

Alliance for Water Stewardship Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) operates a water stewardship system, at the heart of which is the AWS International Water Stewardship Standard (AWS Standard). The interconnected AWS system provides users with a set of powerful voluntary incentives to improve the way water is stewarded around the world. The following pages provide answers to some of the most commonly asked questions regarding the organization of AWS, the AWS Standard and related aspects of AWS’s work.

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GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ALLIANCE FOR WATER STEWARDSHIP

What is the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS)?

The Alliance for Water Stewardship Inc. (AWS) is a registered non-profit dedicated to promoting water stewardship. It is membership-based, and operates three primary programs all focused on a deep, applied knowledge of water stewardship. .

What does AWS do?

AWS operates a global water stewardship system, launched in 2014 to promote and reward sustainable use of water by users. At the heart of the system lies an international water stewardship standard which outlines globally consistent criteria for responsible water use. The AWS Standard was established, and continues to be maintained through a multi-stakeholder governance structure. Supporting the AWS Standard lies a credible verification system that enables evaluation of conformance against the Standard. Lastly, AWS, in an effort to grow the global capacity of water stewardship, operates a water stewardship training program.

Who are the members of the Alliance for Water Stewardship?

In 2009, AWS began with ten organizations, who helped steward the organization through its formative stages. In 2014, AWS was opened to general membership and began with a number of founding partners. AWS now includes: AWS Founding Partners are American Standard, CDP, Centre for Responsible Business, Centro del Agua para America Latina y el Caribe, Ecolab, European Water Partnership, Fundacion Chile, Fundacion FEMSA, Future500, General Mills, The Gold Standard Foundation, Hindustan Unilever Foundation, Inghams Enterprises, Marks & Spencer, Murray Darling Basin Authority, Nestle, Pacific Institute, Sealed Air, United Nations Environment Programme, the UN



Global Compact's CEO Water Mandate, The Nature Conservancy, The Water Council, Veolia, Water Environment Foundation, Water Footprint Network, Water Stewardship Australia, Water Witness International, WaterAid and WWF.

How can I become a member of the Alliance?

Any organization interested in becoming a member of the AWS may apply to the AWS governance body. All applicants must be dedicated to furthering the cause of the AWS and dedicated to advancing the cause of water stewardship wherever they operate. The existing membership body will have executive decision over the acceptance of new members.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AWS INTERNATIONAL WATER STEWARDSHIP STANDARD

What is the objective of the International Water Stewardship Standard?

The Standard's overall objective is to encourage sites to pursue responsible water stewardship. It does this by outlining actions that help sites address their shared water challenges and mitigate their water risks. The end result is the furthering of AWS's mission including the minimization of negative impacts and the maximization of the positive impacts of social, environmental and economic water use.

Why would I want to use the AWS Standard?

The AWS Standard is intended to help users implement responsible water stewardship that can help to **mitigate against your water risks, address your shared water challenges, improve your efficiency and ultimately strengthen your reputation** of a user through verified claims. Implementers of the AWS Standard may gain access to markets, address investor concerns, and help to drive innovation and new business opportunities. Promoters of the AWS Standard may be able to **drive change in water resource management** and thereby address their water-related concerns.

What is the difference between an implementer and a promoter of the AWS Standard?

An **implementer is a specific site**, facility, farm or geographically-bounded operation that is putting the AWS Standard into practice. A **promoter is not directly implementing** the standard, but rather encouraging others to implement and "using" the standard to advance their interests. For example, a farm that was using water may choose to be an implementer to address their shared water challenges, while the retailer that sources from that farm (or investors in the retail company), may be promoters to address their supply chain water risks.

Who is the target audience for the AWS Standard?

The AWS Standard may be *implemented* by a water user, but will likely prove to be more helpful for larger water users as they will see bigger benefits, as will those operating in water stressed environments. This includes **implementation by farmers, factories, manufacturing facilities, water service providers / utilities, and any other individual sites that withdraw or consume large volumes of**

water in catchments facing challenges related to water availability or water quality. The Standard may be implemented by smaller sites and entities, but may require such sites to work together and/or gain assistance to complete all of the requirements of the Standard. Furthermore, the AWS Standard is intended to be more broadly ***‘used’ (via promotion, as a framework, to inform public policy, etc.) by others affected by water use (e.g., civil society, public sector, purchasing companies with supply chain water risk concerns, investors concerned about water risk, etc.)***.

How can the AWS Standard be used?

The AWS Standard can be used:

- broadly used as a ***framework*** to guide water stewardship and link water initiatives/tools
- as a ***“how to” guide*** for responsible water stewardship
- as the ***basis for conformance under AWS verification*** and making AWS-related claims.

How much will the AWS Standard cost to use?

The AWS Standard is ***free to download and use***. Implementation costs will vary with the site and context.

How will verification of the AWS Standard work?

The AWS verification system is ***currently developed as an advanced draft which will further solicit input from AWS members and undergo field testing*** before it is finalized. As such, the details of how verification will work are still to be fully determined, but will, at least, involve independent verification in some form.

I’m already working with another standard and certification system, so why do I need to implement the AWS Standard?

Many existing standards have some degree of water consideration built into them already. However, AWS has found that the manner in which they handle water is typically very limited in scope and internally-focused. Since water is a shared resource, addressing internal water efficiency and water quality is insufficient to adequately address water related challenges and risks. Accordingly, by implementing both a sector-standard and the AWS Standard, you can be sure to address both the sectoral issues as well as the shared water issues.

Will the AWS Standard have an ecolabel associated with it and who will be its target audience?

While the verification system is still under development, it is likely that AWS will offer a logo of some kind. It is likely that the target audience will be businesses, similar to a standard such as ISO 14001, however AWS has not ruled out the possibility of creating a consumer facing ecolabel.

How was the AWS Standard developed?



In July 2010, AWS launched the Global Water Roundtable- the process that developed the AWS International Water Stewardship Standard. Based upon the ISEAL Alliance's Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards, the Water Roundtable sought out a multi-stakeholder consensus through meetings and field-tests held throughout the world.

The content of the AWS Standard was decided upon by the International Standard Development Committee (ISDC). This multi-sectoral, multi-regional stakeholder group was open to applicants and selected by the AWS to represent the diversity of stakeholder interests from around the world. The ISDC, which disbanded with the launch of the AWS Standard, was made up of 15 individual stakeholders from eight defined regions (covering the whole world) and three defined groups: public sector agencies, business and water service providers, and civil society organizations. These members are listed on the cover of the AWS Standard (version 1.0)

What inputs did the ISDC use to inform its decision making?

During the development of the AWS Standard, the ISDC used inputs from early AWS regional efforts in Australia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and North America. Specifically, it drew upon the draft Australian and European regional standards; stakeholder inputs gathered from events held in Latin America and North America; 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.

The AWS Standard solicited two rounds of public input (90 days and 270 days respectively) through an online platform, events, webinars, newsletters, and face-to-face conversations which resulted in thousands of comments from hundreds of stakeholders. In addition, the Beta AWS Standard (also known as the second draft), was field tested at 13 different sites in five regions and eight sectors allowing it to incorporate on-the-ground experience. All of the above information was made fully available to the ISDC and was also synthesized by the AWS Secretariat for the ISDC to incorporate into their decision making.

Will AWS also develop regional water stewardship standards?

No. At this time, the intention is to maintain a single international Standard with the exception of Europe, where the European Water Stewardship system will operate as a regional equivalent. AWS has always recognized that water issues vary not only by region by local catchment and accordingly, will expand the AWS Standard's guidance (Appendix B) through time with member and stakeholder input. There is no timeline to establish regional guidance.

Will AWS also develop sectoral water stewardship standards?

No. Like regional-specificity, AWS recognizes that different sectors use water in very different ways. There is an expectation that, in addition to the AWS Standard's Guidance (Appendix B), there will be a need for supplementary guidance for different sectors. Like the regional guidance mentioned above, there is no current timeline to establish sectoral guidance.

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 implementers of the AWS Standard.

The complexities of urban governance present many challenges in developing the International 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 is well suited to addressing water management challenges in urban areas and the consultation and testing phases helped us to identify how the Standard could be adopted by utilities and applied in urban areas.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AWS VERIFICATION SYSTEM

Can I my site be verified to the AWS Standard?

No – not yet. AWS has an advanced draft verification system completed but wishes to wait for further member input and field testing using the AWS Standard (version 1.0) before finalizing. Accordingly, you'll need to wait a few more months as the AWS hopes to have a system finalized and operating by the end of 2014.

Will AWS employ first party verification, third-party verification or both?

At this time, AWS has not decided on the exact nature of verification, but it is likely that an approved/accredited third-party system will play some role with Certification Approval Bodies (CABs) helping to inform the shape of the system. No matter what, as an associate member of the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance (ISEAL), AWS is committed to a credible verification system.

What will be the unit of verification?

Again, while this is still to be formally decided, it is likely that the verification system will focus on the site level or a group of sites (under certain circumstances). At this time, AWS is not exploring verification of catchments, but has not entirely ruled it out.

How do the performance levels in the AWS Standard relate to the verification system?

The AWS Standard has been built to recognize (and incentivize) higher levels of performance. It does this through aggregation of points secured from completing advanced level criteria. Accordingly, once the verification system is complete claims will vary depending on the performance of the site against the various core and advanced criteria.

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 site and catchment levels. Catchment-based actions are, by nature, collective actions. Therefore, even if an implementer of the Standard is a multinational corporation, compliance will require their site to reach out to other stakeholders in that catchment. In other words, using the Standard will require the inclusion of different actors from various sectors at the local level. Furthermore, since the Standard also requires measurement and disclosure of both process and performance information to stakeholders. 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 was also critical in ensuring the credibility of the AWS Standard (version 1.0).

How much will verification cost?

To be determined. It is the goal of AWS that the Standard and verification system are as broadly accessible as possible.

The costs associated with verification will likely vary from site to site and location to location. During testing of the verification system in 2014, AWS hopes to be able to generate more accurate cost information for those interested.

Will there be a product label to recognize AWS compliance?

To be determined. Water stewardship presents certain challenges related to product labelling 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 labelling 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.

How is AWS enabling the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the public sector?

AWS recognizes that both the Standard and the verification system 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. AWS is taking several steps to make sure that the AWS Standard and verification system are accessible to all audiences. First, the AWS Standard was built with all users in mind and was tested in the field with a range of users, including small holder farmers and public sector utilities. Second, AWS will be employing a training program on water stewardship which will help to build awareness, understanding and capacity for implementing water stewardship. Where possible, AWS will seek to provide such courses to groups who cannot afford them. Third, AWS will likely offer group verification within its verification system, thereby allowing smallholders to work together to address the costs of verification. AWS is committed to taking further efforts, in so far as possible, to continually improve the accessibility and affordability of its water stewardship system.



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AWS STANDARD AND OTHER STANDARDS AND SYSTEMS

How is AWS working with the Water Footprint Network?

AWS is a sponsoring partner of the Water Footprint Network (WFN) and WFN is a founding partner of AWS. 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 AWS Standard does not explicitly reference use of **any** specific water measurement or accounting tool, rather leaves it open to the entity to select the most appropriate tool for its circumstances. However, the guidance within the AWS Standard does reference potential approaches, including those offered by WFN. 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.

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. Furthermore, use of select ISO standards such as ISO 14001 does gain recognition within the AWS Standard.

Will AWS offer equivalency with other standards?

AWS does currently offer equivalency with the European Water Stewardship system and is committed to exploring opportunities for equivalency with other standard systems, especially those which heavily impact water resources, such as food systems. We expect this to be an area that is developed throughout the coming years.



What is the relation between AWS and CDP?

CDP is a Founding Partner of AWS and the communication and disclosure criteria of the AWS Standard do partially align with CDP Water Questionnaire requirements. This alignment has been outlined in the AWS Standard's guidance (Appendix C) and informs how completion of CDP or AWS helps with the other initiative. CDP and AWS are not competitive efforts and in fact complement one another.

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

AWS has no formal relationship with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), however the communication and disclosure criteria of the AWS Standard do partially align with GRI indicators. This alignment has been outlined in the AWS Standard's guidance (Appendix C) and informs how completion of GRI or AWS helps with the other initiative. GRI and AWS are not competitive efforts and also complement one another.

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