

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Alliance for Water Stewardship

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) is building a water stewardship program, at the heart of which is an International Water Stewardship Standard. The Standard will be based on critical aspects of water stewardship such as managing flow, water quality, habitats and ensuring equitable governance. When operational, the AWS program will provide a powerful new voluntary incentive to water service providers and businesses to improve the way water is managed around the world. The following pages provide answers to some of the most commonly asked questions regarding the Standard development process and related aspects of AWS's work.

The questions have been categorized as follows:

- 1. Development of the International Water Stewardship Standard**
- 2. Third-party verification**
- 3. Compliance with the International Water Stewardship Standard**
- 4. Who will use the International Standard?**
- 5. Relationship between the AWS International Standard and other relevant standards and systems**

1. Development of the International Water Stewardship Standard

1.1. Will the AWS process also develop regional water stewardship standards?

AWS's aim is to develop a single International Water Stewardship Standard, thereby enabling a consistent and coherent approach to water stewardship actions worldwide. The multi-stakeholder process to develop this Standard is called the Water Roundtable which includes engagement of stakeholders at regional and international levels. Effective regional input is necessary to ensure the credibility of the Water Roundtable process, and one of the most important elements in building the Standard. Regional water stewardship standards are under development in Australia and Europe. These, and any other regional standards that may emerge, will need to be consistent with the International Standard to be recognized by AWS.

1.2. Will the AWS process develop standards by sectors or by actors?

Although the intention is to produce a single International Standard, supplementary guidance will be developed to ensure the Standard can be widely accessed and used. This supplementary material may be for specific sectors or regions. We will be able to define the range and comprehensiveness of this material once the draft International Standard has been published and tested in sufficient sectors and settings.

1.3. How is AWS ensuring transparency in the Water Roundtable process?

The publicly-vetted roadmap for the development of AWS's Standard was published in January of 2011 (Water Roundtable Process) and formally approved in April of 2011 (and is available on the AWS website [add link]). Corporations, like any other stakeholders, are free to participate in the development of the Standard. Furthermore, several corporations, as well as foundations, government agencies, and non-profits have provided financial support to help to establish the Standard. The governance (decision-making) of the Standard is completely independent of any financial contributions, and is comprised of 15 volunteer stakeholders known as the International Standard Development Committee (names and affiliations are published on the website). Should you have further requests for additional information/transparency, we would encourage you to contact us and we will endeavor to shed light upon any questions.

1.4. Is it an option to verify a watershed?

This is under discussion with the International Standard Development Committee (ISDC) at present and answers will be provided in the coming months.

1.5. How will the AWS Standard deal with situations in which the national legislation is deemed insufficient to ensure responsible water stewardship?



We anticipate that the Standard will involve an assessment of local and national laws. In cases where laws are absent or deemed inadequate to ensure responsible water stewardship, the AWS Standard will provide a minimum level. Note: in all cases the AWS Standard will always require compliance with national laws and must not contravene any domestic legal requirements.

1.6. How will the Standard and verification system deal with the different ways in which water utilities are organized in different countries?

The intention is to create a single, International Water Stewardship Standard, supplemented with sectoral (including water service providers) and/or regional guidance (and possibly some additional requirements in the Standard).

2. Third-party verification

2.1. Who will verify compliance against the International Standard?

As an associate member of the International Social and Ethical Accreditation and Labeling Alliance (ISEAL), AWS is committed to a credible, accredited third-party verification system. Neither AWS nor any AWS Board organizations will be directly involved in verifying compliance against the AWS International Standard. While the exact nature of the verification system is still to be determined, it is likely that AWS will use a model which employs accredited, third-party certification bodies managed by one or more suitably experienced accreditation body/bodies.

2.2. How will this verification provide added value?

Third-party verification is a credible way in which organizations can be identified as responsible water stewards. Depending on the nature of the organization, this recognition will be important for other actors in the supply chain, investors, civil society organizations and potentially watershed or environmental authorities. Third-party verification also provides evidence to local communities about an operators water use (often critical in the face of threats). We expect that our third-party verification system will be sought out by those organizations who want to be identified as leaders in water stewardship.

3. Compliance with the International Water Stewardship Standard

3.1. How is AWS going to ensure the credibility of claims made against the Standard, especially those made by multinational corporations?

The AWS Standard is designed to promote stewardship actions at the facility and watershed levels. Watershed-based actions are, by nature, collective actions. Therefore, even if a user of



the Standard is a multinational corporation, compliance will require that entity to reach out to other stakeholders in the given watershed. In other words, using the Standard will require the inclusion of different actors from various sectors. Furthermore, since the intention is to include a series of recognition levels within the Standard, greater external engagement will likely align with higher levels of recognition.

The AWS Standard will require measurement and disclosure of both process and performance indicators via a third party. Accordingly, AWS believes that this Standard will provide scientifically-based, verifiable evidence behind claims of actions and impacts and thus prevent false claims from being made.

Participation by civil society organizations (CSOs) from throughout the world during the drafting of the Standard is also critical to ensure the credibility of the Standard as it is built and avoid the challenges noted.

3.2. What costs will be associated with third-party verification?

Ultimately, the decision to engage in any verification process will be taken by individual organizations, or potentially groups of organizations, based on the anticipated benefits of doing so. It is the goal of AWS that the Standard and water stewardship program are as broadly accessible as possible, and to work with organizations interested in engaging in third-party verification to help them identify which benefits are likely to be realized. The costs associated with Standard compliance, and third-party verification, may vary by water user depending on, amongst others, their location and the nature of their water use. One of the aims of test piloting the International Standard will be to determine the costs of compliance with the Standard in a variety of scenarios.

4. Who will use the International Standard?

4.1. Is this process addressed only to multinational corporations?

This process is open to all entities – civil society, public sector, and corporations (both large and SMEs). The Standard development process has been designed to be as inclusive as is practical, with the members of the International Standard Development Committee being equally distributed between three sectors: civil society, public sector and business and water service providers. Similarly, the ongoing stakeholder engagement processes are designed to be balanced and inclusive to ensure that the views and concerns of all sectors are incorporated into the Standard to the best of our ability.

4.2. What about the role and participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)s and the public sector?

AWS recognizes that the both the Standard and the wider water stewardship program cannot achieve their potential impacts without being relevant for public sector agencies, smaller businesses, smallholder farmers etc. To be successful, our water stewardship program needs to provide benefits for all sectors, including public sector agencies, smaller businesses, smallholder farmers, etc. Each of those sectors also needs to be able to see that their interests are being served. Our water stewardship program will provide access to the information needed to help local stakeholders make informed decisions on the management of their watershed. While our program is still under development, and we cannot yet say exactly what those tools and information will look like, AWS’s commitment to be relevant for all sectors is clear.

4.3. What about the participation of the agricultural sector?

The agricultural sector is actively participating in the development of the Standard and there is an expectation that they will be increasingly engaged as time goes on. The thinking at this time is that there will be a single, International Standard with sector-specific guidance (and possibly some additions to the requirements of the Standard).

5. Relationship between the AWS International Standard and other relevant standards and systems

5.1. How is AWS working with the Water Footprint Network?

AWS is a sponsoring partner of the Water Footprint Network (WFN). Additionally, we have a memorandum of understanding with WFN which outlines our intention to work closely with each other as we develop our respective programs. As part of this, we are currently exploring how WFN approaches could be integrated into the AWS Standard. We expect that the four major steps of the WFN methodology (scope, accounting, basin sustainability, and response) will be explicitly addressed in the AWS Standard.

5.2. What is the relationship between AWS and ISO processes?

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is a standard setting body with numerous industry- or industrial sector-specific standards. Water stewardship goes beyond any single industry or industrial sector, and focuses on broader social and environmental concerns. In a similar way to WFN (mentioned above) we are exploring the most suitable ways in which to incorporate aspects of ISO processes into the AWS Standard. With this in mind, we expect that

AWS's International Water Stewardship Standard will be compatible with some ISO standards, such as 14001, but will not have any formal affiliation with ISO.

5.3. What is the relation between AWS and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)?

AWS has no formal relationship with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), however we anticipate that the reporting component of AWS will align with GRI indicators to the extent possible. In other words, by passing AWS's third-party verification, the given entity will have completed the work necessary to report on a number of GRI indicators.

5.4. How can the AWS process help to establish national laws on water stewardship?

The AWS process is designed to provide a voluntary approach to water stewardship that supports regulatory approaches and watershed governance capacity. It is not designed to establish national laws on water stewardship. However, AWS is open to collaborate with governments at all the levels, recognizing their place as key stakeholders regarding the legal use and management of water resources.

5.5. How will the AWS Standard relate to other standards on environment or water?

As we develop our International Standard we will be continuing discussions with other standard-holding organizations to determine how best to interact and complement one another. AWS is committed to working with, and adding value to, other standards initiatives. AWS is an associate member of the ISEAL Alliance better able to relate to many other standards that touch upon the environment and water.

5.6. How will AWS relate to the various water disclosure measures that are available?

AWS will not become a central repository of water disclosure measures, but it will draw upon various tools, methods, metrics and efforts that are related to water stewardship, including those related to water disclosure. AWS will be consistent with the Carbon Disclosure Project's water disclosure measures, as well as some GRI metrics. In that sense, our work will help to bring these efforts together.