

Terms of Reference

Certification and Accreditation Requirements Revision Project

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Document Owner:	Programme Assurance Manager	Version:	2.0	Last reviewed:	09/07/2024
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1. About the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)

We are setting The Standard for seafood.

Impact-focused, Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) is driving **the world’s leading independent certification programme for responsibly farmed seafood.**

Setting the most robust standards and providing the highest assurance and integrity throughout the supply chain, we are leading the transformation of the seafood farming industry transparently towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

All this ensures that ASC labelled seafood, available in over 100 countries, has been farmed with care.

Farmers choose ASC certification to benefit from the biggest global footprint providing the most supply and sales opportunities.

Retailers choose ASC labelled seafood to benefit from the highest assurance throughout the supply chain and strong global recognition of the ASC brand.

Seafood lovers choose ASC labelled seafood to make a healthy and tasty choice and drive a positive impact on the planet and people.

2. Project Objective

The current ASC Certification and Accreditation Requirements (CAR) v 2.3.1 and Certification Requirements for Unit of Certification (RUoC) v 1.0.1, applicable to ASC’s species standards, became effective in July 2023 together with equivalent documents for certification against the ASC Feed Standard. The primary objective of this next revision is to reflect the assessment needs of the new ASC Farm Standard and to merge the Feed and Farm CAR and Feed and Farm RUoC into a single document to reduce the number of assurance documents.

This revision will also incorporate new approaches to improve efficiency of the certification process (reducing cost and complexity). It also provides an opportunity to improve further areas identified by stakeholders and through Variation Requests (VRs) and Requests for Interpretation (Q&As) processes.

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The objectives of this revision are:

- Merge the existing CAR and RUoC documents into one common document that is applicable to both feed mills and farms.
- Develop processes and methodologies that support the evaluation of the new requirements in the ASC Farm Standard.
- Develop requirements to grade non-conformities in a standardised manner particularly for metrics requirements.
- Maintain current levels of rigour and integrity.
- Evaluate the potential for use of risk-based approaches and new technology, to improve efficiency of the certification process, implementing these where possible.
- Ensure views and expertise of stakeholders are heard in development phase to better track impact of proposals and promote acceptance of resulting CAR.
- Assess current requirements in CAR and RUoC and adjust them as necessary to improve efficiency and accessibility to the programme
- Improve CAR requirements by using all sources of programme performance data (VRs, Q&As, Issue logs, Incidents, Tripartite meetings) to identify areas for improvement.

3. Scope

The ASC CAR defines the requirements for accreditation of CABs and the operational requirements of the certification process from application to certification decision including surveillance activities. The ASC RUoC sets the rules for applicants and certificate holders to comply with the certification process. The CAR and RUoC are connected having the same structure and content.

The CAR provides evaluation processes for CABs and auditors so audits can be conducted consistently irrespective of species, geography, or the CAB. As examples, the CAR includes process requirements to:

- Announce and plan audits
- Evaluate social criteria
- Conduct unannounced audits
- Conduct remote audits

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In addition to the audit process, the CAR outlines the requirements for other steps in certification process such as: Information for application, contractual clauses between farms and feed mills and CABs, stakeholder engagement activities, audit reporting, non-conformities and sanctions, certification decisions and certification maintenance.

The RUoC has requirements for farms and feed mills covering the same processes included in the CAR as actions by the UoC. There are other requirements which are specific for the type of certification applicable to the UoC, such as the requirements to set an internal quality management system in multi-site and group certifications. It also sets the rights of ASC to collect information from the UoC related to its compliance (e.g., farm data and key data elements or KDE).

4. Elements of the ASC CAR Revision

ASC's Programme Development and Revision Procedure outlines the information sources to be considered in the CAR review. These are:

- Variance Requests
- Interpretations (Q and A)
- Evaluation of CAB conformity and performance related to current requirements;
- Issue Log;
- Tripartite meeting feedback.

ASC has revised its strategy for the next five years. The strategy includes objectives to improve efficiency in the certification process through the simplification of processes and the use of technology to maintain or increase the reliability of verification mechanisms. This includes the following elements.

CAR implementation

This element considers issues and feedback collected from the organisations that make use of the CAR actively such as CABs, producers and the appointed assurance services provider. Feedback is collected through the VRs, Q&As, ASC Issue log, Incidents and Tripartite meetings.

Certification process efficiencies

ASC will review all the requirements that might need simplification to make the certification process more efficient in time and resources. As an example, the

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application and audit planning stages can be streamlined with complexity removed to make the process less prescriptive for CABs while still maintaining the robustness of the programme. This element will review requirements in the CAR that have been established since the start of the programme and were not included in the scope of the last CAR revision process.

Multi-site and group quality management system requirements

Currently both certification types have different requirements for the evaluation and implementation of quality management systems. This revision will improve consistency by developing one set of requirements applicable for both certification options with additional requirements for small farmers groups.

Risk Based and innovative auditing

ASC has developed some tools and calculators that consider risks to prescribe audit sample requirements and frequency of evaluation together with tools that facilitate the information verification (e.g., Social Risk and Multi-site calculators, ASC Mapping Tool). This revision will establish requirements for CABs and producers to use the technological tools and risk assessments developed by the ASC where they are available. These tools may include those for data collection and verification of compliance evidence such as GIS, KDE and other innovative solutions that effectively assist the certification process with timely information about producer conformity without the on-site auditing effort.

5. Stakeholder Involvement

The following key ASC stakeholders will be consulted as part of this revision process:

- Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs): Accredited CABs and their auditors conducting ASC audits who already offer certification services to ASC certified farms or feed mills. These CABs are located globally.
- Producers: certified farms or feed mills and those seeking certification 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

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Specific attention will be given to ensure inclusion of underrepresented and hard-to-reach stakeholders in the consultation process (e.g. communities with barriers to engagement or certain farms / feed mills). ASC is employing several strategies to engage stakeholders with the development process.

These include:

- Representation of stakeholders in decision making bodies (Technical Advisory Group and Board of Trustees).
- Public consultations, by means of:
 - online surveys
 - online workshops and meetings
 - a dedicated web page
 - summary slide decks in relevant languages
 - social media to promote consultations and elicit feedback.

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6. Milestones

The table below summarises key development milestones within the alignment process. The ASC website includes information on the latest opportunities for stakeholders to engage in the process. This timeline may be amended to maintain alignment with ASC Farm Standard finalisation.

Date	Activity	Engagement opportunity
Jul 2022	TAG approval for CAR revision	
Jul 2022-Sept 2024	Review work and preparation of proposed revision	
Jul-Sept 2024	TAG review of proposed revisions	
Sept-Oct 2024	Targeted Consultation with CABs	Yes
Jan 2025	TAG endorsement of CAR draft for public consultation	
Jan 2025	Public consultation 30 days	Yes
Mar 2025	TAG endorsement of final CAR document	
Apr 2025	Board approval of final CAR document	
TBD	CAR document effective	

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7. Governance and Decision Making

The revision and development of the CAR will be supported by the CAR project team and Director of Programme Assurance.

TAG will also endorse drafts of the revised CAR ahead of public consultation. The CAR project team will then review consultation feedback and develop the final document and assessment of risks and impact for the revised document for TAG endorsement. The TAG will then recommend to the ASC Board whether to accept the final CAR document.

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

8. Risk Assessment

The CAR revision may bring risk to the certification programme related to the revisions selected. The following is an overview of possible risks associated with this revision. More detailed and informed risks and mitigation measures will be completed following public consultations using the ASC Risk and Impact Framework, RIF.

Identified Risk	Mitigation strategy
<p>The CAR implementation requirements and certification costs may increase creating a barrier for small and medium sized producers globally to get certified.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Testing and consultation will seek to evaluate this risk to allow informed decisions on trade-offs in delivering impact.
<p>Addition of new methodologies and steps in certification process may cause ambiguous interpretations from CABs and producers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep only essential changes with proper testing, calibration and training.

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<p>Efficiencies may be perceived to be less rigorous leading to a reputational risk for ASC.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements will only be considered for removal or adjustment where it is clear that the original intent is fulfilled without increasing integrity risks • Impacts of proposed changes on all stakeholders will be assessed and clearly communicated.
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9. Contact Information

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10. Stakeholder Feedback

ASC welcomes stakeholder feedback on this Terms of Reference at any time. Stakeholders may forward concerns or complaints to complaints@asc-aqua.org; as per [ASC's Complaint Procedure](#).

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11. Amendment, Modification or Variation

Amendment History

Date:	Version:	Summary of Amendment:
01 JUL 2022	1.0	New Document
09 JUL 2024	2.0	<p>Amended Sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 1- About ASC • Section 2 - Project Objective • Section 5 – Stakeholder Involvement • Section 6 - Milestones • Section 7 - Governance and Decision Making • Section 8 – Risk Assessment • Section 9 - Contact information

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