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# Aquaculture in Protected Areas

Preliminary consultation

9 March – 9 April 2026

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## Share your views!

- [Find the consultation survey link here](#)
- [See our dedicated webpage and the draft project Terms of Reference here](#)



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# ASC Protected Areas (PAs) preliminary consultation

This consultation covers the Terms of Reference and other key topics

Through this consultation, we seek stakeholder input on:

1. The project objectives, scope, justification, timeline, governance and stakeholder engagement plan (Terms of Reference)
2. Key risks, challenges, and regional considerations that should be addressed
3. Expected project outcomes
4. Additional protected areas governance frameworks to be considered
5. Specific questions for CABs and auditors

Initial consultation for 30 days  
(9 March – 9 April)

Technical working group  
formation (Mar 2026)

Second consultation  
(Sep-Oct 2027)

Third consultation  
(Mar-Apr 2028)

Effective (Jul 2028)



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# Consultation engagement plan

This preliminary consultation will be followed by a 60-day consultation in 2027 on the draft proposals.

The preliminary consultation survey will be available for 30 days. It invites stakeholder feedback on the project ToR and on key initial topics.

Further engagement will include targeted consultation with key stakeholders (for example conservation authorities, PA managers, producers, NGOs, indigenous rights holders) and further stakeholder consultations to test clarity and feasibility.

ASC also plans to run workshops to collect further feedback and incorporate revisions.

As a Code Compliant member of ISEAL, ASC develops its standards in accordance with the ISEAL Code, a globally recognised framework that defines practices for effective and credible sustainability systems.

## Stakeholder targets



Producers operating in or near PAs and representative bodies



Academic and research institutions and governmental agencies



Civil society organisations, NGOs and community representatives



Retailers and brands



Suppliers, supply chain companies and feed manufacturers



CABs, auditors or other assurance providers



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# Project objectives, scope and governance



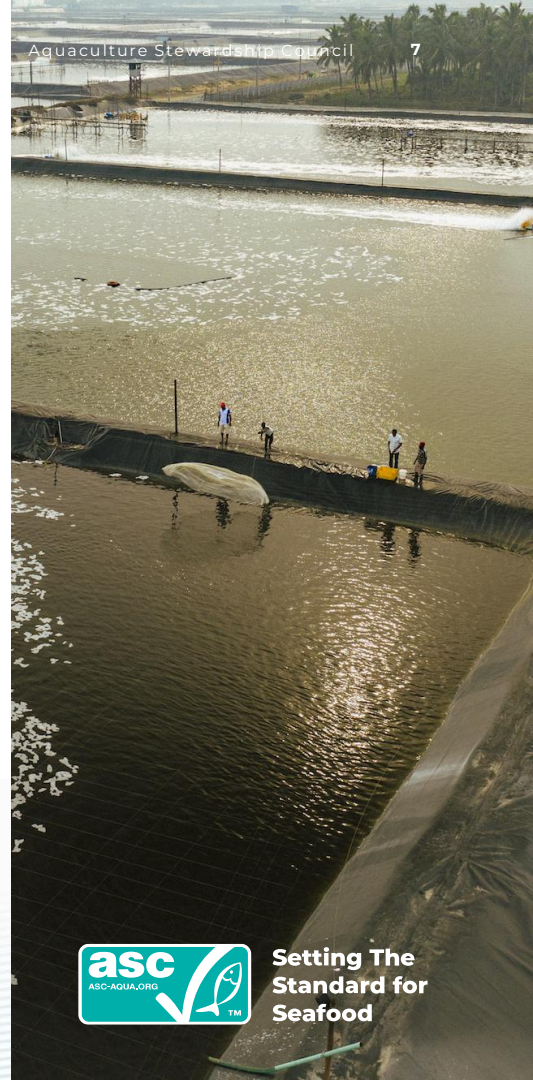
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## Aquaculture in Protected Areas: project justification

With both global aquaculture and PA systems expanding, there is an urgent need to clarify how aquaculture can operate responsibly within or near PAs and coexist with conservation objectives.

Aquaculture has become the world's largest source of aquatic animal production, surpassing capture fisheries in 2022. At the same time, the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework commits countries to protecting at least 30% of land and marine areas by 2030 as well as to effective management and governance.

While the IUCN protected area categories provide a globally recognised framework, inconsistent national adoption and categorisation complicate alignment with certification schemes such as the ASC Farm Standard, which generally restricts aquaculture in protected areas with limited, contested allowances in certain categories.



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# Aquaculture in Protected Areas: project justification



**Current ASC requirements reference IUCN categories, but they do not provide detailed guidance on how to interpret or assess compatibility**

This may create uncertainty for producers, auditors, and stakeholders.

This project will close that gap by creating a clear, auditable framework that supports both conservation and responsible aquaculture.



**The project will also review other relevant frameworks**

This includes IUCN guidelines, Natura 2000, Ramsar, and World Heritage protocols to identify opportunities for alignment and complementarity. This will ensure ASC standards remain consistent with global conservation practices and reinforce ASC's credibility in biodiversity governance.

# Aquaculture in Protected Areas: objectives

This project aims to clarify how aquaculture can operate within protected areas and to ensure that ASC certification requirements are aligned with globally recognised conservation frameworks

- The project seeks to produce a practical, audit-ready framework developed collaboratively with key stakeholders and technical experts. This framework will provide clear, evidence-based guidance for determining whether aquaculture activities are compatible with conservation objectives.
- The aim is to strengthen ASC's ability to support biodiversity conservation while enabling responsible aquaculture development.
- These revisions will reduce ambiguity, improve audit consistency, and enhance ASC's credibility with governments, conservation bodies, and market stakeholders.
- The project addresses environmental risks to biodiversity, habitats, and ecosystem processes in and around PAs. It also considers social impacts, such as safeguarding community and indigenous interests, and potential economic impacts, such as providing clarity for producers and investors
- The project will strengthen ASC's alignment with other recognised frameworks, including IUCN guidelines, Natura 2000, Ramsar, and World Heritage impact assessment protocols.



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## Aquaculture in Protected Areas: scope

This project will develop a globally relevant framework that explains how aquaculture can operate responsibly within or near a PA under ASC certification.

- The work includes reviewing existing ASC requirements and interpretation guidance, comparing them against IUCN PA categories and national legislation, and identifying gaps
- A key part of the project is the design of a risk-based compatibility assessment and methodology that helps determine aquaculture operations' compatibility with a PA. This assessment will use broad, practical criteria to provide farms with a clear understanding of compatibility and give auditors a simple way of confirming compliance.
- The outputs will include revised ASC requirements for the ASC Standards, interpretation guidance in the Interpretation Manual, and a jointly developed ASC–IUCN whitepaper. The framework will be tested in selected geographies to ensure it is practical and scalable.
- Stakeholder engagement will be central, with opportunities for targeted and stakeholder consultation in line with the ASC [Programme Development and Revision Procedure \(PDRP\)](#). The project will follow the ASC's governance requirements and [Metrics Methodology](#).



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# Aquaculture in Protected Areas: project risk assessment

The project will address ongoing risks while considering key project risks

IDENTIFIED RISK	MITIGATION
<p>Technical complexity of compatibility framework</p>	<p>This will be managed through a phased approach, pilot testing in representative settings, and iterative refinement based on results and stakeholder input.</p>
<p>Limited stakeholder engagement due to complexity and global scope</p>	<p>Early stakeholder mapping, targeted outreach, and varied engagement formats (supported by the TWC’s inclusive structure) will help maintain broad and balanced involvement.</p>
<p>Delays in project timelines due to stakeholder feedback requiring additional work and further consultation rounds</p>	<p>Milestones will align with governance calendars, reviews will be scheduled in advance, and virtual meetings will be used to support timely decision-making, with realistic timelines communicated early.</p>
<p>Insufficient funding or delayed donor commitments</p>	<p>Contingency planning, phased delivery options, and pursuing co-funding with conservation partners will help maintain progress.</p>



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## Aquaculture in Protected Areas: project risk assessment

The project will address ongoing risks while considering key project risks

IDENTIFIED RISK	MITIGATION
Misalignment between ASC standards and global conservation frameworks	An early standards review, supported by external expert validation and clear documentation, will ensure alignment and transparency.
Sustainability opportunity not fully realised	Integrating sustainability principles into assessment metrics, including restorative case studies, and highlighting benefits in communications will help ensure these opportunities are captured.
Impact on existing producers operating in Protected Areas	Any potential changes will consider practical farming contexts to ensure requirements remain clear, proportionate and workable. Producers will be engaged early to understand current practices and challenges. Producer representatives will also participate in consultative processes to help inform the development of any updates. Where adjustments are proposed, clear guidance, timelines and, where appropriate, phased implementation will support a smooth transition.

## Aquaculture in Protected Areas: project governance

The project governance will follow established ASC programme development procedure

- This project will follow the relevant processes defined in the [Programme Development and Revision Procedure](#) and [TAG Terms of Reference](#).
- ASC expert staff will develop proposed metrics and new indicator requirements for Protected Areas, informed by expert input and stakeholder engagement, culminating in a joint ASC–IUCN whitepaper.
- A TWG will serve as the core technical forum, developing proposals, validating decisions, and ensuring alignment with ASC governance requirements.
- The TAG provides governance oversight, reviewing and endorsing proposals, advising on technical issues, and guiding stakeholder consultation outcomes to the ASC Board. Additional TWGs may be formed if deeper technical expertise is needed, with a TWG expected to operate from project inception through finalisation.
- TAG decisions are preferably by consensus, with majority voting used if needed, and all governance and alignment considerations with IUCN and ASC Protected Area interpretations inform the Terms of Reference and structure.



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**Thank you**



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