

Core Standard FAQ

What is Harmonisation? Is it the same as the Core Standard?

The ASC has created the Core Standard in response to demand from the market to produce a certification process that uses the common indicators across multiple species to make the certification process more effective, and to bring new species into the programme in a more efficient manner. The Core Standard will streamline redundancies across the certification process, while increasing the number of species eligible under performance-based requirements that minimize or eliminate the key negative environmental and social impacts of aquaculture.

Harmonisation refers to the process by which the ASC has identified common indicators in each of the existing ASC Farm Standards that will apply to every ASC certified species in order to create the Core Standard.

The ultimate aims of the harmonisation project, and the resulting Core Standard, are to:

- Improve the scalability of ASC certification, allowing new species to become eligible more easily and expanding the reach of the standards
- More effectively respond to updates and changes within the market, and create a more efficient approach to integrating appropriate modifications into the standard
- Increase consistency when applying the standards as there will be less scope for variety in the interpretation of indicators when the wording is harmonised
- Contribute to the ASC's ultimate aim of minimising the environmental and social impacts of aquaculture by meaningfully expanding the programme

Why is the ASC doing this now?

The development of the new ASC Core Standard is a direct result of market demand. The ASC has received many requests to develop standards for additional finfish and to streamline the process of becoming certified. As a market-based programme, the ASC must find ways to effectively respond to the needs of the growing community of farms and retail partners seeking certification for an increasing range of species.

Furthermore, with the increasing demand for healthy protein, aquaculture production around the world has increased sharply. It is important that the ASC establishes standards for aquaculture not currently covered by the programme to further protect the aquatic environment and make sure that farms operate to the best social standard.

Importantly, as a member of the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) organisation, the ASC standards are developed in line with ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice. The developments of the Core Standard complies with all applicable mandates, including provisions for credible standard setting, inclusive and transparent standard setting and a commitment to constant improvement.

What standards will be impacted?

The ASC Core Standard will be applied to all species and farms globally. Species relevant additions and exclusions will be applied where appropriate.

The harmonised standard will be in effect for the following species groups with others added once applicability has been validated: Salmon, Shrimp, Pangasius, Bivalves, Abalone, Tilapia, Trout and, once they have been finalised, Seriola and Cobia.

Does the ASC currently certify any species that cannot be harmonised?

Each species certified by the ASC will be harmonised and all indicators will be merged into the Core Standard. The applicability of the indicator to any current species ASC certifies can be seen using the 'key' reference table available as part of the consultation.

How will the Core Standard differ from the current ASC standards?

The Core Standard will retain many of the features of the current standards, such as the presentation of the principles, impacts, criteria, rationale and indicators. However, the structure will differ from the current standard in the following ways:

1. There will be one common Core Standard of principles, criteria and indicators
2. The inclusion of common definitions and references
3. Detailed methodologies and species specific requirements will not be presented within the Core Standard, but instead will appear in species specific annexes

Does this mean the ASC standards will be lowered? Isn't "simplification" a code word for watering down the standard?

The ASC certification uses measurable, performance-based indicators to address the primary impacts of aquaculture and minimise harmful effects on the environment. Under the Core Standard the essential process for assessment and record keeping will not change. The standard setting process and the indicators against which a farm is measured will remain clear and robust.

The primary and most notable change will be that regardless of which species in the ASC scope is being certified, the core indicators being assessed will be the same for every species. The final Core Standard audit manual will feature a set of common indicators against which all farms seeking certification will be assessed.

My farm is already ASC certified. What does this mean for my operations?

Harmonisation is not intended to change the requirements for farms in any major way. However, minor adjustments to the standards will be made, language within the standards will be updated, duplication removed and methodologies harmonised where possible. Once the standard has been finalised, farms will have an adjustment period to transition to the

harmonised standard in order to allow time to make any updates necessary to retain certification. The ASC will identify all the changes affecting farms and provide additional reference and information to farms as needed.

How will this affect the cost of certification?

The ASC will do everything possible to make farm certification simpler and remove duplication to make the application of the Core Standard more efficient. It is hoped that the more efficient process introduced through the harmonisation will bring cost savings to independent certification and assessment bodies (CABs) and reduce the final cost of an audit.

However, the CABs which audit farms against the ASC standard agree the costs of the service with individual farms. The final cost is based on many factors including travel and length of the audit. The ASC does not set the price of the audits and in no way benefits financially from the audit process.

How will CAB's be trained for these new standards?

As the Core Standard will primarily consist of existing ASC certification modules, there should be no substantial difference in the training process for auditors once the new manual is in use.

Which new species are most likely to become part of the programme with harmonisation?

We anticipate sea bream, sea bass and grouper will be the first species to become eligible for ASC certification once the Core Standard has been formally adopted.

Will the seriola and cobia standard be part of the harmonisation? And how does the Core standard fit into the other standards development such as the marine finfish standard, operational review and seaweed?

The ASC standard for *Seriola* and *Cobia* will be finalised in August of 2016. The standard will be compatible with harmonisation and will eventually become part of the Core Standard.

The development of the marine finfish and seaweed standards will continue, as will the Operational Review.

It is expected that both the marine finfish and seaweed standards will be complete in mid 2017. They will be operational before the harmonisation project is complete. However, the standards will be compatible with the Core Standard and will be fully integrated once the harmonisation project has been completed.

How does the Operational Review fit into the Core Standard development?

The Operational Review will result in a revised standard for pangasius, salmon and tilapia. These revised standards will be finalised before the final public consultation on the Core Standard. Once finalised, they will be included in the Core Standard.

During the final round of public consultation on the Core Standard, there will a possibility to provide feedback on the Operational Review as part of the Core Standard development.

In what way will the “thousand data-points from 8 species standards produced by the dialogues” be measured?

The farm requirements (measurements) set by the dialogues are not intended to be affected by harmonising the indicators into a Core Standard. These metrics will continue to apply as limits to the Core Standard.

It may be the case that, with the introduction of the Core Standard, indicators that had previously not been applicable for some species become relevant. Alternately, in some case, indicators that were previously measured in the assessment of some species may no longer be relevant once the Core Standard is in effect. Before any change to the indicators is implemented, the ASC will have a far-reaching public consultation with stakeholders to reach agreement.

How will you account for different social standards within the needs and variety of circumstances related to farming species covered under the Core Standard?

Social standards are being harmonised as part of the process of creating the Core Standard. Every aspect of the social standard that was included in the certification and audit process prior to the implementation of the new standard will remain a part of the ASC standard. In some cases, indicators which currently apply to one species will now apply to other species.

Why not include detailed methodologies and species specific requirements in the public consultation of the Core Standard at this stage?

In order to have a deliberative and effective consultation that will allow for all aspects of the harmonisation project to be thoroughly considered, we have created a multistep process to allow for a thorough public review.

All the requirements, applicability and methods for specific species will be included in the annexes of the Core Standard and will be included during the second phase of the consultation process.

How can I comment on this draft of the Core Standard when all of the species specific requirements have not yet been released? What kind of feedback are you looking for?

At this stage, our goal is for stakeholders to agree the correct list of indicators for the Core Standard. We want we make sure the Core Standard in its current state includes the right components so that nothing is missed.

The second public consultation will focus on what to include as species specific requirements in the annexes.

Won't the Core Standard lead to explosive growth within the programme? How will the ASC successfully manage such rapid expansion?

The Core Standard will allow the ASC programme to grow in line with market demands. In response to the greater need for certified seafood, the ASC has initiated the process of hiring key staff in new regions to help manage the expansion of the standard.

What are the milestones and timeline for this process and at what date do you anticipate finalising the Core Standard?

1 st Consultation on draft standard	August 2016
2 nd Consultation on draft standard	January 2017
3 rd Consultation (if needed)	2017
Core Standard Launch	2017/2018

Also see the relevant [project page](#) on the ASC website.