

Water Quality Advisory Committee Framework

Purpose

The purpose of the Water Quality Advisory Committee (WQAC) is to enable the definition of the Waterbody Unit of Management (WUM), in accordance with the methodology in Appendix 8 (8.6), when the boundaries of the WUM are unclear to the Unit of Certification (UoC). The WQAC will reduce complexity for sites and auditors by resolving challenges with defining WUMs outside of the audit process.

Who can use the WQAC

Only UoCs with sites located in Type A receiving waterbodies (RW) are required to define a WUM, therefore the WQAC is applicable to sites located in a Type A RW. Applications to the WQAC will only be considered if the boundaries of the WUM are unclear. Examples of unclear WUM boundaries may include channelised systems, island archipelagos and large lakes.

Overview of the WQAC Process

The WQAC will comprise of three independent experts with experience and knowledge of water quality and area-based management. The WQAC will review information from the UoC and provide a decision to the UoC regarding the definition of a WUM. The output will be a defined WUM which the UoC shall present as evidence to support the implementation of Indicator 2.6.6:

*The UoC shall define the **Waterbody Unit of Management (WUM)**, following the method outlined in **Appendix 8 (8.6)**.*

An exception applies where a WUM is already defined, in which case, the UoC shall provide evidence of the defined WUM.

Terms of Reference for the WQAC are available on the ASC website.

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Request Submission and Decision-Making Process

1. The UoC shall submit information to ASC via MyASC regarding the RW outlining the rationale for challenges with defining the WUM.
 - a. The ASC submission form on MyASC shall be completed in English and include the following information:
 - i. Information, maps and data about the geography and hydrology of the area around the site(s). This should include current and depth data, maps of the region and the coordinates of the site(s).
 - ii. Information about jurisdictions and regulatory bodies managing water quality in the area.
 - iii. The rationale for the challenge in defining the WUM.
 - b. It is recommended that the UoC allows sufficient time for a decision to be made on the request (based on the timescales below) in advance of the initial or surveillance audit.
2. ASC will conduct an initial administrative review of the submitted information to determine the suitability of the request (for example, whether the request has been submitted by a UoC with a site in a Type A waterbody) and the information provided. Approved requests will proceed to step 3.
3. Requests may be rejected if the request has not been submitted by a UoC with a site in a Type A RW, or insufficient information has been provided.
 - a. ASC will provide feedback to the UoC in these instances to aid the resubmission of the request (where applicable).
 - b. The WQAC will then have 21 days to review the submission and provide a decision on the request. The WQAC will either define the boundaries of the WUM based on the information provided in the submission, or request more information from the UoC.
4. If more information has been requested by the WQAC to define the WUM, the UoC will be contacted by ASC to request the additional information.
5. Once the additional information has been received, the WQAC will have 14 days to review and decide the boundaries of the WUM.

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6. Once a decision has been made by the WQAC, ASC will inform the UoC of the outcome within 7 days. The outcome will determine the boundaries of the WUM which shall be used for audits.
 - a. The UoC will have 14 days to appeal the decision from the WQAC. Information/data will need to be provided to support the rationale of the appeal. Appeals without a clear rationale, or sufficient information/data will not be considered by the WQAC.
7. Steps 2-4 will be repeated as part of the appeal process to define the WUM.

Information for Auditors

The aim of the WQAC is to reduce complexity for auditors by resolving issues with WUM boundary setting outside of the audit process. UoCs will be expected to submit information and receive a resolution prior to the initial audit (or surveillance audit if the WUM boundaries have changed). The output will be presented to the auditor by the UoC as part of the audit process. Auditors can then determine compliance against the relevant indicators based on the WUM boundaries as defined by the WQAC.

ASC welcomes all stakeholder feedback that helps us improve our programme. Should a UoC wish to submit feedback including any formal complaint about the execution of this process by ASC or the WQAC, information on the ASC Complaints Procedure can be found here: <https://asc-aqua.org/provide-input/>

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