

TERMS OF REFERENCE

CoC Module Review

Contents

1.	About the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)	2
2.	Project Objective and Scope	2
3.	Project Information	3
4.	Stakeholder Involvement	4
5.	Project Milestones	5
6.	Governance and Decision Making	6
7.	Risk Assessment	7
8.	Contact Information	7
9.	Stakeholder Feedback	7
10.	Amendment History	7

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Classification:	EXTERNAL (RESTRICTED)	Page 1 of 7			

1. About the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)

ASC is founded on, and committed to, transforming seafood farming. **Our vision** is a world where seafood farming plays a major role in supplying food and social benefits for humanity whilst minimising negative impacts on the environment.

Our mission is to transform seafood farming towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility, creating value across the chain using market mechanisms, improvement incentives and delivering value-added services from farm to fork.

With the most robust standards and the highest assurance, we ensure traceability and transparency throughout the supply chain. By choosing ASC labelled seafood, consumers in over 115 countries are contributing to a more sustainable future.

We champion change by leveraging our expertise, fostering innovation, and partnering with the supply chain to amplify our impact. We make change by collaborating to develop the world's leading independent certification and improver programmes for responsibly farmed seafood.

2. Project Objective and Scope

The objective of this project is to conduct a revision of the ASC Chain of Custody (CoC) Module. The following topics are in scope:

1. **Human rights** requirements for ASC certified supply chain companies to better align with ASC's vision and mission. This includes compliance verification mechanisms of social criteria.
2. Inclusion of **animal welfare slaughter requirements in alignment with the ASC Farm Standard** (where stunning and slaughter occurs in the first certified CoC site after harvesting).
3. Potential improvements to the **food safety** requirement.
4. Maintaining **alignment with MSC CoC** requirements to continue the efficiencies of a shared CoC Standard for ASC CoC certificate holders and CABs.
5. Add **impact in other areas** if desired, such as digital traceability and improver product supply chains.

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Classification:	EXTERNAL (RESTRICTED)	Page 2 of 7			

3. Project Information

Addressing human rights issues in the supply chain

A major driver for this project is the need to cover human rights requirements in ASC certified supply chains. ASC shares MSC’s Chain of Custody Standard which focusses on traceability and segregation of certified products. In 2022, ASC launched the additional ASC Chain of Custody Module. The Module is part of a suite of improvements and tools to provide greater value and assurance to programme participants and customers. As an environmental standard-setting organisation, MSC’s CoC Standard does not include a focus on human rights.

ASC has steadily developed its human rights programme through the different ASC species standards and most recently in the ASC Feed Standard and the ASC Farm Standard (launching in May 2025). Processing in aquaculture is a high-risk area for human rights abuses and poor working conditions – underlining a need to focus directly on these issues across the supply chain.

Aligning animal welfare requirements with the ASC Farm Standard

Another driver of the project is ensuring alignment with the ASC Farm Standard animal welfare requirements including humane slaughter. Slaughter can occur outside of the farm Unit of Certification in the post-farm supply chain, for example at the first processor. To provide assurance that slaughter is conducted humanely regardless of where it occurs, the relevant animal welfare slaughter requirements will apply to supply chain companies that conduct slaughter through the CoC Module.

Further review themes A further impetus for the review is to consider potential improvements to the existing food safety requirement within the CoC Module, ensuring the requirement does not limit accessibility to ASC CoC certification.

Lastly the revision will consider other topics such as digital traceability for improved supply chain assurance and the inclusion of supply chain certification for ASC improver products. Currently these are not provided for in detail in the ASC CoC requirements.

The timeline of this revision will align with MSC’s own Chain of Custody program review and the mandatory date of the ASC Farm Standard, to ensure optimum consistency for certificate holders and certification bodies.

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Classification:	EXTERNAL (RESTRICTED)	Page 3 of 7			

4. Stakeholder Involvement

Consultation activities include public consultation on the project ToR for 30 days, targeted outreach to seek input during proposal development, publication of the draft revised CoC Module for 60 days and feasibility assessment which may include pilots. Various opportunities for engagement are identified in the project milestones below.

Stakeholder and target	Interest in the process	Consultation target
Supply chain companies - processors, packers, re-packers, importers	Feasibility of new requirements; market access; claims related to products	Five supply chain companies of different size/ region
Supply chain companies who conduct slaughter	Feasibility of new requirements	Three companies who conduct slaughter of varying species
Retailers	Priority topics and regions for their supply chains; claims related to products	Three retailers of varying regional location, size and species handled
NGOs	Expertise on human rights issues in the supply chain and how they can be credibly addressed	Three NGOs with expertise on human rights issues
Unions or worker representatives	Support for workers, opportunities for collective bargaining, employer accountability	Two unions or representatives familiar with relevant regions and issues
CABs, auditors or other assurance providers	Feasibility of auditing new requirements and/or alternatives of effective compliance evaluation	Three representatives of CABs, auditors or other assurance providers

In addition to review of the ToR, we plan to ask stakeholders about the following themes:

- The main supply chain human rights asks and the approach ASC should take to including human rights requirements in the CoC Module
- Effective and efficient evaluation mechanisms for human rights.
- The approach ASC should take in including slaughter requirements in the CoC Module
- Potential improvements to food safety requirements
- Potential coverage of other topics such as digital traceability and improver projects

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Classification:	EXTERNAL (RESTRICTED)	Page 4 of 7			

5. Project Milestones

Date	Activity
May 2025	Publish Project ToR and Working Group ToR
Apr-Aug 2025	Develop proposals, impact assess (RIF), recommendations
Sep 2025	High-level internal agreement
Nov-Dec 2025	Prepare public consultation
Jan 2026	Submit for TAG approval
Mar 2026	60-day public consultation
May 2026	Feasibility assessment (RIF continuation)
June 2026	Prepare final document
July 2026	Submit for TAG approval
Oct 2026	Submit for Board approval
Nov 2026	Release ASC CoC Module v2.0
May 2027	Effective date CoC Module v2.0

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Classification:	EXTERNAL (RESTRICTED)	Page 5 of 7			

6. Governance and Decision Making

This project will follow the relevant processes defined in the [Programme Development and Revision Procedure](#) and [TAG Terms of Reference](#).

ASC staff are responsible for the management and delivery of the project and for the drafting of relevant proposals, including the project ToR, consultation themes and the Technical Working Group ToR.

Stakeholder views on these will be collected during the ToR consultation period. No category of stakeholder has a majority vote in decision making. Following the consultation and subject to TAG approval, a Technical Working Group will be established to represent important stakeholders with consideration given to both diversity and balance, ensuring that no one stakeholder group or set of interests can control decisions. The proposal will go through a Risk and Impact Framework (RIF) assessment to balance between having robust and feasible requirements.

TAG reviews stakeholder feedback and Technical Working Group insight and provides advice for the next steps or recommendations to the ASC Board. TAG recommendations are preferably made by consensus. If no consensus can be reached, agreement on advice by the TAG is made by simple majority of members.

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Classification:	EXTERNAL (RESTRICTED)	Page 6 of 7			

7. Risk Assessment

Identified Risk	Mitigation strategy
ON-GOING RISKS	
Need to ensure ASC addresses priority topics including human rights and slaughter	Priority topics to be addressed in the review and confirmed through public consultation processes
Need to engage supply chain stakeholders	Stakeholders to be engaged through two consultation periods
PROJECT RISKS	
Additional requirements add cost and complexity for certificate holders	Stakeholder input; impact and feasibility assessment; representative working group; removal of other CoC Module aspects
Impact of divergence in approach between ASC and MSC	ASC and MSC collaboration and alignment where possible
Missed opportunity to add value in supply chain assurance	Consider other topics in the review, time and resource permitting

8. Contact Information

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9. Stakeholder Feedback

ASC welcomes stakeholder feedback on this Terms of Reference by 15 June 2025 via email submission to consultation@asc-aqua.org.

10. Amendment History

Date	Version	Summary of Amendment
April 2025	1.0	New document

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Classification:	EXTERNAL (RESTRICTED)	Page 7 of 7			