



**Alliance for Water Stewardship**

**Assurance System Report**

**August 2016**

[www.allianceforwaterstewardship.org](http://www.allianceforwaterstewardship.org)

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## Introduction to the AWS Verification Program

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) is a global, non-profit organization dedicated to advancing water stewardship around the world. As part of this mission, AWS developed The AWS International Water Stewardship Standard. The AWS Standard was the result of an international, four-year, ISEAL compliant, multi-stakeholder process which responded to the growing need for evidence of robust water risk and impact mitigation efforts. It is built around the notion of implementing water stewardship at the site level in a way that understands and engages with the broader catchment to work with other water stakeholders to address shared water-related challenges and opportunities. AWS has developed a verification system for implementing the AWS Standard which is consistent with the ISEAL Assurance Code. A central feature of the AWS Standard System is the role of independent certification by third-party Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs).

AWS will implement the AWS Standard System in two phases: an initial phase (Phase 1: estimated 2015-2016) will be used to work out any kinks and ensure capacity is sufficient to meet system needs. For the second phase (Phase 2: 2017+), AWS will update the AWS Standard System and add improved functionality (e.g. risk aspects, site pairing, etc.) pending AWS member input. Throughout Phase 1, AWS will itself run the accreditation program. This time will be used to gain experience with the system and examine the potential of transferring the accreditation function to an independent accreditation body. The AWS Standard is intended to be complementary to existing systems such as ISO 14001. And AWS's approach – utilizing the competencies of independent third-party entities to assess compliance with the AWS Standard - draws heavily on existing international norms which apply to conformity assessment bodies (e.g. ISO 17065).

Information on the AWS Verification Program is available at <http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/verification.html>.

For any additional questions, please contact Richard Robertson, AWS Technical Manager, by emailing [richard@allianceforwaterstewardship.org](mailto:richard@allianceforwaterstewardship.org).

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### AWS Standard System

AWS is the standards system owner and keeper of The AWS International Water Stewardship Standard (“the AWS Standard”). As such, AWS is responsible for implementation of the AWS Standard, including standard setting, capacity building, assurance, labelling and monitoring. To achieve these goals, AWS has structured its standards system into three programs: verification program, training & capacity-building program, and membership program. These three programs are complementary. They serve to reinforce one another to ensure that the AWS Standard System provides a credible and robust implementation of the AWS Standard.

## AWS Standard Framework

The AWS Standard System is rooted in four normative documents which, together, comprise the AWS ‘Standard Framework’. The scope and interrelationship of these normative documents is shown in Table A.

Table A

Normative Document	Purpose	Program	Primary Target Audience
AWS Standard	Sets the Standard	AWS Verification Program	Implementers CABs
AWS Self-Verification Requirements	Sets the process for self-verification	AWS Verification Program	Implementers
AWS Certification Requirements	Sets the process for certification	AWS Verification Program	CABs
AWS Interim Accreditation Requirements	Sets the criteria and the process for accreditation	AWS Interim Accreditation Program AWS Verification Program & AWS Training & Capacity Building Program	AWS or AB
			CABs
			Trainers
			Consultants

First and foremost is The AWS International Water Stewardship Standard (<http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/aws-standard-system.html#aws-standard>), which lays the foundation of the AWS Standard System by establishing the actions, criteria and indicators for how sites should manage water at the site level and how water should be stewarded beyond the boundaries of the site. This is a normative document, which is applicable, on a voluntary basis, to any site wishing to demonstrate its conformity with the AWS Standard.

The second normative document of the AWS standard framework is the AWS Self-Verification Requirements (<http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/verification.html#self-verification>). This document describes the mandatory requirements for the processes of self-verification, which are to be followed by implementers.

The third normative document of the AWS standard framework is the AWS Certification Requirements (<http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/verification.html#certification>). It describes the mandatory requirements for certification, which are to be followed by CABs.

The AWS Interim Accreditation Requirements (<http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/verification.html#accreditation>) is the fourth normative document of the AWS standard framework. It sets out the mandatory criteria that AWS (or accreditation body) will use to evaluate the competency of AWS service providers (CABs, trainers and consultants).

During the first phase of implementation, AWS may produce additional normative documents in support of program-level objectives. Such objectives may include establishing rules and requirements for membership, branding and claims, training, capacity-building, and related topics. AWS also intends to produce a guidance document entitled AWS Verification System, which provides an overview of how all the different elements of the AWS Verification Program interact to deliver a credible assurance to stakeholders on AWS claims.

### List of standards that are assessed through the assurance system

The AWS assurance system assesses the AWS Standard through the work of AWS accredited assurance providers (or CABs).

AWS accredited CABs are required to comply with ISO 17065 with five modifications:

1. CAB shall have a procedure for handling complaints that is open to all parties involved in the AWS conformity assessment process.
2. CABs shall operate an ‘impartiality committee’ charged with annual (at least) review of CAB management of conflict of interest. The committee must be comprised of at least three members who are independent of

the CAB. Records of impartiality committee reviews, discussions, conclusions and recommendations for corrective actions must be maintained for at least five (5) years.

3. CABs shall ensure that all members of the audit team have maintained their independence from the client and organization under assessment. Declarations of potential conflict of interest shall be made. An auditor or staff person is presumed to have a conflict of interest if:
  - there is a family relationship; or
  - there is a prior association through employment (e.g., a fee-for-service arrangement) within the last 3 years.
4. CABs shall compel employees and sub-contractors (e.g., technical experts) to declare any potential conflict of interest in advance of engaging in an AWS conformity assessment.
5. CABs shall not assign any employee to an AWS conformity assessment if that person has previously provided management advice to the organization or if that person has an unmitigated potential conflict of interest with the organization under assessment.

AWS has accredited the first assurance providers. A list of approved assurance providers is available here <http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/verification.html#aws-accredited-organizations>.

Stakeholders are an integral part of the AWS Standard System and are highly visible in the Standard and Verification Programs. Stakeholders are encouraged to participate in the assessment process during the site audit and subsequent surveillance audits and the complaints/appeals process. Audit teams will actively seek input from stakeholders through interviews on relevant criteria in the Standard and the site's performance. Additionally, stakeholders can submit complaints on procedural or general issues at any time to the relevant parties (CABs, AWS, etc.) or through formal means on concerns about certificates. Details for stakeholder participation can be found on the AWS website

[http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/assets/documents/AWS\\_Certification\\_Requirements\\_v1.0\\_July2105.pdf](http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/assets/documents/AWS_Certification_Requirements_v1.0_July2105.pdf) in sections 2.6.3 and 3.2.2 and in Appendix 3.

AWS will actively seek ways to drive improvements in its Verification Program; testing them first in Phase 1 and rolling them out in Phase 2. These will include protocols for assurance body oversight, adaptive risk management plans and communications systems (among others).

## Personnel Competence

Auditor qualification and accrediting process are explained in the documents found here:

<http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/verification.html#accreditation>. AWS requirements for qualifications of Lead AWS auditors and Local AWS auditors are summarized on Table B. AWS Requirements for collective expertise of the Audit Team are summarized on Table C.

AWS will, in Phase 1, refine its oversight processes using continued feedback from CABs and others involved in Phase 1 implementation. This refinement will include detailed auditor evaluations and performance management as well as improved auditor training.

## Assessment

The AWS Verification Program allows for both self-verification (details available here <http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/verification.html#self-verification>) and 3<sup>rd</sup> party certification (details available here <http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/verification.html#certification>). 3<sup>rd</sup> party certification is applicable to single sites, multiple sites with one owner and multiple sites with multiple owners (group certification). There are caveats and criteria for participation under each of these three areas. Summary Table D below shows some key differences between certification of single site, multi-site and group operations. Each audit will be done by an audit team to be comprised of at least 3 people with qualifications that span those noted in Table C above.

In effort to minimize bias in audits, the audit team is not permitted to give specific guidance to sites. Sites are instead directed to accredited organizations (as listed on the AWS website <http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/verification.html#aws-accredited-organizations>) that can provide insight into

additional water stewardship actions.

Decisions on certificates and non-conformities are made by the AWS Certifier of the accredited CAB, based on the assessment completed by the audit team. Details for this process are available at [http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/assets/documents/AWS\\_Certification\\_Requirements\\_v1.0\\_July2105.pdf](http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/assets/documents/AWS_Certification_Requirements_v1.0_July2105.pdf). The audit grading and non-conformity major or minor classification, criteria, remediation and sanctions are available in this document in sections 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 3.7, and 3.8.

For group certification, AWS is testing in Phase 1 a model detailed in section 5 “Requirements for Group Certification” and section 6 “Conformity Assessment of Group Clients” in the document found here [http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/assets/documents/AWS\\_Certification\\_Requirements\\_v1.0\\_July2105.pdf](http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/assets/documents/AWS_Certification_Requirements_v1.0_July2105.pdf).

### Oversight

AWS’s oversight model is under development in Phase 1 with AWS acting as the sole overseers from the Standard System. An expected level of oversight is applied to the CABs through their accreditation by AWS and another that is a signatory of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) for Product Certification (see 2.1.5 of [http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/assets/documents/AWS\\_Interim\\_Accreditation\\_Requirements\\_v1.0\\_July2015.pdf](http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/assets/documents/AWS_Interim_Accreditation_Requirements_v1.0_July2015.pdf)). Please see the “important note” at the beginning of this report from AWS regarding the phased approach and goals for oversight.

### On-going Scrutiny

Because AWS does not allow product claims or on-product labelling, the onus is on AWS, stakeholders and CABs to identify and report fraudulent claims. The majority of the burden falls upon AWS for surveillance. All repercussions will be addressed by AWS through the mechanisms outlined in section 7.7 of [http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/assets/documents/AWS\\_Certification\\_Requirements\\_v1.0\\_July2105.pdf](http://allianceforwaterstewardship.org/assets/documents/AWS_Certification_Requirements_v1.0_July2105.pdf).