

Water Quality Advisory Committee – Overview of Proposed Process

Purpose

The purpose of the Water Quality Advisory Committee (WQAC) is to resolve issues with the setting of boundaries of Type A waterbodies according to the methodology outlined in the Farm Standard's Criterion 2.6: Water Quality. Furthermore, the WQAC will only provide decisions where waterbody classification or boundaries are complex. The WQAC will facilitate timely decisions outside of the audit process, reducing complexity of compliance and verification for producers and auditors.

Overview of the proposed process and scope of the WQAC

The proposal is that the WQAC will comprise of three to five independent experts¹ with experience and knowledge of water quality and area-based management. The WQAC will convene on a regular basis/as required to provide producers located in Type A waterbodies with an initial classification of the Waterbody Unit of Management (WUM) and subsequent re-classification where circumstances affecting the WUM boundaries or classification change.

The WQAC will support the implementation of Indicator 2.6.1:

The UoC shall classify the receiving water (RW) body into Type A, B or C, according to its sensitivity to nutrient enrichment (Appendix 8 (1.1)):

- *Type A - Sensitive freshwater and marine lentic:*
 - *Hydraulic retention time (HRT) > five days (low nutrient flushing rates) (Appendix 8 (1.2 and 1.4))*
- *Type B – Sensitive lotic:*
 - *HRT < five days*
- *Type C – Less sensitive freshwater and marine:*
 - *HRT < five days and flow rate > 1000m³/s, or TSS > 20mg/l at low flow (Appendix 8 (1.3))*

¹ The AWQAC members' composition shall aim to represent all major stakeholders with consideration given to achieve diversity balance, so that no one stakeholder group or set of interests can control decisions.

Information for producers

Producers will be able to submit information/data to ASC regarding the boundaries of the WUM to seek an agreed classification of the waterbody in which the producer is located. ASC will pre-screen the information submitted and share the submission with the WQAC. The committee members will then review the information and provide a WUM classification for the producer. The output from the WQAC may be disputed only if there is further data/information available to support the dispute.

Examples of potential submissions:

- The WUM classification methodology in Indicator 2.6.1 determines that the producer is in a Type A waterbody. However, the producer has information/data which may support a reclassification (i.e. as Type B or C).
- The producer discharges to, or is located in, one system which shortly becomes another (e.g. a river which becomes a lake 60m downstream). Therefore, the boundaries of the waterbody may be unclear.

Information for auditors

The aim of the WQAC is that it will reduce complexity for auditors by resolving issues with WUM boundary setting outside of the audit process, and by an independent entity. Producers will be expected to submit information and receive a resolution prior to the initial audit (or surveillance audit if the WUM classification has changed). The output will be available for auditors as part of the desk-based review prior to an audit. Auditors can then determine compliance against the relevant indicators based on the WUM classification.