



BETTER STANDARDS FOR OUR PLANET



Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Review of the ASC-MSC Seaweed Standard Programme



Consultation Draft

Version 1.0.1 August 2025



Document history

Version	Effective date	Description of amendment	Affected section/ page
1.0	22 July 2025	New document for consultation (August-September 2025)	-
1.0.1	19 August 2025	Minor, non-substantive updates	Section 1 - Introduction; Section 7 - Risk 3 mitigation strategy

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1. Introduction to the ASC-MSD Seaweed Standard

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) have jointly developed a global standard for socially responsible and environmentally sustainable seaweed harvesting and farming practices (more information on claims [here](#)). The MSC and ASC are independent organisations founded to lead certification and labelling programs for responsibly produced seafood. They aim to transform the seafood industry by developing standards that provide the strongest environmental and social requirements, and by recognising responsible farming and harvesting practices through certification.

The joint vision and mission of the ASC and MSC in developing this Seaweed Standard is to contribute to the health of the world's aquatic ecosystems by recognising seafood farming and harvesting that has met Standard requirements through certification.

The Standard has five Principles covering:

- Sustainable wild populations
- Environmental impacts
- Effective management
- Social responsibility
- Community relations and interactions

Benchmarking against existing seaweed standards and ratings systems will be updated as part of this project to ensure appropriate engagement and that the revisions to the ASC-MSD Seaweed Programme are informed by the current landscape.

2. Background on the ASC-MSD Seaweed Standard review

The ASC-MSD Seaweed Standard has been operational since 2017, with 14 seaweed production units certified as of June 2025 in Japan, South Korea, and the USA. Third-party certification activities have been conducted by four accredited Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs): Control Union, AMITA, DNV, and LRQA. The certification landscape encompasses both wild-harvested and farmed seaweed, covering a diverse range of species including Euglena, Chlorella, Schizochytrium, Undaria, Laminaria, and Pyropia. While the programme has made significant strides, areas for further development remain, such as enhancing market incentives, reducing certification costs, and increasing the pool of qualified auditors to ensure effective implementation.

Review of the Seaweed Standard has not been formally initiated until now to ensure sufficient evidence of programme performance was available to allow meaningful review. ASC-MSD have monitored feedback throughout this period to ensure any urgent issues could be identified and addressed.

3. Objectives and Scope of the Seaweed Standard review

The objective of this review is to ensure that the ASC-MSD Seaweed Standard is relevant and effective for future programme growth. The Standard should effectively address key sustainability challenges by setting requirements for seaweed production that reflect widely adopted best-



practices in minimising impact on surrounding natural environments and being responsible employers and neighbours. To maximise the impact of the ASC-MSC Seaweed Standard, it must be feasible to implement.

To complete this review, ASC and MSC will evaluate the following information sources:

- ASC and MSC's Strategic Plans
- ASC and MSC's updated Fisheries and Farm standards, ASC Feed and Farm Certification and Accreditation Requirements (CAR) and other programme documents and processes (to maximise programme alignment)
- Standard Interpretations
- Seaweed Programme Issues Log
- Learnings from Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)
- Stakeholder feedback
- Research
- Industry best practices
- Standard and CAR Variation Requests (VRs)
- Unit of Certification (UoC) performance data
- Relevant legislation

ASC and MSC are Code Compliant members of [ISEAL](#). This standard review process will align with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems.

4. Stakeholder participation

The Seaweed Standard Review will be transparent and engage stakeholders to ensure outcomes are relevant and effective.

The process will follow [ASC's Program Development and Revision Procedure](#). Any revisions will require at least one round of public consultation and other stakeholder engagement opportunities to ensure effective participation, particularly from those who are typically underrepresented (such as those in developing economies).

Public consultation will:

1. be open and accessible to all identified stakeholders, with consultation summaries made public
2. aim to gather input from a balanced and diverse group of stakeholders with an interest in the subject matter and geographic scope of the standard, or who are affected by its implementation
3. address barriers faced by stakeholder groups who are under engaged or underrepresented and proactively seeks their contributions

Identified stakeholders are:

Primary

- Seaweed farmers and fisheries
- Communities around farms and fisheries
- Regulators and policy makers
- Scientists/academics
- Environmental and social NGOs
- Processors
- Retailers
- Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) & Assurance Services International (ASI)

Secondary

- (Industry) Media
- Donors
- Overlapping sustainability initiatives

Engagement will be monitored and targeted depending on the areas of focus emerging from the review.

5. Process of Standard Review and Revision

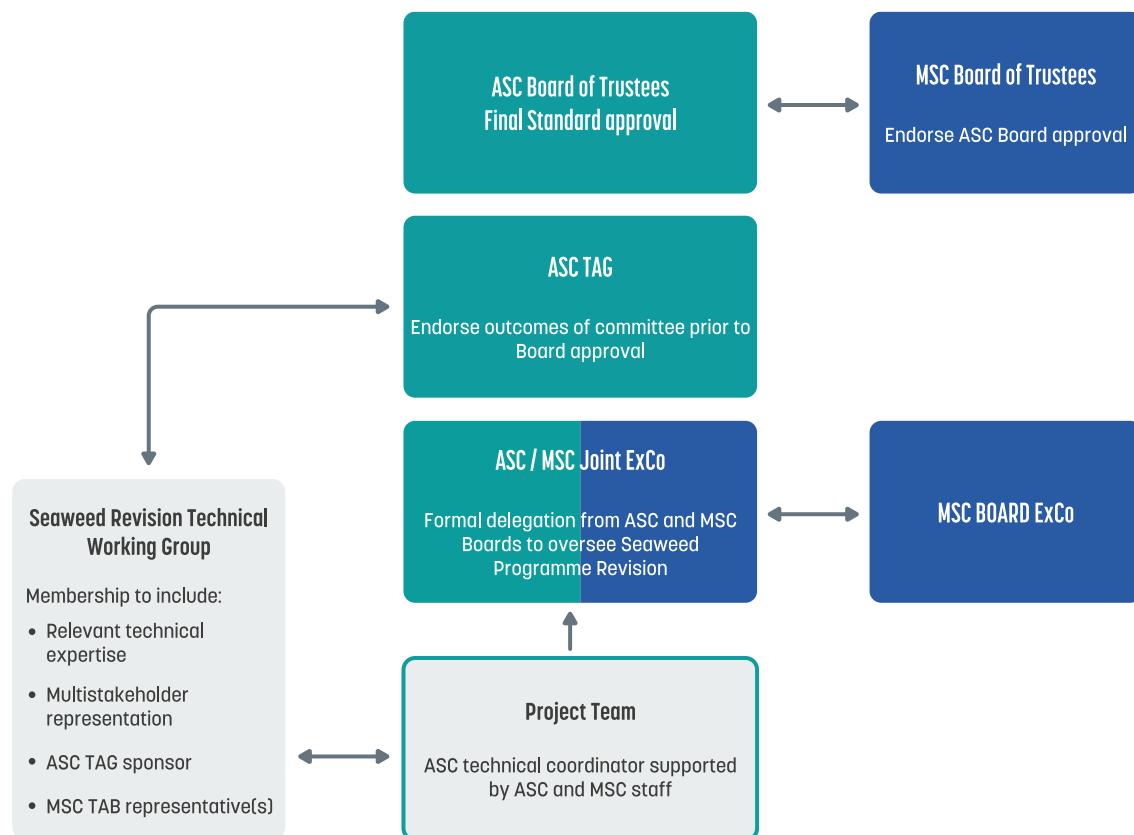
The table below outlines the Standard review and revision process. Any updates will be available on the [Seaweed Standard](#) webpage.

Activity	Who	Planned date
Review programme effectiveness	ASC/MSD	June – October 2025
ToR Consultation	Public	Aug-Sept 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm scope of revision and workplan Update ToR 	ASC Board ASC/MSD	November 2025
Programme research and development	ASC/MSD	November 2025-June 2026
Endorsement initial proposals	Seaweed Revision TWG ASC TAG	July 2026
Stakeholder consultation	Public	Sept-Oct 2026
Confirm next steps	Seaweed Revision TWG	Jan 2027
Further programme development	ASC/MSD	Jan-Jun 2027
Endorsement testing draft and plans	Seaweed Revision TWG ASC TAG	July 2027
Testing	ASC/MSD/Stakeholders	July 2027-May 2028
Endorsement final consultation draft	Seaweed Revision TWG ASC TAG	Jan May 2028
Final consultation	Public	March May 2028
Approvals	ASC Board approval MSC Board approval endorsement	Q3 2028
Launch		Q3 2028

6. Governance

To ensure the effective operation of this joint programme, MSC and ASC have taken the lead in different areas of programme management and oversight. ASC will lead the Standard review/revision work. To ensure the programme continues to reflect MSC's strategic goals and crucially, the needs of the wild harvest component of the programme, representatives from MSC's executive and governance are embedded within the adapted governance structure at key decision points.

This structure is subject to review.



Consensus decision making is preferred, although majority decision making is permitted. Composition of governance bodies ensures no one interest group can dominate decision making. Where recommendations from Technical Advisory Group (TAG) are not unanimous, minority views shall be reported to inform final decisions.

Meeting summaries, including decisions of the Seaweed Revision Technical Working Group and the ASC TAG will be made available on the ASC website.

For further detail on ASC and MSC governance structures please visit programme governance webpages: [ASC](#) and [MSC](#).

In standards revision the ASC TAG and MSC TAB ensure standard content is fit-for purpose, reviewing and overseeing the process, including the work of Technical Working Groups developing standard content.

7. Assessment of risks

The following risks and mitigation approaches have been identified for the project:

Identified risks		Risk mitigation strategy
1	The standard does not align with market and consumer expectations for a sustainable and responsible Seaweed Standard.	Engage with market stakeholders and consumers to gain a clear understanding of the specific issues the new standard should address and ensure it meets their expectations.
2	The Standard's rigour and complexity and consequent implementation and certification costs may limit access to the programme for small operators, particularly in countries with developing economies, limiting the programme's impact.	Evaluation of the impact of this risk will form part of the review, options such as group certification, and simplification will be explored.
3	Seaweed operations may lack the data to provide evidence of compliance against the Seaweed Standard.	Consider data availability in revisions to the Standard to ensure adequate accessibility to programme.
4	Regulation of seaweed production and harvest may not be in place in many regions, limiting ability to meet Standard requirements.	The MSC and ASC are developing strategies to ensure formal and informal management arrangements are taken into account during the assessment.
5	Limited programme uptake has reduced investment from CABs in qualifying auditors, reducing availability and increasing costs.	Specific engagement with CABs in reviewing challenges, specifically with auditor competencies and certification processes.

8. Get Involved

Please contact consultation@asc-aqua.org to register your interest in this review or submit any comments.

Any complaints relating to the Seaweed Standard review should be directed to complaints@asc-aqua.org.