

AWS and Regional Water Stewardship Standards

On November 24th, AWS Board organization, the European Water Partnership, will launch the European Water Stewardship (EWS) system. EWS will be comprised of a regional European Water Stewardship Standard and related documents (glossary and guidelines), an inspection and certification scheme, and a communications framework. EWS has been developed through a multi-stakeholder engagement process, including pilot tests of the European standard in several locations and different business sectors.

The success of the European Water Partnership (EWP) in developing EWS is testament to the value of bringing stakeholders together to find shared responses to shared water problems. EWP has done an exemplary job in gaining that cross-sector buy-in to the concept of water stewardship, and communicating effectively on the subject to a wide and diverse audience.

Water Stewardship Australia (WSA), one of the founding Board members of AWS, has also adopted a multi-stakeholder approach in developing a draft standard for Australia. This process has included pilot testing of the draft Australian standard and is moving ahead with the support and active involvement of key stakeholders.

As AWS continues to develop its International Water Stewardship Standard, and the wider water stewardship program needed to ensure uptake and effective management of the International Standard, and adoption of stewardship actions, the success of the regional work in Europe and Australia is a source of great encouragement. Firstly, it shows that multi-stakeholder processes around water stewardship are viable approaches. Secondly, it demonstrates that companies are interested in adopting stewardship approaches, including the use of standards and verification schemes, to address their water-related business risks. Thirdly, both the European and Australian processes provide many lessons from which AWS can draw as we move forward with developing the International Standard.

The details of how the European and Australian processes will interact with the AWS international process will become clearer throughout 2012. Of particular importance in gaining this understanding will be the finalization of the draft International Standard (targeted for release in early 2012) and testing this draft Standard in a variety of settings and sectors. In the meantime, we look forward to working closely with our Board Organizations EWP and WSA, and their respective partners in Europe and Australia, to develop our International Standard and contribute to the collective international effort to address the world's most pressing water challenges.