ASC Monitoring & Evaluation System
Public System Summary Version 1.0

Sept 2017

1. Introduction and Background

Over half of the seafood consumed globally comes from aquaculture. As the world's population continues to increase, the drive for responsible, protein-rich food sources increases with it. Aquaculture is currently the fastest growing food-production system in the world. As the sector grows, so does its footprint on the environment and local communities.

The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) was established in 2010 by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH) to address this very challenge, together with other existing and future initiatives and organisations. The ASC aims to transform the world's seafood markets by promoting and rewarding responsible fish farming practices through a market-oriented certification and labelling programme, resulting in minimised negative environmental and social impacts.

The guiding principles for the ASC M&E system include: keeping it simple and practical (lean), build upon strengths, broad participation of users, accountability, and transparency. All of the components described in the following can be found in more detail on the ASC website and full M&E System Report.

2. Scope and Boundaries

The scope of the ASC M&E system is reflected in the M&E framework (see page 3) and focuses on three major result areas:

    (i)   social and environmental performance of the farm
    (ii)   system effectiveness and efficiency and
    (iii)   market performance.

ASC has adopted a stepwise approach for its M&E system that considers the main potential impact in terms of coverage and hotspot impact areas. The initial focus will be on the two key species, salmon and shrimp, (out of current eight species standards) for which ASC offers certification. These species also have the largest number of certified farms to date.

For this defined scope of salmon and shrimp, the following sustainability areas are the focus of the M&E system:

- Water quality
- Benthos state
- Feed utilisation
- Antibiotic use/disease management
- Wildlife
- Habitat loss or rehabilitation
- Working conditions, including overtime
- Wages
- Local community

The M&E system will monitor at a farm/producer level as well as at supply chain level. The Theory of Change is designed for the ASC system as a whole and the result chains focus on the key desired outputs and outcomes and associated strategies to realise the change. Not every issue can be monitored, nor every aspect of the Theory of Change tested, especially in this initial phase of the M&E system build-up. The other two main areas of the M&E system, system effectiveness and market performance, will be organization wide.

3. Defining the Intended Change

The long-term goals and desired impacts of ASC are set out by the mission, vision and Theory of Change. The mission of the ASC is

> *To transform aquaculture towards environmental sustainability and social responsibility using efficient market mechanisms that create value across the chain.*

By carrying out this mission, ASC aims to achieve its Vision:

> *A world where aquaculture plays a major role in supplying food and social benefits for mankind whilst minimising negative impacts on the environment.*

The ASC will be seen to have achieved its mission if, as a result of ASC actions:
- Aquaculture is transformed towards environmentally sustainable and socially responsibility
- There is an increased global demand for (sales of) ASC certified seafood.

These two effects will together be called ASC's Vision of Success. The ASC's vision of success is captured and explained in the Theory of Change (ToC). As the name suggests, the Theory of Change highlights the intended changes that *hypothetically* will occur as a result of implementation of ASC strategies.

The ASC M&E Framework describes the sustainability issues that ASC is responding to at farm and sector level, the long-term goals, expected outcomes, strategies to achieve them and the assumptions in order to be successful in bringing about change. See Annex ASC M&E Framework.

4. Ongoing Monitoring System

Based on the Theory of Change and results chains, the M&E system has been developed to support ongoing monitoring of results, incorporating learning to adapt the ASC programme. While the purpose of the ASC M&E system is to track and report progress on results at all levels – from outputs, outcomes to impact, as well as to "test" the hypotheses articulated in the Theory of Change and results chains - it would be extremely difficult and challenging to try to do all of this in a meaningful and feasible way. Thus, ASC is taking a strategic approach to looking at different "levels" of monitoring and evaluation:

Level 3	• Impact • Periodic, in-depth, research questions • Independent
Level 2	• Outcome • Periodic, sample, priority issues • Internal and external
Level 1	• Outputs and shorter term outcomes • Ongoing, all operations • Internal
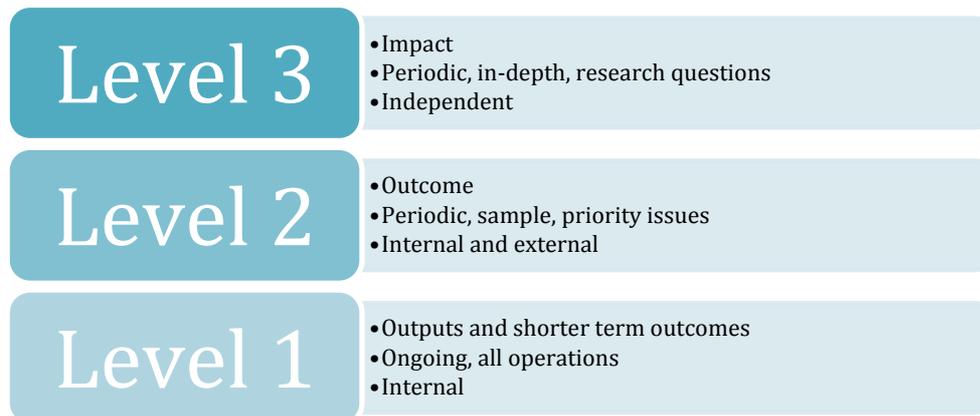
4.1 Indicators

ASC has been collecting basic data on certified operations and markets since the start of its operations in 2012. These are made available in monthly reports on the ASC website.[1] Starting in 2017, a broader set of indicators is being collected to track progress towards our goals and "test" through regular collection of data on a prioritised set of indicators. See the ASC website for the full report and list of indicators. ASC M&E Program V1.0

4.2 Performance monitoring

The majority of the indicators will be regularly collected from ongoing operations such as audit reports, assurance records, training records, outreach activities and media monitoring. Being a performance-based scheme, many metrics regarding farm performance and results are collected through assurance activities and will be used for both compliance assessment and monitoring & evaluation. See ASC M&E Program V1.0.

4.3 Outcome and Impact Evaluation

At Level 2 and 3, the topics and area of focus will be determined on a yearly basis responding to the needs of the organisation as well as the requests from stakeholders. The outcome level data will be used for these periodic analyses for both internal learning purposes and external reports.

This data will be augmented with additional data from certified operations through other mechanisms such as surveys and data from other sources including FAO, national or sector baselines and/or counterfactuals depending on the design of the survey or study.

Summaries of all outcome and impact evaluations will be made publicly available on the ASC website once they are finalized and where possible all full reports as well. See list of Publications and Research.

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[1] ASC in Numbers (ASC Certification Updates)

5. Improving the Effectiveness of the M&E system

The M&E system will be used internally to learn for improving the system effectiveness and the standards. By gathering regular data over time through ongoing performance monitoring, ASC will be able to identify and analyse trends in system effectiveness to target training of auditors and farmers. The system will provide data to test the assumptions in the standard including thresholds.

The outcome evaluations will be used for targeted deeper dives into research questions of what is working, under what conditions and to identify influencing and enabling factors.

6. Transparency and Stakeholder engagement

ASC is designing and developing its M&E system in close cooperation with its stakeholders. By engaging its stakeholders in dialogue ASC wants to develop an understanding of what social and environmental issues matter the most to them (in relation to ASC's long-term goals), gain their input and expertise in developing 'solutions' to address and measure these matters (through its M&E program), and align expectations and create acceptance of its program.

ASC has embedded stakeholder engagement within its governance structure. In addition to this basic structure ASC specifically engages stakeholders with the monitoring and evaluation system:

- Webinars: targeted stakeholder specific webinars to solicit input.
- Public consultation: Putting the M&E framework up for public consultation in order for all stakeholders to provide comments
- Website: transparency of all reports and documents with a mechanism to submit input

Find out more about the ASC M&E programme: ASC's Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system

For further information about our M&E system, please contact us.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

The overall coordination of the design, development and management of the ASC monitoring and evaluation program lied with the Standards and Certification department. As a result of the re-structuring early this year, this department is split up into two – Standards & Science (S&S) and Programme Integrity (PI) teams. This overall coordination role is assumed by the Head of the PI team.

In total we have got 2,4 FTE working in M&E, including both staff members in those 2 teams and consultants for various areas of the M&E work.

From next year onwards, the main M&E function will be transferred to the S&S team with an in-house full time position, Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator[2], who will be supported by staff members across the teams.

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[2] See TOR for recruitment on our website

ASC M&E Framework:
Defining the Intended Change

Sustainability Issues Sector

1. Increasing global demand for fish
2. Increasing pressures on wild fish stocks
3. Ungoverned expansion
4. Supply base largely uncertified and fragmented
5. Consumers unaware or unwilling to pay for sustainably sourced products

Long term Vision
To transform aquaculture towards **environmental sustainability and social responsibility that preserves the environment, while improving farmers, workers and communities wellbeing**

Sustainability Issues Farm

1. Disruption of local ecosystems:
   • Feed pollution
   • Mangrove clearing
2. Biodiversity
3. Waste Water
4. Use conflict
5. Social Issues
   • Working conditions
   • Labour rights
   • Community involvement

Long term Outcomes

1. Minimized negative effect of aquaculture on environment
2. Improved working conditions and enhanced positive effect of aquaculture on the local community
3. Increased efficiency through reduced production costs
4. Increased sales to make responsible farming viable

Assumptions

1. Critical mass uptake
2. Consumers and business see value in credible certification
3. Market access
4. Regulatory enforcement

Shorter Term Outcomes

1. Increase farmers implementing the ASC standards.
2. Credible system that rigorously and transparently verifies changes on the farm level inspires stakeholders with trust and confidence, leading ultimately to more demand for responsible certified product.
3. Market preference for certified product creates incentives

Assumptions

1. Thresholds and best practices are "right"/ sufficient
2. Access to tools and resources to implement changes
3. Market access
4. Farmers see cost/benefits

Outputs

1. Farmers are aware of benefits of ASC certification.
2. Accessibility of the ASC programme
3. Effective, efficient and transparent programme
4. Expansion of programme scope
5. Raised stakeholder awareness of benefits of certified fish

Programme Strategies

1. Outreach to farmers and groups (training and support)
2. Defining best practices and system requirements (standard setting, policies and systems)
3. Quality Management system (Certification Bodies, assurance)
4. Adherence to most rigorous internal guidelines
5. Promoting market uptake with companies, NGOs
6. Building consumer awareness

Institutional Strategies

1. Build capacity and external support
2. Collaborating with other organizations
3. Monitoring and evaluation for continuous improvement