



## ISEAL Community Member System Overview

Organisation Name	Aquaculture Stewardship Council
Year	2022
Version	V2

### 1. The STRATEGIES our system employs to meet its sustainability objectives

The ASC certification programme intends for ASC certified aquaculture farms to:

- Create less pressure on the environment and ensure social responsibility and
- Deepen the demand (uptake & buying) for ASC products throughout the value chain in existing markets and develop interest in new ones.

ASC's [Theory of Change \(TOC\)](#) and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework define and illustrate the strategies and activities ASC undertakes across the standards system and wider ASC programme to achieve impact. These include:

- Employing strategies to reduce the social and environmental impacts from aquaculture operations,
- Verifying the performance of certified farms,
- Ensuring that the products in the supply chain can be traced to responsible farms and
- Matching these products to market demands to encourage uptake of more certified farms.

These impacts are expected to be achieved through the key principles of sustainability that aquaculture operations can affect as defined in ASC farm and feed standards. The indicators of the standards are developed to identify farm performance that mitigates the impacts across those key principles and allow measurement of performance against these. ASC utilises the M&E framework to validate whether our standards are providing measurable progress towards our outcomes and to evaluate the validity of the TOC. In instances where outcomes are not achieved or negative impacts realized, it provides the information necessary to revise and adjust.

Intended outcomes from our standards are also captured in each individual standard. ASC is in the processes of developing an aligned Farm Standard that reaffirms our commitment to responsible aquaculture by providing consistency defining impacts across production systems.

## 2. A description of the STANDARD that ASC has developed

ASC currently has 11 species standards covering the main species produced in aquaculture and a standard for feed. ASC define responsible aquaculture through seven Principles for key aquaculture species. ASC identifies the social and environmental impacts that our programme can influence to move the industry towards more responsible aquaculture. These impacts have associated best practices that are both measurable and achievable. ASC Standards are therefore calibrated to move industry towards sustainability, addressing the key impacts of aquaculture.

Sustainability issues and desired outcomes are embedded within the structure of ASC standards. Standards comprise:

- Principles - High-level guiding goals needed to contribute to the ASC Mission
- Criteria - Impact areas of concern that together address the Principle
- Indicators - Defined requirements to be assessed at audit
- Performance level (if applicable) - Specific performance levels to be reached.

Performance levels are set following research and consultation with key stakeholders, to assure effective impact mitigation will be achieved. Data submissions and auditor verifications allow ASC to gather evidence as to whether these performance levels are met. This informs our ability to understand where impacts are achieved or where improvements in the ASC standards are needed. Improvements needed will be addressed through ASC's standard setting processes (see section 5).

ASC is currently developing a single aligned Farm Standard applicable to all current species and production systems in ASC certification programme's scope. This will make greater use of risk-based assessment, tailoring requirements to impact areas of most relevance to individual farms. It will also simplify the structure of ASC Standards. More information is available on the [ASC Website](#).

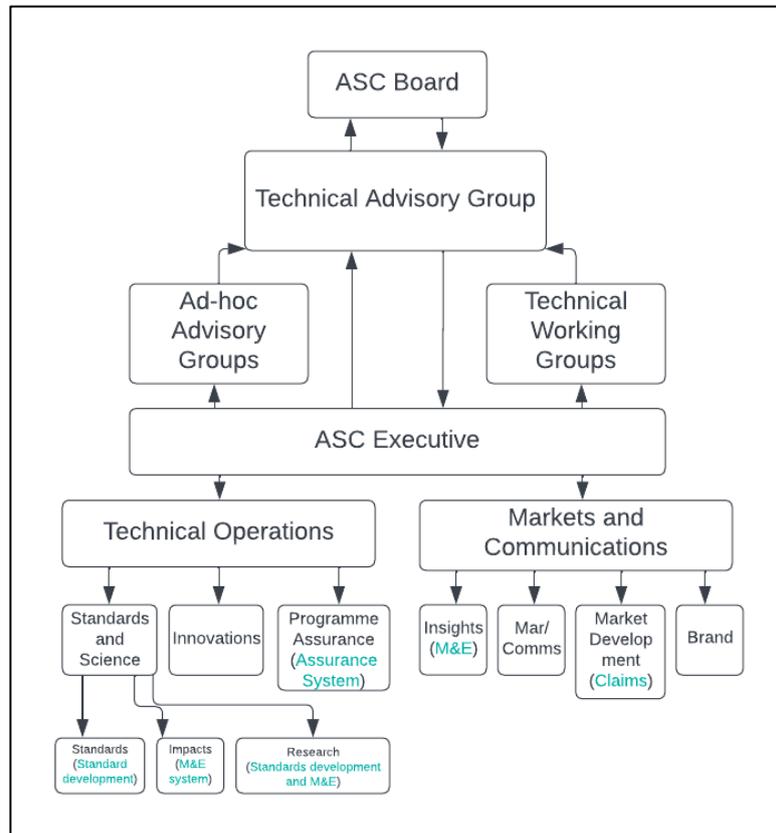
## 3. How we maintain RESPONSIBILITY for decisions taken about and by our system

At ASC, the Board sets strategy and takes decisions on developing new standards and approves them for use. For decisions relating to the standards and assurance system, the Board is guided by recommendations from the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). The TAG are in turn guided by Technical Working Groups (TWGs), formed to develop key technical recommendations for standard content. TWGs aim to balance representation from key stakeholder groups. Each standard development/revision process has a specific governance structure relevant to the scope of the development needed. These are included in public Terms of Reference. The ASC governance bodies include representatives from key stakeholder groups including industry, eNGOs and other relevant fields.

Decisions taken by the Board are also informed by ASC's monitoring and evaluation programme that details programme objectives, intended changes and definitions.

The ASC organisation is structured to provide resources for all key system elements, included in the simplified organogram below in green.

**Figure 1. ASC Organisation and Governance Structure**



#### 4. How our system's design demonstrates a COMMITMENT TO IMPROVEMENT

ASC revised the M&E framework in 2021. This framework and associated indicators define the environmental, social and economic sustainability issues that the ASC programme addresses, and the data collected to monitor intended outcomes and associated impacts. The framework accounts for data availability and accessibility against indicators to be tracked; meaning that we have identified the indicators necessary to measure progress towards our outputs and outcomes but may not yet have the data available to monitor. Given that ASC currently operates 11 species standards, there will be some variation across which indicators can be reported and these are sometimes reported at different scales. The forthcoming aligned Farm Standard (scheduled for release in 2024) will reduce this issue.

In one example, we have been able to assess the overlap of ASC certified farms in wetlands, previous mangrove forests and protected areas and utilise that analysis in the development of indicators for the proposed ASC Farm Standard. This has helped clarify that the degree of environmental impacts differ considerably based on operations and habitat types, and therefore should not be treated equally.

The M&E programme defines the reporting frequency needed to monitor progress towards intended outcomes. Where outcomes are not achieved learnings will inform the system to drive improvements in processes and the standard requirements that inform those expectations. This critical adaptive learning from the M&E programme recognises the framework as a living document to be reviewed, revised, and updated based on learnings.

## 5. How our standard or tool is monitored and reviewed to ensure its RELEVANCE

ASC maintains an M&E programme to ensure that the standards are achieving the desired outcomes, as described above. ASC also maintains a Research Team and an Insights Team with primary responsibility to ensure that ASC's programme remains relevant and compares with other overlapping or competing standards. Through regular alignment and benchmarking, we maintain an understanding of how others are measuring responsible practices, which informs our research and revision processes.

In reviewing standards, ASC consults not just the results of the M& E system, but the Issue Log, where reports of issues with our current standards or gaps in the standard and assurance system are recorded. Variance Requests, Interpretations and conformity records from standard implementation also inform reviews and can highlight areas where relevance to specific farm types or regions are not as expected.

ASC publicly shares results of all evaluations and revisions conducted, along with feedback from public consultations. All updates related to evaluation, revision, consultation and working groups are provided in our Programme Improvements webpages: <https://www.asc-aqua.org/programme-improvement>.

ASC employs several strategies and tactics to reduce barriers to accessing the ASC programme. Effective stakeholder engagement is important to ensure the programme remains relevant.

In developing and revising standards in particular, stakeholder voices are crucial. ASC engage in both open public consultations and targeted expert consultations to ensure that the requirements set in the standards are relevant, achievable, and measurable. Stakeholder mapping and participation planning ensures appropriate methods are used and consultations focus on those most affected by standards. Research for standards development, often led by the dedicated Research Team also often involves targeted expert consultation. This supplements expertise directly built into the project governance structure through Technical Working Groups where main stakeholder groups are represented.

Methods employed to reduce barriers to accessing consultations include translating resources into local languages and using ASC's network of regional staff to engage directly with stakeholders. Online surveys and meetings are available (with interpretation) to allow stakeholders with differing resources to share their views. All feedback is made public on the ASC website to allow stakeholders to follow the progress of the standard development process.

In accessing standards and certification information, ASC makes documents available online in key languages, offering printed copies where needed at cost. ASC's network of regional staff also provide support by engaging producers, processors, retailers, consumers and other key groups with an interest in the industry and its impacts.

ASC offers group and multi-site certifications in addition to the traditional single site certification to improve accessibility to enterprises of different types and scales. This broadens potential programme impacts and relevance.

The ASC Improver Programme, currently in development, aims to offer an improvement pathway to ASC certification and funding mechanisms for farms not currently operating at best-practice. This has the potential to engage far more producers in the ASC programme and improve the reach and therefore impact of the ASC.

## **6. How the standard is IMPLEMENTED**

ASC uses a third-party auditing system, accredited by a global oversight body to ensure the standard is implemented consistently and rigorously. Competency requirements and mandatory auditor training requirements are included for all those engaged in certification services. An annual Tripartite meeting supports CABs and the oversight body improve system consistency by running calibration exercises and reviewing issues of standard application.

The following list explains further system features ASC has employed to ensure consistent interpretation of standards:

- Standard structure: The logical framework used (Principle: Criterion: Indicator: Performance Level) ensures the standard covers all relevant issues and the intent can be clearly communicated.
- Language: Language use in the standard must be clear, specific, objective, and verifiable. The standard is performance-based underpinned by the ASC Metric Methodology to ensure the standard is clear in terms of process, management, and performance criteria.
- Guidance: Guidance is provided to aid interpretation offering examples and background to aid Standard users.
- Interpretation: Interpretations provide temporary additional guidance and information between revisions to programme documents. All interpretations are reviewed for inclusion during the development of new standards or the review and revision of existing standards or the CAR. To ensure transparency, all Interpretations are publicly available on the ASC's Variance Request and Interpretation Platform
- Variance Requests: ASC maintains a process for considering variations from the standard that can be applied in similar circumstances, where standards are found not to account for a specific situation.

The ASC Impacts Team currently has four staff all dedicated to building and delivering the M and E framework and working to ensure ASC can demonstrate impact and effective implementation of the standards.

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