ALLIANCE FOR WATER STEWARDSHIP

ISEAL Community Member System Overview

Organisation Name	Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS)
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AWS Vision – A water secure world that enables people, cultures, business, and nature to prosper now and in the future.

AWS Mission – We ignite and nurture global and local leadership in credible water stewardship that recognises and secures the social, cultural, environmental, and economic value of freshwater.

1) The **STRATEGIES** our system employs to meet its sustainability objectives

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) is both a global network of over 180 private sector, civil society, and public sector organisations, and the custodian of the International Water Stewardship Standard (known as the AWS Standard).

AWS operates globally, and the AWS Standard is applicable to all types of freshwater used by an organisation or industry in any location around the world. AWS Standard certification demonstrates that a site has successfully completed each of the five steps in the AWS Standard. It enables businesses to make credible claims about their water stewardship practices and commitment to water sustainability and can help increase investor confidence, improve brand perception and strengthen customer relationships.

The AWS Strategy 2022-2030 is based on three strategic goals: Influence, Inclusion and Impact. It focuses on strengthening and deepening the AWS System through sectoral engagement in four priority industry sectors (agricultural supply chains, textiles, food & beverage and microelectronics) while remaining agile and responsive to demand in other sectors. This focus allows AWS to drive increased corporate commitments and certification against the AWS Standard.

AWS is ISEAL Code Compliant since 2014. Our system has been independently evaluated against ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice — a globally recognised framework for effective, credible sustainability systems. As such, AWS defines impact very specifically as positive and negative long-term effects resulting from the implementation of a standards system, either directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

One of our key strategies to deliver on our mission is AWS Membership. AWS's multi-stakeholder alliance members are committed to pursuing and championing credible water stewardship practices and collective actions.

AWS does three things on behalf of its members and in pursuit of its mission:

- maintains a respected and vibrant sustainability standard system

- implements strategies to increase multi-stakeholder participation in water stewardship action, that, in line with our Theory of Change, will lead to impact

- facilitates the sharing of knowledge and learning from water stewardship.

A further strategy to deliver on our mission is the AWS Global Training Programme. Reinforcing all three points above, the strategic importance of the AWS Training Programme cannot be understated. Training is the activity where most individuals and organisations begin their water stewardship journey.

Figure 1 - AWS Theory of Change
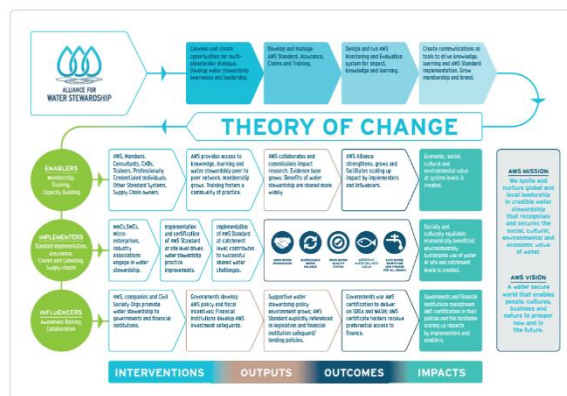
The aim for the AWS Global Training Programme is to provide high quality, valued and accessible water stewardship training, content and knowledge to those interested and active in all aspects of implementation and certification of sites against the AWS Standard. To learn more visit https://a4ws.org/training/

A key further strategy is the launch of the Alliance for Water Stewardship's Impact Accelerator (IA) Programme, which is a collaborative, place-based approach to water stewardship that brings multiple sites together to implement the AWS Standard at the same time helping to share costs, create peer support and maximise impact.

As part of an IA, businesses build capacity and gain knowledge on the catchments they operate in and turn that knowledge into action by being supported through preparation for certification against the AWS Standard. By bringing multiple sites together, the AWS Impact Accelerator helps ignite water stewardship at scale throughout value chains.

2)   A description of the **STANDARD** that our system has developed

The AWS International Water Stewardship Standard (AWS Standard) is a globally applicable framework for major water users to understand their water use and impacts, and to work collaboratively and transparently for sustainable water management within a catchment context. The Standard is intended to drive social, environmental and economic benefits at the scale of a catchment. The Standard is intended to promote continual improvement such that performance improves over time.

It achieves this by engaging water-using sites in understanding and addressing Shared Water Challenges as well as site water risks and opportunities. It asks water-using sites to address these challenges in a way that progressively moves them to best practice in terms of five outcomes: Good water governance, sustainable water balance, good water quality status, important water related areas (IWRAs), and Safe water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH).

The AWS Standard is applicable globally to all organizations and industrial sectors, independent of their size and operational complexity. The focus of the Standard is the operational site and its local water catchment, but with a broader goal to include indirect water use in the supply chain. The Standard applies to all types of water used by an organization in its normal activities. This includes surface water, groundwater, recycled water, desalinized water (from ocean or brackish sources), precipitation, non-renewable reserves (fossil water), and even unusual sources such as snow or ice. The scope applies to all water uses whether from private water sources or from third party suppliers. The same applies to wastewater management and treatment.

Figure 2: The AWS Standard and its five steps and five outcomes.

The AWS Standard is intended to be applicable to any type and size of business in any location. The current non-normative Guidance to the Standard is general for all sectors and regions. Each organization should apply water stewardship to its 'physical scope' extending beyond the site's operational boundaries for data collection, stakeholder engagement and actions. The physical scope should be based on a combination of water-related catchment(s), stakeholder interests and regulatory landscape.

3) How we maintain **RESPONSIBILITY** for decisions taken about and by our system

AWS Membership is the highest decision-making body of the AWS system (see Figure 3). For a list of all AWS members please see https://a4ws.org/membership/members/

Figure 3 AWS System of Governance
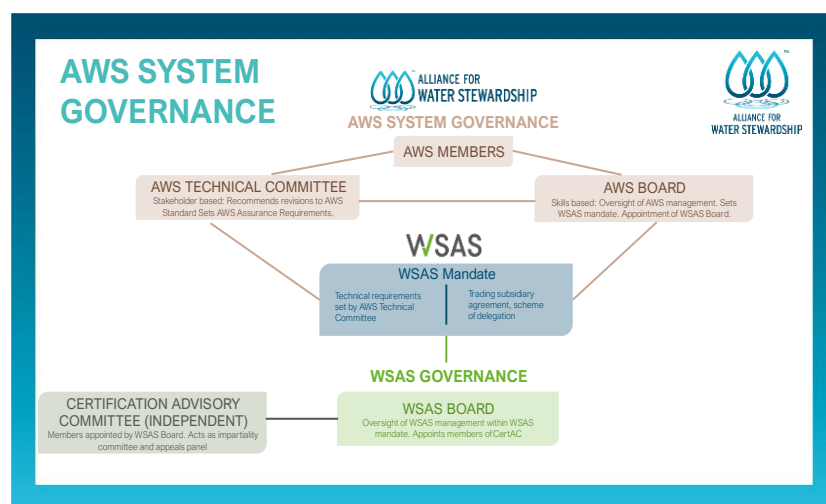
The AWS Board members (Trustees) are elected by our members and are responsible for:

- Developing and approving the AWS strategic plan, in conjunction with the CEO
- Financial oversight of the organisation and ensuring that AWS is able to meet its financial obligations
- Ensuring management identifies the principal financial and non-financial risks of the organisation, and implements appropriate systems and programs to manage these risks
- Developing policies and procedures related to good governance
- Appointing, setting the remuneration and monitoring the performance of the CEO
- General oversight to ensure the organisation is managed in a prudent and responsible manner in line with its fiduciary responsibilities, values, and principles of good governance

Trustees do not represent either their employer's or sector's interest, rather they are required to further the interests of AWS SCIO see here: https://a4ws.org/about/governance/aws-board

The AWS Technical Committee is the primary body responsible for providing balanced stakeholder oversight of matters relating to the integrity and quality control of the water stewardship system on behalf of members in particular, the AWS Standard and AWS Assurance System. For a list of all AWS Technical Committee Members please see here: https://a4ws.org/about/technical-committee/

In 2021, AWS modernized its assurance model and established Water Stewardship Assurance Services (WSAS) Ltd. a fully own subsidiary and the sole mission driven Conformity Assessment Body of AWS.

The AWS Secretariat is made up of four key business units:

- System Integrity that manages the Standard System, Assurance System, Global Training Programme, Monitoring & Evaluation (MEL), Research Programme, Claims Programme, Technical Committee Liaison, and Data Management System.
- Outreach & Engagement that manages Membership, Marketing & Communications, Events/AWS Forum and AWS website
- Policy (New Programme in development)
- Finance & Admin that manages: Finance, Human Resources, and Governance coordination

4)	How our system's design demonstrates a **COMMITMENT TO IMPROVEMENT**

The AWS Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) System takes a Theory of Change (ToC) approach and demonstrates our commitment to improvement. Our 'theory' is that as Enablers, Implementers and Influencers of the AWS System set about creating and supporting interventions, outputs and outcomes, the desired positive impacts will be realised in order to deliver on our mission and vision (view our ToC infographic see Figure 1 above or a4ws.org/impacts). The M&E System is intended to help AWS evaluate and improve its effectiveness, including with regard to the structure and functioning of the AWS Standard System. It also enables AWS to be accountable to its stakeholders and ensure credibility via the provision of clear and verifiable information.

AWS publishes annual Performance Monitoring Reports (a4ws.org/resources) to provide opportunities for learning and an indication of the extent to which outputs and outcomes are being achieved. Impact evaluation studies are also being carried out to identify medium- and longer-term effects of the implementation of the AWS Standard System. As part of the M&E System, AWS employs mechanisms to ensure the quality and alignment of performance monitoring data and of outcome/impact evaluations. AWS is moving towards real-time reporting and an increasing amount of our M&E data collected online, and automatically uploaded to our Salesforce data management system, as well as regularly updated on the AWS website.

5)	How our standard or tool is monitored and reviewed to ensure its **RELEVANCE**

The AWS Standard is reviewed periodically (at least every five years) as part of a global multi-stakeholder ISEAL Code conforming process to ensure it remains relevant and effective in all relevant aspects – from the most pressing sustainability issues; to considering key challenges facing water users; to integrating the most recent scientific evidence and approaches; to aligning our system with developments with globally agreed sustainability efforts from nature and biodiversity conservation, to developments in climate and resilience ensuring that the AWS Standard and its system remains relevant for users.

Beginning in January 2023, AWS began a review and revision of the International Water Stewardship Standard V2.0 (commonly known as the AWS Standard). The primary aims of the AWS Standard Review and Revision are to:

- Improve the value proposition and user experience for sites;

- Enable more accurate and consistent auditability, and;

- Enhance the Standard's contribution to AWS's vision, mission and organisational strategy.

This process will be carried out according to the AWS Standards Development and Revision Procedure and ISEAL's Standard-Setting Code of Good Practice. The process is led by the AWS Technical Committee and facilitated by the AWS Secretariat, with the aim to publish the revised AWS Standard V3.0 in 2025. For more information see: https://a4ws.org/the-aws-standard-2-0/aws-standard-review-and-revision-3/

6) How the standard or tool is IMPLEMENTED

The AWS system is implemented by growing global network of sites across over 50 countries.

Assurance against the AWS Standard is conducted through third-party audit and certification processes. The details of certification processes, including requirements for auditor qualifications and competencies, are listed in the AWS Certification Requirements see https://a4ws.org/download/aws-certification-requirements-v3-1-october-2023/.

See Figure 4 below that shows a typical journey for a site to get certified. The first step for a site is to download the AWS Standard and Guidance for free from the AWS website. Although not required, the next step is highly recommended to register for an online course as part of the AWS Global Training Programme. Trainees can also choose to join the AWS Professional Credentialing Programme and join a growing community of water stewardship leaders. Once a decision has been by a company/site to certify, a site then registers its intention on the AWS website. As the site implements the Standard, it is invited to contact WSAS to organise an audit (visit https://watersas.org/). If successful, an AWS Certificate is awarded.

Sites may achieve one of three levels: Core, Gold or Platinum. All Core criteria must be met as a minimum requirement for certification. Additional points are awarded for performance against the Advanced Indicators. The greater the number of points achieved the higher the level of water stewardship performance and AWS certification.

Advanced Indicators and higher-level certification were introduced to recognise that good water stewards seek continual improvement and commit to ongoing action to respond to the ever-evolving nature of local water context. Gold and Platinum status recognises sites that push their water stewardship performance to higher levels. A site's certificate is valid for three years, subject to successful annual Surveillance Audits.

Figure 4 Typical journey for a site to get AWS Certified. The shaded area highlights the activities that are carried out by Water Stewardship Assurance Services (WSAS) Ltd.