

ASC Farm Standard v1.0

Disclaimer: This text provides an explanation of the ASC Farm Standard v1.0, in plain English with minimal jargon. It is not intended for use in certification. Only the official [standard](#) document is valid for certification purposes. The ASC Farm Standard is effective from May 2025 and will fully replace the ASC Species Standards. Farms are allowed a transition period to move to the ASC Farm Standard until May 2027.

The ASC Farm Standard is structured in four principles. It has the following requirements:

PRINCIPLE 1: Operate legally and apply effective business management

Principle 1 ensures that farms meet the national legal obligations in the country they are based in, have ethical practices and effective management and traceability systems in place. This principle has **five criteria**:

- 1.1** (Legal compliance): Farms should ensure they hold all legal licences and permits and comply with all applicable legal requirements.
- 1.2** (Management systems): Farms must maintain a management system and appoint someone responsible for ASC standard implementation. They should train employees on the system and review its effectiveness annually.
- 1.3** (Business ethics): Farms must promote ethical business practices and discourage corruption and not falsify or misrepresent evidence of conformance.
- 1.4** (Traceability and disclosure): Farms must assess the risk of mixing certified and non-certified products, implement traceability systems, and ensure that feed comes from ASC-conforming sources. They must disclose information about their inputs and cannot sell products treated with banned chemicals or antibiotics as certified.
- 1.5** (Supply chain): Farms must map their input supply chains and ensure suppliers of young fish (so-called pre-grow out and intermediate sites) of flatfish, freshwater salmonids, seabass, seabream, meagre, and land-based salmon meet key ASC Farm Standard requirements:

- **From principle 1:** Sites must have all legal licences and permits.
- **From principle 2:** Sites cannot be in Protected Areas (with limited exceptions) or have converted natural wetlands since May 1999, unless restored. They need a Human-Wildlife Plan to protect local species, an Escape Prevention Plan, proper waste disposal procedures, and must hold hormone-treated water for at least 48 hours before discharge.

- **From principle 3:** Sites must follow fair labour rules, ban forced and child labour, support union rights or alternatives, ensure health and safety, and have an accessible grievance system for communities.
- **From principle 4:** Sites must follow a vet-approved Health and Welfare Plan, use medicines only under prescription, report antibiotic use to the farm, and never use WHO-listed critical antimicrobials.

PRINCIPLE 2: Operate in an environmentally responsible manner

Principle 2 addresses the potential impacts of seafood farms on natural habitats, biodiversity, and ecosystems. It includes **twelve criteria**:

2.1 (Environmental risk assessment): Farms must conduct an Environmental Risk Assessment (ERA) using a prescribed method, carried out by qualified professionals if defined in national legal requirements.

2.2 (Important natural areas): The farm site is not allowed in a protected area (with some exceptions). The farm site must have low risk of harming important or sensitive areas, and any areas defined as 'critical habitat' must be protected. For land-based sites, natural wildlife paths and buffer zones near water must be kept. For land-based and suspended systems (for example where shellfish is grown floating off the seafloor), restoration of wetlands is required. In bivalve farming, plankton levels must stay healthy, proven by water studies or modelling.

2.3 (Interaction with wildlife): Farms must minimise human-wildlife conflicts and avoid harming threatened species. Any wildlife deaths must be investigated and reported. Only hatchery-raised fish and bivalve seed should be used.

2.4 (Preventing escapes): Farms must stop fish from escaping by using strong, well-maintained enclosures and trained staff. They must track escape numbers, staying under strict yearly limits. Mass escapes must be reported right away and may lead to cancellation of certification. For salmon, only smolt of locally native species can be used. Fallowing must not interfere with wild salmon migration periods.

2.5 (Sea/river floor protection): Farms must assess and maintain the conditions of the seafloor and river floor.

2.6 (Water quality): Farms must control nitrogen and phosphorus levels to prevent water pollution and harmful algae blooms. Larger feed pellets should have less than 1% small particles. Cages must be in well-oxygenated water, with adequate depth or current. In sensitive (Type A) waterbodies, farms must monitor water quality and take corrective actions if it declines. For point-source systems, farms must treat water to limit pollution. In less sensitive (Type B) waterbodies, pollution increases must stay under 25%, with oxygen levels closely monitored.

2.7 (Salinisation): Farms using brackish or saltwater pond systems must line their ponds to prevent leaks, cannot release salty water over land, and can only discharge water that is as salty or less salty than the nearby natural waterbody. If the farm uses freshwater wells, the water must stay below a certain level of salt and chloride.

2.8 (Fish waste): Farms must store fish waste safely, not release them into rivers, wetlands, or natural areas, only re-use them if they are clean, and dispose of them properly if they cannot be reused.

2.9 (Freshwater use): Farms in areas with high water stress must have a water-saving plan. Farms cannot take more than 50% of surface water and must return at least 90% of the water they take back to its source.

2.10 (Energy use): Farms must calculate their energy use and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from both feed and farm operations and maintain a GHG management plan.

2.11 (Waste disposal): Farms must reduce, reuse, and recycle waste where possible and ensure proper disposal and avoid the use of banned or hazardous pesticides. Gear cleaning must be done on land where wastewater is treated. Farms must retrieve lost gear, clean up surrounding areas, and ensure infrastructure is neat.

2.12 (Feed use): Farms must only use ASC-conforming feed, cannot use feed made from the same species they are farming and must use feed efficiently.

PRINCIPLE 3: Respect and promote human rights

Principle 3 focuses on ensuring that farms treat their workers and communities around them fairly and respectfully. It has **13 criteria**:

3.1 (Human rights policy): Farms must have a written policy that supports workers' rights and respects nearby communities, overseen by a senior manager. It must be shared with stakeholders, and all staff must be trained on it.

3.2 (Preventing forced labour): Farms must ensure no forced, bonded, or compulsory labour is used, respecting workers' freedom of movement, freedom to leave their job, not withholding pay, and not retaining ID documents. Safe, fair housing and working conditions must be provided. If forced labour is found, proper actions must be taken to resolve it.

3.3 (Preventing child labour): Farms must ensure no child labour is used. Any child labour found must be addressed protecting the child's best interests. Children aged 13–14 may only do light tasks under strict conditions and young employees aged 15–18 must not work excessive hours.

3.4 (Preventing discrimination): Farms must treat all employees equally, free from discrimination, violence, and harassment. Medical tests are only allowed when necessary for the job or safety.

3.5 (Health and safety): Farms must conduct health and safety risk assessments, address any hazards, train employees and maintain accident records. Safe machinery, emergency procedures, and proper facilities like drinking water and food areas must be provided. Commercial diving activities should be logged, carried out by certified divers and monitored.

3.6 (Freedom of association and collective bargaining): Farms must allow workers to join trade unions, choose representatives, and collectively negotiate for better conditions without interference and must uphold any agreements.

3.7 (Labour contracts and subcontracting): Farms must provide written contracts with clear terms for roles, hours, wages, benefits, and policies. Family members working on-site must be treated equally and false apprenticeships are banned.

3.8 (Wages): Farms must pay at least the minimum wage, annually assess wages against living wage benchmarks and create a wage improvement plan if there is a gap. Wages should be paid in full and on time. At least 14 weeks of maternity leave should be provided.

3.9 (Working hours and overtime): Farms must follow the law and collective bargaining agreements for working hours and paid leave, including limits on daily and weekly hours, rest periods, and leave. No employee can exceed 8 hours a day or 48 hours a week (excluding overtime), with averaging over a 17-week period allowed. Overtime must be voluntary, capped at 12 hours per week, and paid at a premium rate.

3.10 (Disciplinary practices): Farms must have a clear policy on workplace conduct and maintain records of any disciplinary actions. Deductions from wages or benefits for rule violations are not allowed.

3.11 (Employee housing): Farms must ensure employee accommodation is safe, clean, and meets legal standards and must provide privacy, hygienic facilities, and reasonable rent. For remote locations, access to free private communication channels must be available.

3.12 (Complaint mechanisms): Farms must engage in dialogue with employees to address concerns and prevent grievances. They must have a fair and accessible grievance system for employees and communities. Employees should be trained on it, and grievances must be addressed within 90 days, with records maintained.

3.13 (Community engagement): Farms must respect the rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples and local communities, particularly regarding land and water use. The farm should minimise negative impacts on surrounding communities and

engage proactively to address any issues, and source goods and services locally if possible.

PRINCIPLE 4: Protect the health and welfare of animals

Principle 4 focuses on ensuring that farms maintain their animals' health and welfare. It has **5 criteria**, but criteria 4.1 and 4.2 have several sub-sections applicable to different species groups and for different activities:

4.1.1 (Animal health and welfare for all fish species including cleaner fish): Farms must train staff in fish health, welfare, and biosecurity, and have a vaccination plan in place. All fish must be free from regional diseases before stocking, and mortality limits must be followed. Regular vet visits are required, and a detailed health and welfare plan that monitors water quality, fish health, feeding behaviour, and mortality. Cleaner fish must be stocked carefully, in good conditions, and fed properly.

4.1.2 (Handling of all fish species including cleaner fish): Farms must have a plan that ensures minimal stress and injury during handling, including using appropriate equipment and assessing fish fitness. Handling practices should consider environmental conditions and minimise time out of water. Handling must be within limits to avoid harm, and farms must have measures for acclimatisation and welfare post-handling. For wild-caught cleaner fish, farms must ensure fishing gear avoids injury and stress, and cleaner fish must be segregated before any salmonid-specific treatments.

4.1.3 (Slaughter for all fish species including cleaner fish): Farms must ensure fish are stunned before slaughter with at least 95% losing consciousness immediately. Certain inhumane slaughter methods are prohibited, and records of stunning and slaughter processes must be kept. Cleaner fish must be reused when possible, and if not, must be humanely slaughtered.

4.2.1 (Shrimp health and welfare): Farms must train staff in shrimp health, welfare, and biosecurity. They must stock disease-free shrimp, conduct regular health checks with a veterinarian and have a feeding plan, if they use feed. A health and welfare plan must monitor health, disease prevention, and biosecurity. Farms must track mortality, set reduction targets, and report health concerns to professionals. Specific species must come from eyestalk ablation-free broodstock.

4.2.2 (Shrimp handling): Farms must have a handling plan to ensure shrimp are handled under suitable conditions that should account for environmental factors, pond preparation, and gradual adjustment to water changes. Any unusual behaviour during handling should be addressed, and risks related to biosecurity and equipment should be considered.

4.2.3 (Shrimp slaughter): Farms can only use humane slaughter practices, either by immersion in an ice slurry or electrical stunning followed by ice, and death

must be confirmed. Farms must have back-up systems for failed stunning and keep records.

4.3 (Bivalve and abalone health and welfare): Farms must train staff on the health, welfare, and biosecurity of abalone and bivalve. Only disease-free animals may be stocked, and a vet must visit the site regularly. A health and welfare plan must be in place to monitor disease, manage risks, and report notifiable diseases.

4.4 (Veterinary treatments): Farms can only use treatments prescribed by a qualified vet. Hormones for growth promotion are prohibited, and antibiotics should only be used in rare, justified cases. The farm must follow legal limits for treatments and monitor for resistance. Antibiotic use must be publicly reported.

4.5 (Sea lice management for salmon grown in cages): Salmon farms that produce using cages must collaborate with other farms in an area to manage sea lice collectively and jointly they must set sea lice thresholds. Farms must also collaborate with other organisations on research and monitor lice levels in both farmed and wild salmon and conduct sea lice sampling. If sea lice exceed limits, they must be reduced within 21 days. Farms should rotate treatments to prevent resistance and have a parasite control plan approved by a veterinarian. Parasiticide usage must be made publicly available.