate compliance with the standard's requirements. Good performers will have a simple, less expensive process which provides a good assessment of the benthic conditions of the area surrounding the farm. The tier system also allows a better understanding of individual farm situations, especially if tier 2 or 3 need to be evoked. A better understanding will favour the development of appropriate management actions.

The requirements also include flexibility for producers to use a User-Defined Benthic Monitoring Program Requirements that aligns with regional regulatory requirements while demonstrating the capacity to detect the same EQS thresholds described in the farm compliance framework across all spatial monitoring zones. This non-prescriptive approach is meant to recognise the in-depth monitoring and regulation of aquaculture in some jurisdictions/countries and foster innovation.

2.14 FISH HEALTH AND WELFARE:

30. Is ice slurry an allowable kill method?

Yes. Within this proposal, ice slurry is allowed but must be preceded by successful stunning that lasts until the fish is killed.

31. When does the transition period for stunning begin?

The transition period will start upon the launch of the ASC Farm Standard, in April 2024. From that date, the seabass, seabream and meagre industry for example, will have a 3-year transition period, and must have stunning requirements in place by Q2 2027.

32. Is sampling for metals in water required?

Sampling for heavy metals is recommended as a best practice but is not compulsory. It will be up to the producer to decide when heavy metals should be monitored depending on their farming system and their environment.

33. Will data on stocking density be used to create metrics to replace the Operational Welfare Indicators (OWIs)/traffic light system?

No. OWIs are used to assess the overall health and welfare status of fish. One of the factors that can contribute to a downward trend in OWIs is an inadequate stocking density. However, there are other factors that could be contributing to it such as infectious disease or lack of appropriate feeding. By gathering stocking density information, ASC will assess if it is possible or necessary to establish numerical limits for density.

34. Why are you introducing a hydrogen sulphide parameter in Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS)?

Hydrogen sulphide can be a significant hazard, especially in intensive RAS, where hydrogen sulphide producing bacteria can proliferate in anaerobic areas and lead to mass mortality events.

35. Is ASC asking for farms to report the OWI parameters?

Not at this stage. Reporting the OWIs to ASC would be an unnecessary administrative burden for the farms. ASC believes it is more meaningful for farms to develop their own systems to monitor OWIs. Auditors will check that the systems are developed, are put in place, and are being used appropriately.

36. How will slaughter and stunning be audited?

Depending on the location of slaughter, this may be handled one of two ways. If slaughter takes place on-site, then the content of criterion 2.14, will be audited as part of the normal UoC audit. If slaughter takes place off-site, the UoC will conduct an internal audit at the harvesting station. CABs will verify the internal audit reports and, if necessary, carry out spot-checks at slaughter facilities.

37. Indicator 2.14.12, which refers to feed, states 'unless such diets are not available' what does this mean in practice?

This means that diets are not available commercially globally, in the country of production, or that they need to be imported from long distances. Full detail will be included in the interpretation manual for the Standard, which will be available for the next consultation.

38. Is it possible for dry feeds to get a shelf-life extension?

This would be accepted if the manufacturer provides formal written evidence indicating that the shelf-life has been extended.

39. What is a simple explanation of the term “morphological”?

“Morphological” attributes relate to the physical appearance of the organism.

40. Is the specific system of monitoring water parameters in line with what farmers measure today?

The water quality monitoring requirements have been checked with multiple farms including salmon, coho, chinook, seabass and seabream producers. The more complicated requirements are to be adjusted to individual needs. Public consultation will also determine if other producers are conducting monitoring in a significantly different manner.