

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) is building a water stewardship program, at the heart of which is an International Water Stewardship Standard. When operational, the AWS program will provide a powerful new voluntary incentive 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 organization of AWS, the Standard development process and related aspects of AWS’s work.

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1. The organization of the Alliance for Water Stewardship

1.1. What is the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS)?

AWS is a registered non-profit dedicated to promoting responsible use of freshwater that is socially and economically beneficial as well as environmentally sustainable.

1.2. What does AWS do?

The Alliance for Water Stewardship Inc. (AWS) is building a global water stewardship system to be launched in 2013 to promote and reward sustainable use of water by major water users. The system will comprise globally consistent principles (and criteria) for responsible water use set out in an International Water Stewardship Standard; a multi-stakeholder governance structure to eventually own the stewardship Standard and system, a credible verification process for performance against the standard, and; a recognised international brand that drives participation and rewards participants in the system.

The Standard is being developed through the multi-stakeholder global Water Roundtable process.

1.3. Who is part of the Alliance?

AWS has ten Board Organizations, each of which delegates one director to sit on the AWS Board. Our Board Organizations are

- Carbon Disclosure Project
- CEO Water Mandate
- European Water Partnership
- International Water Management Institute
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Pacific Institute
- Water Environment Federation
- Water Stewardship Australia
- Water Witness International
- WWF

In Latin America and the Caribbean and North America we have dedicated Regional Initiatives. Australian and European stakeholders are represented through our Board Organizations, Water Stewardship Australia and the European Water Partnership, while in other regions we work with our networks of partners, including Board Organizations, to promote AWS and water stewardship.

With the exception of our Executive Director, AWS staff are currently “seconded” from Board organizations (The Nature Conservancy and WWF). As we build our organization AWS will gain operational independence from its Board Organizations.

1.4. How can I become a member of the Alliance?

As an organization with global reach, AWS’s Board have recognized the need to build an organizational model that encourages participation from all regions and sectors. AWS is committed to building an international, multi-stakeholder, membership-based organization. The details of this model, including the business model and the governance model, are currently under development and the membership structure has not yet been defined. AWS is committed to working with stakeholders internationally to achieve a credible and effective organizational model.

2. Objective of the International Water Stewardship Standard

2.1. What is the objective of the International Water Stewardship Standard?

The Standard’s overall objective is to minimize the negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts of social, environmental and economic water use.

2.2. How will the Standard achieve this objective?

Stakeholder engagement and actions implemented around the Standard’s principles – water governance, water balance, water quality and Important Water Areas – are expected to lead to positive outcomes in terms of a) more equitable governance, b) sustainable water flow regimes, c) good water quality, and, d) protected, managed and restored areas. Social (e.g. culture- or health-related), environmental (e.g. species- or habitat-related) and economic (e.g. financial- or livelihood-related) impacts relating to these outcomes will benefit stakeholders from different sectors.

3. Development of the International Water Stewardship Standard

3.1. How is the AWS Standard being developed

Beginning in July 2010, AWS launched the global Water Roundtable- the name of the process that will develop the International Water Stewardship Standard. Based upon the ISEAL Alliance’s Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards, the Water Roundtable will seek out a multi-stakeholder consensus through meetings and field-tests held throughout the world.

The Standard is the work of the International Standard Development Committee (ISDC). The ISDC is made up of 15 individual stakeholders chosen from eight defined regions (covering the whole world) and three defined stakeholder groups: public sector agencies, business and water service providers, and civil society organizations. Members of the ISDC together with their affiliations can be seen on the [AWS website](#).

3.2. What inputs does the ISDC use to inform its decision making?

During the development of the first draft Standard, the ISDC used inputs from AWS Regional Initiatives in Australia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and North America. Specifically, Australian and European regional standards; outcomes of the Latin American regional process, summarized in [this report from the 2nd Latin American Regional Forum](#); stakeholder meetings which were timed to coincide with ISDC meetings, including the first [AWS North American public meeting](#); and previous work undertaken, including the [initial Water Roundtable Launch report](#) and a [study on the use of water stewardship standards in Africa](#), were all considered by the ISDC in producing the first draft Standard.

As the process moves forward, public consultation rounds will be held for each draft Standard, regional and international outreach events will be held, and the draft Standard will be tested in different sectors and settings. These will all provide inputs for the ISDC as they continue to refine the Standard. Stakeholders interested in providing feedback on the draft Standard should regularly check the AWS website where information on how and when to participate will be posted.

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

One of the drivers for the creation of AWS was the work being undertaken in Australia and Europe to develop regional water stewardship standards, and recognition of the need for a consistent international approach to water stewardship. AWS's aim is to develop a single International Water Stewardship Standard, thereby providing that consistent and coherent approach to water stewardship actions worldwide. Regional standard development processes have continued in both Australia and Europe and AWS Regional Initiatives have been established in Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. These, together with engagement with stakeholders in other regions are helping to inform the development of AWS International Water Stewardship Standard. The AWS process is not designed to develop regional standards; although it may be determined that detailed region-specific implementation guidance is needed.

3.4. How will the AWS Standard relate to existing or future regional standards?

The European Water Stewardship standard was launched in November 2011 while the process to develop an Australian water stewardship standard is also continuing. The need for stewardship actions to be locally relevant and applicable is clear, and AWS is working with stakeholders to understand better how the AWS Standard will relate to and interact with regional-specific standards. The consultation and testing phase of the Water Roundtable (the process to develop the AWS Standard) will provide critical inputs into this discussion.

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

Like regional-specificity, AWS recognizes that different sectors use water in very different ways. The International Standard Development Committee (ISDC) recognizes the need for sector-specific input into the development of the Standard. There is an expectation that, in addition to the AWS Standard, there will be a need for supplementary guidance for different sectors. Like the regional specificity mentioned above, the consultation and testing of the draft Standard will inform the ISDC on the best way to address sectoral needs in the Standard and how the AWS Standard will relate to and interact with sector-specific standards.

3.6. 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](#)). All stakeholders are free to participate in the development of the Standard. Several corporations, foundations, government agencies, and non-profits have provided financial support to help to develop the AWS Standard. The International Standard Development Committee (ISDC) is completely independent of any financial contributions, and is comprised of 15 volunteer stakeholders. The names and affiliations of ISDC members can be seen [here](#).

3.7. How will civil society and academia participate in the process?

The members of the ISDC have been selected based on regional and sectoral affiliation. The three sectors defined are Public Sector Agencies, Business and Water Service Providers, and Civil Society. Members of the ISDC together with their affiliations can be seen on the [AWS website](#). During the consultation and testing phases there will be targeted outreach to stakeholder groups, including civil society.

3.8. 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.

3.9. 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 appropriate guidance in how the Standard can be applied in different sectors and regions. The details of what guidance is required will be decided by the ISDC over the course of the Standard development process.

4. Consultation and testing procedures

4.1. Why will consultation and testing be performed?

For the ISDC to fulfil its mandate to produce a Standard that will be applicable in all sectors and regions, it is important they hear a broad range of perspectives, both from potential users of the Standard and those who will be affected by its use. Consultation and testing will enable different voices to be heard and key issues to be highlighted, thus guiding the ISDC when revising the draft Standard. Testing the draft Standard enables the ISDC to understand how the draft Standard performs under realistic conditions.

4.2. How will AWS conduct consultation and testing?

AWS will conduct consultation and testing in a series of “phases”, each of which will correspond to a draft version of the AWS Standard, i.e. Phase I will correspond to first draft, Phase II to second draft and so on.

Stakeholders around the world can participate using one or more of the following channels. Note that not all of these channels will be available in each consultation phase (see below).

- Using the online feedback facility on AWS’s website
- Participating in regional or international meetings (details will be published on the AWS website)
- Participating in webinars
- Testing the draft Standard at a single facility
- Participating in in-depth field tests involving multiple stakeholders

4.3. What will happen with feedback?

The information gathered in each consultation phase will be kept consistent in terms of the questions being asked, enabling stakeholder feedback to be organized according to categories. This feedback will be reviewed by the ISDC, considered and responded to by category. While specific comments will not be individually responded to, the ISDC will endeavour to consider all feedback and validate their decisions for inclusion or rejection of stakeholder input. This rationale will be publicly posted on the AWS website after each phase along with the release of the subsequent draft.

For more information on consultation and testing procedures please see [AWS's website](#).

5. Third-party verification

5.1. Who will verify compliance against the AWS Standard?

As an associate member of the International Social and Environmental 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 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.

5.2. 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.

5.3. Is it an option to verify a watershed?

In the first draft Standard, the International Standard Development Committee (ISDC) has recommended that verification be performed at a site level.

6. Compliance with the International Water Stewardship Standard

6.1. 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 from throughout the world during the drafting of the Standard is also critical to ensure the credibility of the Standard.

6.2. 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. However, the AWS Standard is designed to address some of the major water challenges and achieve positive impacts at a watershed-level, so compliance with the AWS Standard will not be achieved by continuing with “business as usual”. There will be costs associated with actions to ensure compliance, but the intention is that there will be significant benefits as well.

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 field trials of the AWS Standard will be to determine the costs of compliance with the Standard in a variety of scenarios.

6.3. Will there be a product label to recognize compliance?

Water stewardship presents certain challenges related to product labeling that are less prominent in other social and environmental standards. One of the main issues to be resolved is whether verifying a site, e.g. a factory or farm, rather than an enterprise as a whole, provides a feasible basis for product labeling as, in many cases, the site would not be producing the final, consumer product. The feasibility of a product label will be determined throughout the consultation and testing phases of the Standard.

7. Who will use the AWS Standard?

7.1. 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 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.

In its deliberations, the ISDC has identified both “Implementers” (those implementing or putting into practice the AWS Standard at the site and within the watershed) and “Promoters” (those promoting or encouraging the uptake of the Standard within their sphere of influence, for example river basin organizations or retailers vis-à-vis their supply chains) of the Standard. While verification would be open only to Implementers, i.e. those who have their performance verified, the role of Promoters is equally important for the Standard to achieve its objectives.

7.2. What about the role and participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the public sector?

AWS recognizes that both the Standard and the wider water stewardship program cannot achieve their potential impacts without being accessible, relevant and providing benefits for 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. While both the Standard and the wider water stewardship program are still evolving, AWS’s recognition of the importance of public sector and SME to achieving watershed-level impacts, and our commitment to establish a system that is meaningful for these sectors, is clear.



7.3. How can water utilities and service providers use the Standard, particularly in urban areas?

Many cities are experiencing profound challenges as the demand for freshwater, and the ability of service providers to meet that demand, are stretched. Water utilities and water service providers, both in urban and non-urban settings, have shown a strong interest since the formation of AWS and been identified as users of the AWS Standard.

The complexities of urban governance present many challenges in developing the AWS Standard. Individual cities have different agendas and motivations for adopting policy choices, and that these policy choices are linked to their own unique historical, economic, geographic, political and demographic profiles. The multi-stakeholder-based approach of stewardship could be well suited to addressing water management challenges in urban areas and the consultation and testing phases will help us to identify how the Standard could be adopted by utilities and applied in urban areas. Targeted outreach will inform this and we expect to conduct field trials involving utilities and urban-based water users.

7.4. 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, AWS Standard with sector-specific guidance (and possibly some additions to the requirements of the Standard).

8. Relationship between the AWS Standard and other standards and systems

8.1. 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. The ISDC has recommended that the first draft Standard does not explicitly reference use of any specific measurement or accounting tool, rather leaves it open to the entity to select the most appropriate tool for its circumstances. We are committed to working with the Water Footprint network as our respective organizations evolve, and expect that the four major steps of the WFN methodology (scope, accounting, basin sustainability, and response) will be widely used by entities aiming to have their performance verified against the AWS Standard.

8.2. 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.



As with WFN (mentioned above), use of ISO standards is not a requirement of the AWS draft Standard, but we expect ISO standards will be widely used by entities aiming to have their performance verified against the AWS Standard.

8.3. 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.

8.4. 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.

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

As we develop the AWS Standard we will be continuing discussions with other standard-setting organizations to determine how best to interact and complement one another. AWS is committed to working with other standards initiatives with the aim of finding points of mutual recognition. AWS is an associate member of the ISEAL Alliance.

8.6. 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. We expect the final AWS International Water Stewardship Standard 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.

For more information, visit our website at www.allianceforwaterstewardship.org

