ASC Programme Development and Revision Procedure

Version 3.0

21 FEB 2024

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1. Amendment History

Date	Version	Summary of Amendment

21 FEB 2024	3.0	• New document title, layout, branding, and formatting.
		• Procedure scope expansion to all certification programme documents.
		• Amended Sections:
		   o Section 3 – Purpose, Section 4 – Scope, Section 5 – Stakeholder Feedback, Section 6 – Supporting Documents, Section 7 – Roles and Responsibilities, Section 8 – Certification Programme Document Regular Maintenance, Section 12 – Project Terms of Reference, Section 13 – Technical Working Group, Section 14 – Document Draft, Section 15 – Public Consultation, Section 17 - Final Document, Section 18 – Record-Keeping, Appendix C – Terms and Definitions.
		• New Sections:
		   o Section 9 – Urgent Revision, Section 10 – Document Changes and Development, Section 11 – Addition of New Species, Section 16 – Feasibility Assessments, Appendix A – Process Flowcharts, Appendix B – Acronyms.
		• Removed Sections:
		   o Introduction, ASC Guiding Principles for Standard-Setting, Content Needed for Consultation Plan.

8 NOV 2021	2.0	Revision to reflect: • ISEAL Standard-Setting Code v6.0. • The ASC 2019 governance review and current ASC practice. • Non-substantive changes to improve document clarity also incorporated.
17 NOV 2014	1.0	New document.

2. Contact Information

Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)

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3.   Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to outline the steps for ASC's certification programme development and revision activities.

4.   Scope

This procedure applies to the development, review, and revision process of ASC's certification programme and to the documents that support the certification framework.

5.   Stakeholder Feedback

ASC welcomes stakeholder feedback. Stakeholders seeking clarification on ASC's Standards or Certification and Accreditation Requirements can forward their queries to standards@asc-aqua.org and certification@asc-aqua.org, respectively. Stakeholders may forward concerns or complaints related to the ASC document development or revision process to complaints@asc-aqua.org.

6.   Supporting Documents

Supporting documents are available through ASC's Controlled Document Master List.

- ASC Certification and Accreditation Requirements
- ASC Complaints Procedure
- ASC Metrics Methodology
- ASC Question for Interpretation Procedure
- ASC Standards
- ASC Variance Request Procedure
- Technical Advisory Group Conflict-of-Interest Policy
- Technical Advisory Group Terms of Reference
- The Deed of the ASC Foundation

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7.   Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
ASC Project Manager	Coordinate and facilitate content development or improvement and to achieve required project goals within given parameters.
ASC Research Team	Coordinates the new species selection and integration process.
ASC Technical Operations	Coordinate the programme document regular maintenance and urgent revision process.
Board of Trustees (Board)	The ultimate decision-making body of ASC. The Board mandates ASC to develop new or to revise its existing certification programme. The Board approves Standards and Certification and Accreditation Requirements and approves priority species for ASC's certification programme based on the recommendations of the Technical Advisory Group
Programme Assurance Director	Approves non-substantive changes to ASC's Certification and Accreditation Requirements and feasibility assessment proposals.
Standards and Science Director	Approves non-substantive changes to ASC Standards and feasibility assessment proposals.
Senior Director of Technical Operations	Approves urgent changes to ASC's Standards and Certification and Accreditation requirements and endorses the priority species that are presented to the Board.
Technical Advisory Group (TAG)	Provides technical recommendations and advice to the Board, endorses certification programme content and public consultations.
Technical Working Groups (TWGs)	Formed as necessary by TAG to provide detailed inputs on technical or scientific issues concerning ASC's certification programme.

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Process Flows for Programme Development and Revision

8. Certification Programme Document Regular Maintenance

Input	Output	Coordinated By
• ASC Strategic Plan • Existing document • Questions for Interpretation (QAs) • Issue Log • Learnings from Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) • Stakeholder feedback • Research • Industry best practices • Variance Requests (VRs) • Unit of Certification (UoC) performance • Changes in legislation	• Identified needs for revision or new programme documents	• ASC Technical Operations

8.1 Stakeholder feedback is logged centrally in the Issue Log by the ASC Technical Operations and categorised as non-substantive, substantive or urgent.

8.2 ASC Technical Operations regularly reviews the Issue Log to identify urgent needs for certification programme document development or revision.

8.3 In addition to the Issue Log reviews, ASC Standards and Certification and Accreditation Requirements (CAR) are reviewed for continued relevance and effectiveness in meeting their stated objectives at least every five years as per Table 1.

    8.3.1 The ASC Board of Trustees may also mandate additional ASC Standards and CAR development, review, or revision.

8.4 After the review of ASC Standards and CAR is complete, any identified urgent, substantive, and non-substantive developments will be incorporated as per Section 9 – Urgent Revision and Section 10 – Document Changes and Development.

    8.4.1 If the review concludes that a revision of ASC Standards and CAR is not necessary, ASC shall publicly announce:

    • A re-affirmation of the document

    • The rationale behind the decision not to revise

    • The date of the next review.

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Table 1: Document Revision Frequencies and Effective Date

Document	Revision Frequency	Minimum Effective Date
Standards	5 years	6 months
CAR	3 years	6 months
RUoC	3 years	6 months
Interpretation Manuals	1 year	3 months
Metrics	5 years	6 months
Supporting Documents	3 years or as stated in Controlled Document Master List	3 months

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9.   Urgent Revision

A. Evaluate the Need of an Urgent Revision

Input	Output	Coordinated By
• ASC Strategic Plan • QAs and VRs • Issue Log • Learnings from M&E • Stakeholder feedback • Research • Industry best practices • UoC performance	• Proposal for urgent revision	• ASC Technical Operations

9.1 Urgent revisions are undertaken to mitigate a high risk of ASC's inability to deliver its Mission based on input from:

- ASC's Strategic Plan

- Changes in the supply chain and market uptake

- Changes to operational practices and legislation

- Learnings from M&E, QAs, VRs and UoC performance

- New scientific development and its adoption as industry best practice

- Stakeholder feedback.

9.2 If a need to complete urgent revision is identified, ASC Technical Operations shall complete an urgent revision proposal including:

- Identified issue and any background information

- Proposed revision and justification

- Potential environmental, social, and economic impacts

- Potential impacts on other ASC documents and governance

- Completed risk assessment.

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B. Decision to Complete an Urgent Revision

Input	Output	Coordinated By
• Urgent revision proposal	• Decision to complete an urgent revision	• ASC Technical Operations

9.3 The Senior Director of Technical Operations shall facilitate the urgent revision decision.

9.3.1 If accepted, ASC will release the revised document and inform all stakeholders as soon as possible.

9.3.2 If rejected, the issue will be addressed in the next scheduled document review as per Section 8 – Certification Programme Document Regular Maintenance.

9.4 Urgent revisions of ASC Standards and CAR documents shall be included in public consultation in the next review and revision process as per Section 15 – Public Consultation.

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10. Document Changes and Development

A. Substantive Changes and Development

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
- Issue Log - VRs - QAs - Learnings from M&E - ASC Strategic Plan - Stakeholder feedback - Research - Industry best practices	Decision to complete substantive changes to document or development of new substantive content	Senior Director of Technical Operations	ASC Project Manager

10.1 All proposals for new Standards and CAR documents or substantive revisions to existing Standard and CAR documents with significant impact shall be approved by the Senior Director of Technical Operations.

10.2 Once approved, ASC Project Manager shall follow:

- Section 12 – Project Terms of Reference

- Section 13 – Technical Working Groups

- Section 14 – Document Draft

- Section 15 – Public Consultation

- Section 16 – Feasibility Assessment

- Section 17 – Final Document

- Section 18 – Record Keeping

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B. Non-Substantive Changes and Development

Input	Output	Coordinated By
• Issue Log • QAs • Stakeholder feedback	• Decision to complete non-substantive changes or development	• ASC Project Manager

10.3 ASC Project Manager will follow:

- Section 14 – Document Draft

- Section 17 – Final Document

- Section 18 – Record Keeping

C. Non-Substantive Changes and Development Approval

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• Proposed non-substantive content	• Decision to incorporate non-substantive content into the document	• Programme Assurance Director or Standards and Science Director	• ASC Project Manager

10.4 Non-substantive content shall be approved by the corresponding Director.

10.4.1 If approved, the non-substantive content will be incorporated into the next scheduled document review as per Section 8 – Certification Programme Document Regular Maintenance.

10.5 The Director may decide to the implement the non-substantive content as per Section 9 – Urgent Revision, based on need.

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11.   Addition of New Species

New species may be added to the ASC's scope based on consumer demand, market development opportunity or producer interest.

A. Determination of New Priority Species

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• New species requests	• Endorsed priority species list	• Senior Director of Technical Operations	• ASC Research Team

11.1   Stakeholders may submit a request for ASC to expand its species scope at any time.

11.2   Information on how to submit a species request shall be maintained on the ASC website here.

11.3   All requests for new species are documented internally by the ASC Research Team.

11.4   The ASC Research Team shall evaluate proposed species by conducting risk assessments and market analysis of species according to available resources.

11.5   Based on the assessed risk of adding the new species, availability of literature and market analysis, the ASC Research Team shall formulate a list of priority species.

11.5.1   The Senior Director of Technical Operations shall endorse the proposed priority species list prior to presentation to the Board.

B. New Priority Species Approval

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• Proposed priority species list	• Decision on priority species list	• ASC Board of Trustees	• ASC Research Team

11.6   The ASC Research Team shall propose the endorsed priority species to the ASC Board of Trustees for approval.

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C. Project Development

11.7 Once priority species are approved, ASC Project Manager shall follow:

- Section 12 – Project Terms of Reference

- Section 14 – Document Draft

- Section 15 – Public Consultation

- Section 16 – Feasibility Assessments

- Section 17 – Final Document

- Section 18 – Record Keeping

D. Incorporation of New Species into ASC Standards

11.8 The new species shall be added at the next document review following Section 8 – Certification Programme Document Maintenance

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Key Steps in Programme Development and Revision

12.   Project Terms of Reference (TOR)

A. Prepare the Project TOR

Input	Output	Coordinated By
• Project information	• Draft project TOR	• ASC Project Manager

12.1 The project TOR shall include:

- Project objectives, scope, intent, and timeline.

- The environmental, economic, social, or sustainability impacts the project seeks to address and their intended outcomes.

- The project's contribution to ASC's Mission and ASC's Strategic Plans.

- Any previous proposals, discussions or governance decisions relating to the project.

- Assessment of sustainability risks and opportunities.

- Consultation plan, stakeholder mapping and opportunities to provide input.

- Whether feasibility assessments will be completed.

- Organisational structure, with clear decision-making authority and responsibility.

- TOR amendment history and publication date on ASC's website.

- Reference to ASC's Complaints Procedure with information on how stakeholders can file a complaint.

- Overview of the decision-making process that demonstrates that no category of stakeholders has a majority vote in decision-making

12.2 In addition, project TORs for ASC Standards shall also include:

- Intended sustainability claims that the standard will substantiate

- Justification of the need for the development or revision

- Opportunities for alignment with other Standards.

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B. Project TOR Endorsement

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• Draft Project TOR	• Decision to endorse Project TOR	• TAG	• ASC Project Manager

12.3 The TOR will be submitted for endorsement by TAG.

12.4 The endorsed TOR will undergo a 30-day public consultation following Section 15 - Public Consultation. Relevant stakeholders that are directly notified include:

- Organisations that have developed similar international standards

- Stakeholders engaged in previous programme development and revision activities

- Stakeholders identified in Section 12.1

12.5 The ASC Project Manager shall review and update the TOR to reflect the project progress.

12.5.1 Non-substantive revisions of the TOR shall be approved by the TAG Sponsor.

12.5.2 Substantive revisions of the TOR shall be approved by TAG.

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13. Technical Working Group (TWG)

A. Decision to Establish a TWG

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• Endorsed Project TOR	• Decision to establish a TWG	• Director of Standards and Science or Director of Programme Assurance	• ASC Project Manager

13.1 TWGs are established for projects with a designated TAG Sponsor and one or more of the following characteristics:

- New or complex content for ASC Standards or ASC CAR
- High stakeholder interest
- Lack of scientific consensus
- Variable best practices across regions, species, or production systems

13.2 ASC Project Manager may justify and seek approval to forego a TWG from the Director of Standards and Science or Director of Programme Assurance.

B. TWG Terms of Reference (TOR)

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• Decision to establish a TWG	• Endorsed TWG TOR	• TAG	• ASC Project Manager

13.3 The TOR for TWGs shall include:

- TWG objectives, scope, and deliverables
- A conflict-of-interest declaration
- Technical competencies required for members
- TAG reporting requirements and frequency
- Duration, timeline, and milestones
- TAG sponsor name and ASC Project Manager contact information

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C. TWG Stakeholder Engagement

13.4 The TOR is published on ASC's website.

    13.4.1 Stakeholders are invited to register their interest in the project.

    13.4.2 ASC may target specific stakeholders directly to join the TWG based on competencies and the nature of the project.

D. Approved TWG Membership

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• Proposed TWG members list	• Endorsed TWG membership	• TAG Sponsor	• ASC Project Manager

13.5 The TWG members' composition shall aim to represent all major stakeholders with consideration given to both diversity and balance, ensuring that no one stakeholder group or set of interests can control decisions.

13.6 The TAG Sponsor shall endorse the final members' list of the TWGs.

13.7 The TWG TOR is updated with the final members' list and published on the ASC website.

13.8 Any changes in TWG membership shall be approved by the TAG sponsor.

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14.   Document Draft

Input	Output	Coordinated By
• Endorsed project TOR and TWG	• Draft document for public consultation	• ASC Project Manager

14.1   Draft standard documents shall include:

- **Principles:** high-level guiding goals that contribute to ASC's Mission.
- **Criteria:** impact areas that together address the Principle.
- **Indicators**: defined requirements that are assessed at audit.
- **Metrics:** specific performance levels for the indicator.

14.2   Draft CAR documents shall include:

- **General Certification Requirements:** defined requirements for CABs to implement in their own procedures and management systems.
- **Operational Certification Requirements:** defined requirements for CABs to follow while auditing clients and their UoCs against ASC requirements.

14.3   Requirements within the standard and CAR draft shall:

- Be implementable, verifiable, or measurable
- Use language that is clear, to support consistent interpretation
- Address intended sustainability outcomes

14.4   Requirements within the standard draft shall:

- Meet or exceed existing regulatory requirements
- Cite all original intellectual sources of content
- Not favour specific technology, methodology or patented item.

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14.5 The scope of applicability for the standard and its requirements shall be explicitly stated based on:

- Farm or feed mill

- Geography, bathymetry, oceanographic or limnological conditions

- Product manufacturing method, production system type or farming methodology

- Sampling or testing results

- Species name or group.

14.6 Requirements within the standard draft shall:

- Address intended sustainability outcomes

- Be based on scientific evidence

- Use ASC's Metrics Methodology wherever metrics are used to assess performance.

14.7 If data is not otherwise available through reasonable sources, ASC may request performance data from UoCs to support:

- CAB verification and assurance activities

- Document revisions

- Future metric development or revision

- Impact reporting

- Research

- Other activities, as appropriately justified.

14.8 ASC requested data shall:

- Be evaluated for impact on producers against the value to ASC

- Have a clearly justified and documented purpose to support the activities in Section 14.7

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15. Public Consultation

A. Public Consultation Planning

Input	Output	Coordinated By
• Draft document	• Draft public consultation plan	• ASC Project Manager

15.1 For new ASC Standards, there shall be at least two public consultations.

15.2 For revised ASC Standards, there shall be at least one public consultation.

15.3 For new or revised ASC CAR documents, there shall be at least one public consultation.

15.4 ASC may conduct additional consultations of specific stakeholder groups that are most affected.

15.5 ASC Project Manager shall prepare the public consultation plan with the following:

- Consultation objectives and deliverables

- Stakeholder map identifying stakeholder groups

- Consultation methods

- Consultation questions

- Participation plan with strategies to communicate and engage each identified group with a focus on under-engaged and under-represented stakeholder groups

- Translation needs.

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B. Endorsement for Public Consultation

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• Document draft • Draft public consultation plan	• Endorsed draft document and consultation plan	• TAG	• ASC Project Manager

15.6 ASC Project Manager shall submit the draft document and public consultation plan to TAG for endorsement.

15.6.1 The TAG decision whether to endorse the draft document and public consultation plan will be communicated to the ASC Project Manager.

C. Public Consultation Deployment

15.7 If endorsed, ASC shall release the draft document and inform identified stakeholders of the following:

- Length of the public consultation period
- How to submit feedback
- Other opportunities to engage.

15.8 Public consultation shall:

15.8.1 Be open to all stakeholders.

15.8.2 Aim to elicit feedback from a balanced and diverse group of stakeholders including stakeholders with an interest in the subject matter, scope or those that are affected by the implementation of the document.

15.9 Documents may be translated to enable wider participation of the most affected stakeholder groups.

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D. Post-Public Consultation Activities

Input	Output	Coordinated By
• Public consultation feedback	• Feedback evaluation • Feedback summary	• ASC Project Manager

15.10 After public consultation has closed, the ASC Project Manager shall:

- Review all public consultation feedback

- Prepare a public consultation feedback summary including how the feedback will be considered

- Post the public consultation feedback summary on ASC's website

- Notify all stakeholders who submitted feedback.

E. Subsequent Public Consultations

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• Proposal to continue with, shorten or forego further public consultation	• Decision on proposal to continue with, shorten or forego further public consultation	• TAG	• ASC Project Manager

15.11 ASC Project Manager may propose to TAG to shorten or forego subsequent public consultations if there:

- Are no objections or substantial comments in the first round

- Are no major revisions made to the document draft

- Is sufficiently balanced participation by key stakeholder groups.

15.12 TAG's decision whether to endorse the proposal, to shorten or forego subsequent public consultation will be communicated to the ASC Project Manager.

15.13 Subsequent public consultations shall follow all steps in Section 15 – Public Consultation.

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16. Feasibility Assessments

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• Draft feasibility assessment proposal	• Endorsement of feasibility assessment proposal	• Senior Director of Technical Operations	• ASC Project Manager

16.1 Substantive changes or developments of ASC Standards and CAR documents shall complete a feasibility assessment prior to the final document approval.

16.2 The feasibility assessment proposal shall include:

- Assessment objectives
- Targeted stakeholders
- Assessment methodology.

16.3 Assessment methodology proposed in the feasibility assessment shall consider:

- Technical implementation of requirements
- Auditability of requirements
- Impacts on audit duration
- Validation of data requested.

16.4 ASC Project Manager shall submit the feasibility assessment proposal for endorsement by the Senior Director of Technical Operations.

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17.   Final Document

A. Standards and CAR

Input	Output	Decision Point	Coordinated By
• Final document • Risk and impact evaluation	• Final decision	• TAG and Board	• ASC Project Manager

17.1 TAG will review the final document and risk and impact evaluation and make a recommendation to the Board for approval, aiming for consensus.

    17.1.1 If the TAG does not recommend the final document, TAG will provide a written justification to the Board, TWGs and the ASC Project Manager.

17.2 TAG will record minority views where consensus is not achieved.

17.3 The Board may consult with the TAG before making a final decision on approval.

17.4 If the Board does not approve the final document, it shall communicate a written justification to TAG.

B. Document Release and Effective Date

17.5 Once approved, the document is promptly published on the ASC website with:

- The release date of initial publication or re-affirmation of the document
- The date on which the document is effective
- The planned date of subsequent review.

17.6 Document effective dates shall ensure adequate transition period for stakeholders to adapt to new or revised content.

17.7 Stakeholders, including CABs and UoCs, shall be notified of the document's release and its effective date.

17.8 If reasonably requested, ASC shall provide hard copies of the document and related documents at cost.

17.9 After a Standard or CAR document is released, CABs may submit a VR if an adaptation to a unique local circumstance is warranted.

17.10 ASC shall provide Interpretation Manuals for all Standards.

17.11 ASC shall maintain a QA Platform for programme users seeking addition support.

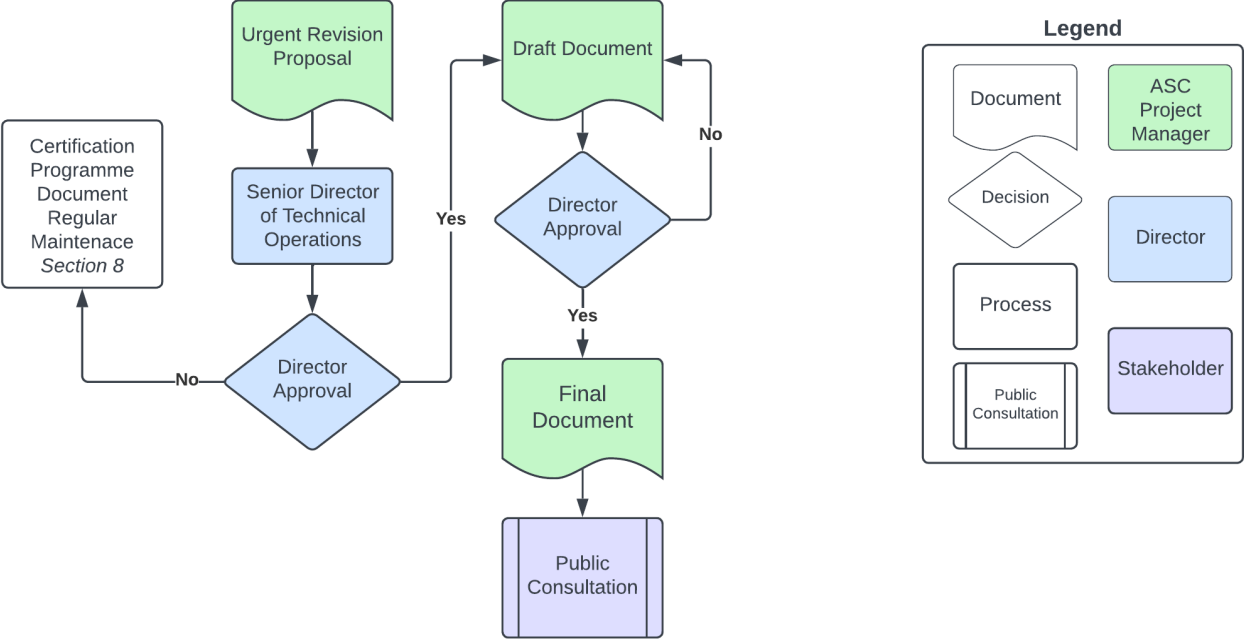| Document Name:	Programme Development and Revision Procedure	Document ID:	ASC-PRC-001	Date issued:	21/02/2024
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18.   Record Keeping

For each certification programme document development and revision process, the following records are retained and available upon request:

- The project TOR and TOR for any TWGs.

- TWG meeting minutes and recommendations.

- Draft documents that were subject to public consultation.

- Endorsements for public consultations.

- Public consultation announcements.

- Public consultation comments and public comment summaries.

- Rationale for reduced or additional public consultations.

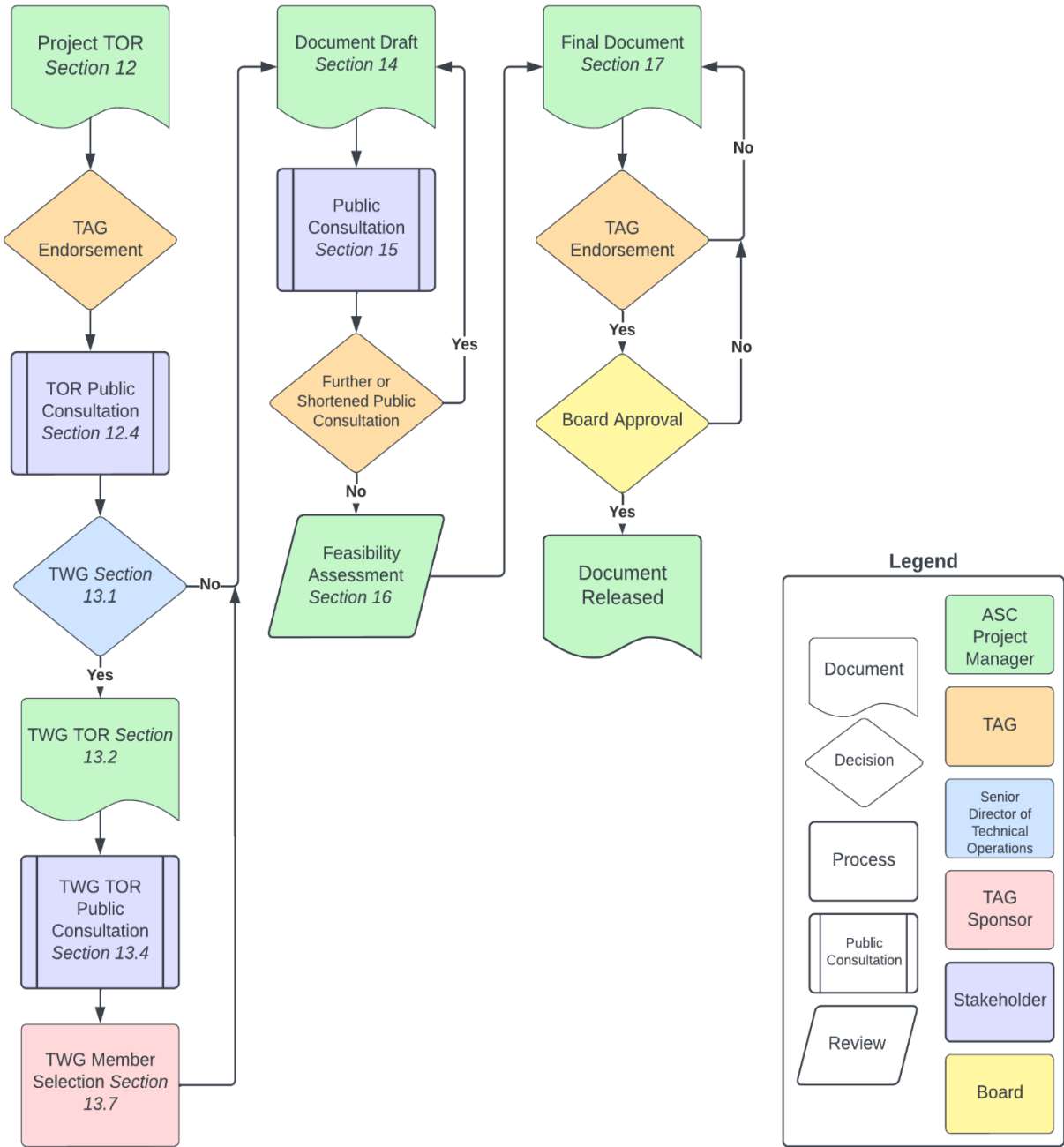| Document Name:	Programme Development and Revision Procedure	Document ID:	ASC-PRC-001	Date issued:	21/02/2024
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Appendix A - Process Flowcharts

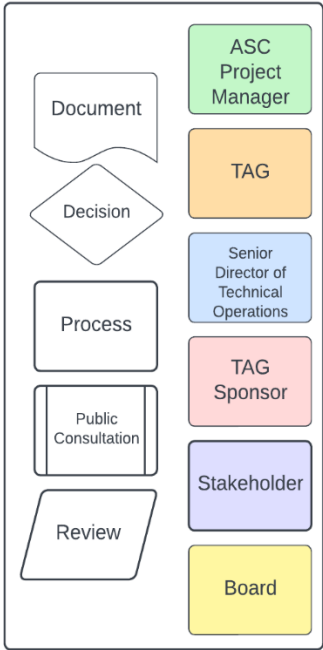## Figure 1: Urgent Revision Process

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Figure 2: Substantive Changes and Development Process

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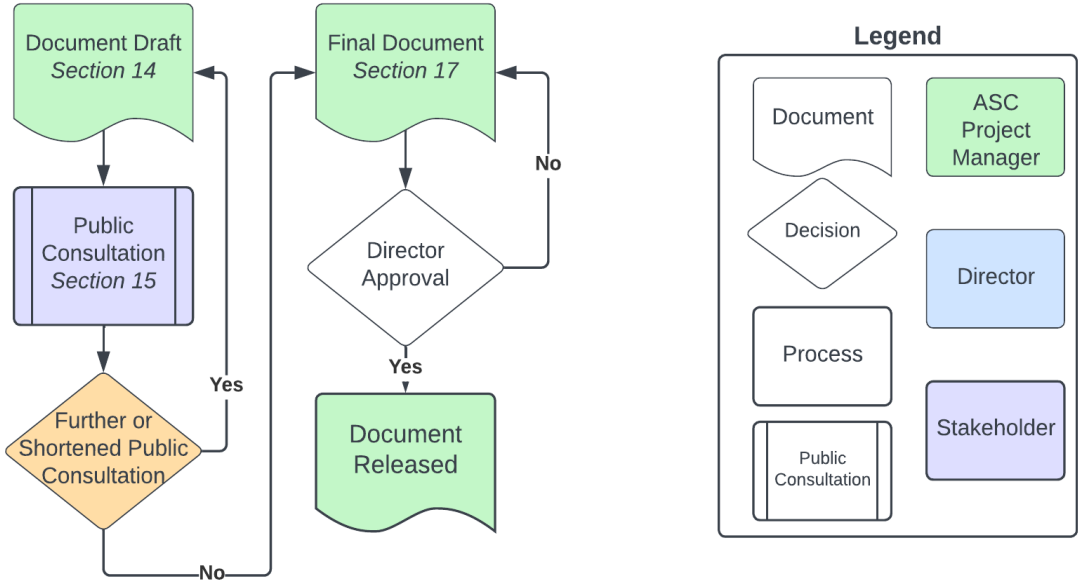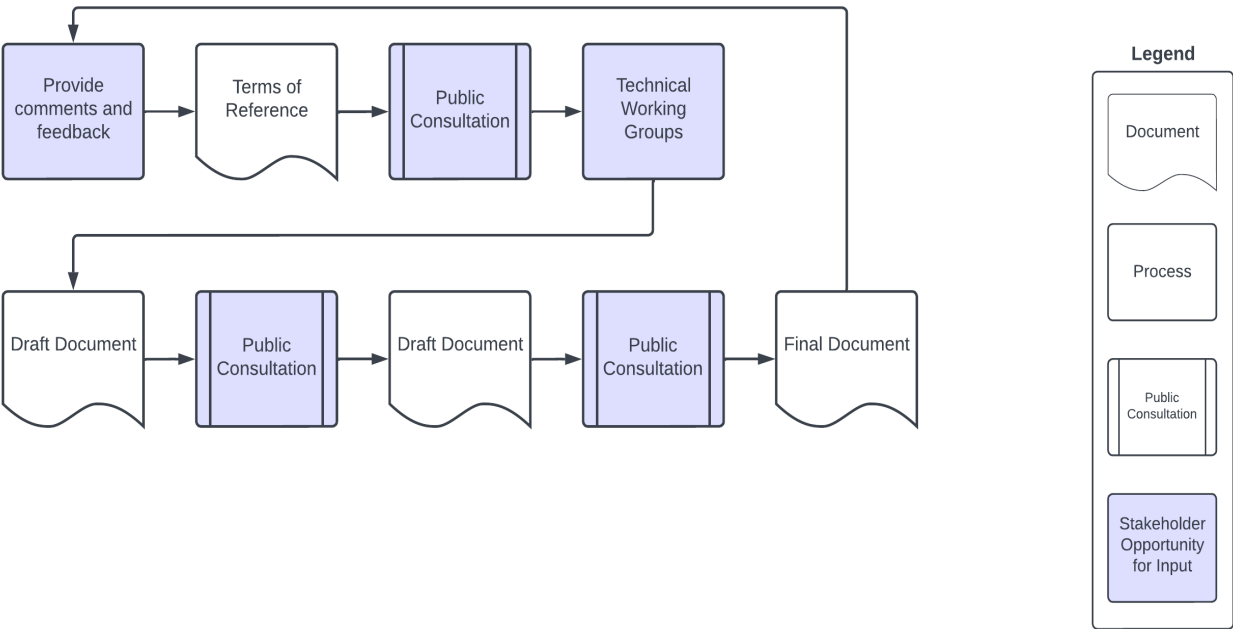## Figure 3: Non-substantive Changes and Development

Figure 4: Stakeholder Opportunities to Provide Input

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Appendix B - Acronyms

Acronym	Term
ASC	Aquaculture Stewardship Council
CAB	Conformity Assessment Body
CAR	Certification and Accreditation Requirements
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
QA	Question for Interpretation
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TOR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Technical Working Group
UoC	Unit of Certification
VR	Variance Request

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Appendix C – Terms and Definitions

The definitions applicable to this document are also available through ASC's Vocabulary Portal.

Term	Definition
Consensus	General agreement characterised by the absence of sustained opposition to substantial issues by any important stakeholder group. Consensus should be the result of a process seeking to consider the views of interested stakeholders, particularly those directly affected, and to reconcile any conflicting arguments. It need not imply unanimity.
Metric	A quantifiable measure for performance levels within an ASC requirement.
Non-substantive changes	Changes that have no significant impact in the implementation of an ASC requirement such as clarifying language, grammar, or administrative corrections that do not trigger an urgent revision.
Question for Interpretation (QA)	An interpretation of the language or the intent of an indicator or a requirement.
Stakeholder	A person, group, or organisation that has direct or indirect stake in an organisation because it can affect or be affected by the organisation's actions, objectives, and policies.
Standard	Document that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for products or related processes and production methods, with which compliance is not mandatory.
Substantive changes	Changes in the intent or performance level that will have a significant impact in the implementation of an ASC requirement that do not trigger an urgent revision.
Urgent revision	Rapid revision made to a document based on legal, regulatory, operational practice or scientific changes, or based on restriction in market uptake.
Variance Request (VR)	Request to adapt an ASC requirement to a unique local circumstance whilst adhering to the original intent.

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