




Requirements for Certification Bodies Offering Certification Against the Criteria of Responsible Fishing Vessel Standard (RFVS)

Issue 1.5


25-January-2024

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1.0 Standards Background and Program Overview

1.1 Global Seafood Alliance (GSA) (Standards Owners)

The Global Seafood Alliance (GSA) is an international, non-profit 501c 6 corporation registered in Delaware, USA with principal offices based in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. It is dedicated to advancing environmentally and socially responsible seafood production.

1.2 Best Seafood Practices – Program Administer

Best Seafood Practices is a division of the GSA, with headquarters office located in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, USA. Best Seafood Practices administers the RFVS program on behalf of GSA.

1.3 Objective of the GSA RFVS Standard

The Responsible Fishing Vessel Scheme (RFVS) is a voluntary vessel-based program certifying high standards of operational practices relating to crew safety and welfare on board fishing vessels. The RFVS is an assurance tool to help this sector showcase industry-agreed best practice through independent, third-party auditing. The RFVS is applicable to all types of commercially licensed fishing vessels and shall be applicable globally, subject to them meeting the scope and eligibility criteria detailed in this document. The overall objective for the RFVS shall be:

“The Responsible Fishing Vessel Standard enables fishing operations to provide assurance of decent working conditions and operational best practice from the catch to the shore.”

The RFVS is underpinned by two core principles:

Core Principle 1: Vessel Management & Safety Systems

Core Principle 2: Crew Rights, Safety and Wellbeing


A vessel applicant that complies with these principles shall enhance the long-term viability of the seafood industry. Application to and certification of applicants to the RFVS Standard is not mandatory.

As changes are made to this document Certification Bodies shall be given 30 days to make necessary changes and adaptations. The time allocated to CBs in developing countries shall be 60 days and with due consideration to capacity building by the BSP Management.

1.4 Standards Development and Ownership

The RFVS has a robust Governance Structure designed to ensure that the RFVS Standard is fit for purpose and meets this key objective. Applicants shall be certified to the RFVS program by a certification program that has been designed to allow it to meet the requirements of ISO 17065, where applicable - conformity assessment requirements for bodies certifying products, processes, and services. The social aspects of the standard shall be assessed to a methodology that shall be in alignment with the Consumer Goods Forum Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative (SSCI) and with the FAO developing guidance on social responsibility in seafood supply-chains.

The structure of the ‘on-vessel’ audit of an applicant shall be conducted so that it is in compliance with ISO 17021 standard requirements on how to conduct an audit for parts of the standard that are applicable. The social aspects shall be assessed by using social assessment methodologies as recognized by Association of Professional Social Compliance Auditors (APSCA). This shall ensure that all RFVS certifications are conducted to impartial, credible, and transparent requirements.

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The following diagram indicates the various components of the RFVS Governance Structure. The membership of each body within the Governance Structure is determined with the objective of ensuring that individuals have adequate capacity, knowledge, and experience to fulfil their responsibilities.

Responsible Fishing Vessel Standard (RFVS) Governance Structure




The Global Seafood Alliance Board acts as the owner of the RFVS Program. The Global Seafood Alliance Board consists of twenty-four members. The full list of Global Seafood Alliance Board members is available from the Global Seafood Alliance website.

The GSA RFVS was developed in partnership with Seafish by adapting their Responsible Fishing Scheme to meet the requirements of the international supply chain. The Responsible Fishing Scheme does not exist and has been superseded by the RFVS program.

Starting from May of 2020, GSA is responsible for owning and managing the RFVS. The GSA Standards Oversight Committee (SOC) shall be responsible for overseeing future development and changes to the RFVS. The GSA SOC membership is drawn from representatives of the seafood production sectors, supply chain industry, NGO’s and Academia.

The GSA SOC shall use bespoke Technical Committees to manage the continued operational issues in relation to the RFVS program.

Each committee shall have their own Terms of Reference under which they conduct business under the direction of the GSA SOC.

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The RFVS program and all associated compliance guides and compliance resources shall remain the Intellectual property of the GSA.

1.5 BSP Program Management

The administration of the RFVS rests with the Best Seafood Practices who act as Program Administrators. Best Seafood Practices approves and contracts Certification Bodies (CB) to carry out certification of the Applicants to the RFVS Program Standard. CBs shall be categorized as either Restricted Approved or Fully Approved (See 3.3).

Best Seafood Practices is responsible for the official training of auditors and maintains a list of approved auditors from all CBs for the RFVS.

GSA shall conduct regular reviews of the operation of the program to protect the integrity and ensure compliance with the requirements of global standards including, as applicable, examples such as ISO/IEC 17065, ISO 17011, SSCL, etc. These reviews are conducted by BSP in multiple ways including internal audits, CB and auditor performance monitoring, consult with the GSA and SOC in Standards review and revision, and so forth.

1.6 Certification and Assessment Scope

Certification of applicants wishing to be assessed against the RFVS criteria is carried out by approved CBs and auditors.

The RFVS does not allow exclusions in conducting assessments of any applicants against any of the standard unless GSA has recognized as an equivalent in full or in part another vessel standard certification or national regulator certificate.

A vessel or group of vessels seeking certification against RFVS, and CBs performing assessments, shall conduct a full evaluation against all parts of the standard.

The CBs who wish to gain approval to evaluate against the RFVS shall fully understand their responsibility and role to provide assurances against this standard and how it is monitored and maintained.

These Terms of Reference shall include CB performance review and, where necessary, BSP shall draw to the attention of the CB and their Accreditation Body any matters requiring investigation or action.


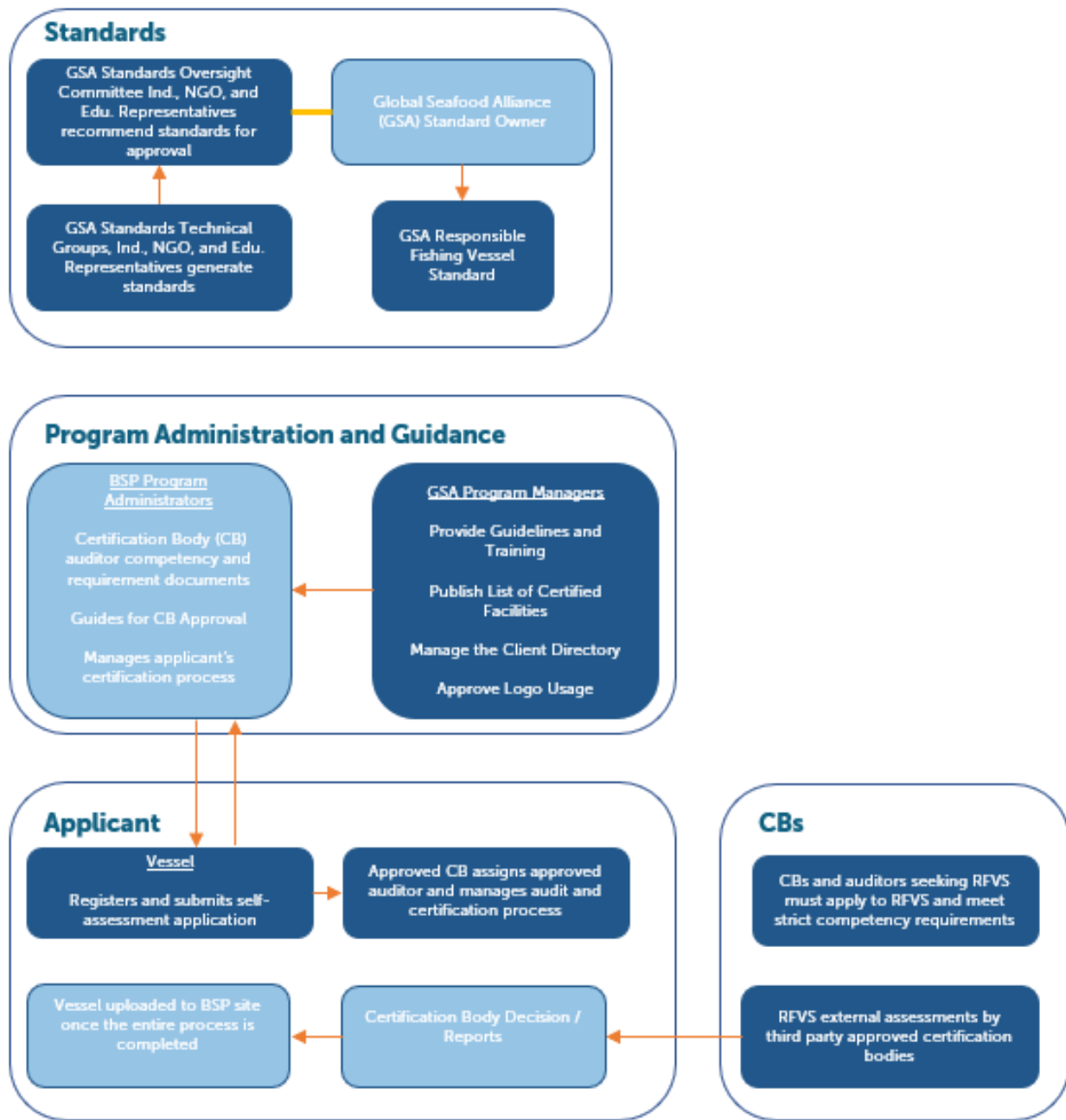
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Diagram 1 – Summary of the Structures Associated with the Certification Program



2.0 Standards Background and Program Overview

2.1 Purpose

This document has been prepared by BSP. The purpose of the document is to ensure that CBs and Accreditation Bodies are fully aware of:

- The role of the GSA as the standard holder and BSP as the standard administrator.
- The importance of the RFVS.
- Their responsibility with respect to legal liability.
- The procedures supporting RFVS and the obligation to comply with all requirements toward protection of the integrity of the scheme.

Significant efforts have been made to promote openness and transparency in the development and implementation process and to work closely with all stakeholders to ensure the integrity and robustness of the system.

It is of the utmost importance that those involved with certification and accreditation are included in the continued development and implementation of the RFVS. This document shall assist with the understanding of the aims of RFVS and its significance.

2.2 Update to Standard, Protocols and Procedures

BSP shall periodically issue new or revised requirements to this document, the RFVS, and/or the various other documents e.g., compliance guidelines, compliance resources supporting the RFVS. The program administrator, BSP, shall make the CBs aware of these changes and the CB shall ensure these are communicated to applicants and the appropriate staff, auditors (full time and contract auditors) within their organization. The latest issue of the Standard shall be on the BSP website.

The Standard shall be identified by an Issue Number. When minor changes (spelling errors, or clarification of items without changing the intent) are made to the Standard this may result in a subsequent Revision Number e.g., Issue 1 Rev. 1.

When a significant change is made to the Standard the issue number shall change.


2.3 Communications

With Certification Bodies: See 3.4.2.

With Applicants: GSA or BSP may contact applicants to request feedback with regards to the audit and certification process as part of the CB performance monitoring.

With Accreditation Bodies: GSA or BSP shall expect to have open channels of communication with Accreditation Bodies and may share some data with Accreditation Bodies responsible for the accreditation of GSA approved CBs. CBs shall be expected to facilitate open communication channels with Accreditation Bodies. This may include such items as complaints submitted to GSA that are justified, or information resulting in suspension or withdrawal of CB approval by GSA.

Accreditation Bodies are also required to share information with GSA related to CB compliance and/or notifications of suspension or withdrawal of a CB's accreditation.

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3.0 Certification Body Requirements

3.1 CB Recognition by Best Seafood Practices

CBs wishing to apply for approval and recognition to assess against RFVS shall first, as a pre-requisite, be accredited to ISO 17065 to a recognized standard BEFORE applying to BSP. CBs shall also be a recognized Member Firm with the Association of Professional Social Compliance Auditors (APSCA). Only independent third-party Certification Bodies not associated with government regulatory bodies shall be accepted as CBs to assess conformity of vessels against the RFVS. CBs wishing to seek recognition shall formally write to BSP confirming their intention and submit a registration form. If the registration meets BSP Requirements, the CB shall be sent additional materials to initiate the application process.

Note: CB application and approval shall be coordinated by BSP on behalf of the GSA.

Applicants shall meet all requirements of this and other relevant documents, including but not limited to the competency and training requirements of CB personnel and individual auditors.

Only CBs that are registered and formally recognized by GSA are authorized to conduct assessments against the RFVS. All offices that offer and make certification decisions, and/or issue certification to RFVS shall be duly registered with GSA.

The CB shall have a named representative responsible for dealing with all aspects of RFVS Certification and Accreditation and these persons shall be named on the registration form. If a named representative leaves the employment of the CB, the CB shall inform GSA in writing within 5 working days and provide the name and details of the replacement.

3.1.1 CB Office Audits

All CBs are subject to and required to participate in an office audit by BSP. The office audit shall include the CB's critical office(s) from where the CB shall manage the RFVS Program. BSP shall conduct an office audit on the CB, at a minimum, once every 3 years, thereafter. The CB may be subject to more frequent office audits as determined by risk.


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Table 1: Required KPIs by GSA for Certification Bodies during the RFVS office audit.


Task	KPI
BSP shall send the CB the NC Summary	No more than 10 calendar days from the date of the CB Office audit completion
CB shall submit all Corrective Actions related to the NCs issued by BSP	No more than 35 calendar days from the date of the audit completion
BSP is to close out the NCs	No more than 7 calendar days from the date the Corrective Action was submitted
BSP is to send the final audit report to the CB	No more than 60 calendar days from the date of the audit completion

Note: CB audits, re-audits (if any), and approval shall be coordinated by BSP on behalf of the GSA.

3.1.2 CB Quality Management System

The CB shall provide evidence to show that it has a fully documented and implemented Quality Management System, under the responsibility of a designated individual within a defined management structure, such that regular system reviews are conducted to ensure the continuous improvement in the quality of the CB services provided.

- The CB’s Quality Management System shall be documented in a quality manual and associated quality procedures related to how an RFVS applicant shall be handled, made available to all staff, implemented, maintained, and continually improved.
- The CB shall have an appropriate Quality Manual that shall include a Quality Policy Statement outlining management commitment to quality objectives.
- As part of the Quality Manual, the CB shall document a clear organizational structure, which unambiguously defines ownership and documents job functions, responsibilities and reporting relationships of all staff engaged in delivering certification services.
- The CB shall clearly identify the staff member accountable for the maintenance of the quality system.
- The CB shall have a list of everyone employed within the organization and maintain personnel records for all staff and auditors covering their qualifications, training, experience, affiliations, professional status, and any relevant consultancy to identify possible conflict of interest or risk to impartiality.
- The CB’s senior management shall demonstrate its commitment to the implementation of the Quality Management System and to review its continuing suitability, adequacy, and effectiveness.
- A description of the management of the certification process including the CB criteria, terms of reference and procedures.
- The CB shall provide an updated list of all individuals responsible for the technical review of BSP audit reports that include qualifications and practical experience.

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- The CB shall provide details of management review policy and procedures, including frequency and documented results of such reviews. Reviews shall be conducted, at a minimum, annually.
- The CBs document control procedure.
- Recruitment procedures, i.e., selection, initial training, ongoing training, and performance assessment for all relevant Certification Body personnel.
- A list of all subcontractors and a detailed procedure for their appointment, assessments, and their ongoing management.
- Procedures for actions in response to non-conformities and the effectiveness of agreed objective evidence presented, corrective and preventative actions taken.
- Procedures in relation to the use of the certificate, rules for granting, suspending or withdrawing a certificate, and the actions taken by the Certification Body should a suspension or withdrawal take place.
- Policies and procedures relating to appeals, complaints, and disputes.
- Procedures for conducting and documenting internal audits and for correction actions arising from internal audits.

CBs shall be subject to a performance review according to the CB KPIs by BSP. CBs failing to meet the expectations of the GSA Program shall be suspended.

3.2 Contractual Agreements


With Best Seafood Practices: A contract is required between the CB and BSP. The contract shall provide the basis by which a CB can undertake audits against the RFVS.

With Applicant: The CB shall ensure that a client agreement with the Applicant is in place for the authorization of the provision of the audit report and any associated information to BSP.

The CB's agreement with the vessels shall include a provision to ensure that the CB is informed of any failure to meet the RFVS eligibility clauses.

CBs shall have procedures in place to ensure the integrity of certification after notification such as complaints, appeals, potential non-conformities etc. The CB shall inform BSP of any such notifications.

With CB Personnel and Auditors: The CB shall have in place agreements with all staff involved in the certification process that obligates them, at a minimum, to the requirements listed under 3.6. The CB shall further have agreements in place with all auditors, including contracted auditors that include the items listed under 3.6.

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3.3 CB AB Requirements

There are two levels of CB approval:

- 1) Restricted CB Approval Listing – For CBs seeking accreditation extensions of scope for specific standards. This “restricted,” level allows the CB enough assessments to gain accreditation.
- 2) Full Approval Listing – For CBs which have gained accreditations for the RFVS.

The BSP Team will maintain an up-to-date list of CB Approval listings.

3.3.1 CB’s Accreditation Body (AB)

The CB’s AB shall be a member of the IAF (International Accreditation Forum) and a signatory to the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA). CBs registering/applying for accreditation to the scope for RFVS shall disclose at that time whether they are aware of any circumstances that would reasonably or may reasonably lead to the withdrawal or suspension of their Accreditation. GSA shall have an open communication channel with the Accreditation Body as part of the arrangement with the CB.

3.4 Scope of Expertise

CBs shall demonstrate that their staff has the knowledge and expertise to evaluate the RFVS requirements.


The importance of understanding these RFVS requirements for evaluation and auditor competence cannot be over emphasized and for GSA, their members, and other users, these are critical criteria, which are essential to support a legal due diligence defense.

3.4.2 Communication

BSP welcomes CB communications and information exchange. BSP shall, from time to time, seek CB input into the RFVS, related documents, and the audit process.

The CB shall warrant and communicate to BSP that:

- All offices that offer and make certification decisions, and/or issue certification to RFVS shall be duly registered with BSP.
- Each auditor is qualified to perform the audit on behalf of the CB in accordance with the criteria set out herein and other related RFVS documents and has complied with all training and competency requirements.
- It maintains an accurate record of the qualifications of each auditor and the training undertaken by such auditors.
- All information supplied to BSP and/or the AB by the CB is, or was when given, true, accurate and not misleading.
- The CB has the power and all necessary consents, licenses, and registrations to conduct their business and to enter into and perform the contract.
- The CB has read, understood, and shall comply with their obligations and requirements as laid out in this document and other RFVS program documents.

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The CB shall demonstrate that it shall carry out audits:

- With all due skill and care.
- In accordance with the current requirements of the RFVS.
- In accordance with any conditions attached to their Accreditation.
- Using only auditors who are trained and registered with BSP and meet the competencies required of RFVS auditors before undertaking such audits.

3.5 Extensions to Scope of GSA Recognition of Certification Bodies

Where a GSA recognized/approved Certification Body wishes to extend their scope to include a new RFVS issue, the request for an extension to the scope or recognition shall need to be submitted to BSP. The process for extending the scope of CB assessment is the same as for initial registration.

3.6 CB Auditor Competence

Each auditor undertaking certification audits against the RFVS shall have the appropriate qualification, training, experience, and skills to perform such audits.

The CB shall ensure that all auditors undertake training as required in accordance with the RFVS.

CB and their auditors are required to read, understand, and comply with the detailed requirements regarding competency described in the “RFVS Auditor Competency and Course Approval Requirements.”

3.6.1 Auditor Registration and Training

BSP shall require the CB to register all auditors with GSA via the program administrator BSP. The initial registration and updating of information are the responsibility of the CB.

The CB shall hold a detailed and complete competency records for all auditors undertaking RFVS audits. The CB shall maintain records demonstrating how auditors comply with the requirements for qualifications, training and experience required under the RFVS. These records shall be kept up-to-date and provided to BSP upon initial auditor approval and thereafter upon request.

CBs shall promptly notify BSP when a CB approved auditor is no longer being used or has had their approval to conduct RFVS audits suspended or revoked by the CB for any reason.


3.6.2 Auditor Qualifications, Training, Experience, and Competencies

The CB shall ensure compliance regarding auditor qualifications as detailed in the current “RFVS Auditor Competency and Course Approvals Requirements” document.

BSP reserves the right to make the final decision regarding admittance of candidates to RFVS Auditor Training courses.

Once an auditor has met the competency requirements and passed the RFVS auditor course, they are not fully approved to audit on their own until they have successfully completed a series of supervised shadow and witness audits against the RFVS to the CB’s satisfaction. The number of shadow and witness audits are as noted below.

A minimum of 2 audits (1 shadow, 1 witness), must be conducted on vessels against the RFVS for final approval of an RFVS auditor by a CB witness auditor. The witness auditor must also meet RFVS auditor competency requirements.

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CBs shall ensure that auditors conduct more than the minimum number of qualification audits where the auditor performance during shadow / witness assessment indicates the auditor is not ready for approval and needs additional training and supervision. This is particularly relevant for auditor candidates that qualified mostly or entirely on practical experience with no previous vessel auditing experience.

“Shadow” audits are audits where training, discussion and direction can be provided to the auditor in training. In these audits the auditor-in-training passively observes (without interference to the audit process and/or the outcome of the audit) the already approved BSP auditor (Lead Auditor) conducting the audit. Based on the auditing experience of the auditor-in-training, the BSP approved auditor may assign some auditing tasks to the auditor-in-training (these are sometimes called observation audits by the CBs – this varies from CB to CB). However, the responsibility of the audit entirely rests with the Lead Auditor, including audit reporting, verification of CA evidence and closure of NCs.

“Witness” audits are audits where the final sign-off of the auditor-in-training occurs so he/she can audit independently. Therefore, the auditor-in-training must conduct the entire audit by himself/herself with no direction or commentary from the witness assessor. The witness assessor only observes and documents the witness audit outcome. Based on the report with all of the information and the witness assessor’s recommendation, the CB makes the decision, if the auditor is to be signed off and given final approval to audit on his/her own as Lead Auditor (independently), or undergo more shadow audits and another sign off (witness audit).

In any case, the CB shall submit to BSP, in writing, the notice of final approval of the auditor. The CB shall also provide BSP all records pertaining to the shadow and witness audits including the final sign off documents for final BSP approval. This is required with or without request. This information is necessary for BSP to maintain verification records of the auditor competency and to update the GSA auditor status records from “pending shadow and witness” to “approved.”

3.6.3 Maintain Audit Experience

The CBs shall have in place an annual program for auditors to maintain experience in the relevant BSP Standards.

This shall include at least 2 on-vessel audits annually against the RFVS. In specific situations where this requirement cannot be met, the CB shall ensure that auditors complete at least 5 on-vessel audits against a RFVS/SSCI recognized standard (when applicable).


3.6.4 Continuing Training, Refresher Training, and Competency Monitoring

RFVS approved auditors shall attend the RFVS auditor course for refresher training at a minimum, every 3 years.

If an auditor does not attend the refresher training course by the respective deadline, they shall become inactive and suspended immediately according to the relevant dates and shall remain inactive and suspended until attending and passing the next training course. If an auditors’ credentials do lapse, they shall have to register for the next training course as a ‘new’ auditor and be subject to the new auditor pricing.

Auditors shall attend refresher training more often where the CB determines, during performance monitoring and calibration. CBs shall promptly notify BSP where an auditor is unable to attend the required refresher training by the 3-year date. In such cases the auditor may be suspended until such time as the refresher training is successfully completed, depending on circumstances.

The auditor shall be kept up to date with industry best practice, and have access to and be able to, apply relevant national laws and regulations.

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Auditors shall undergo additional training by the CB whenever a new issue of a standard is released, or as BSP stipulates. The CB shall maintain written records of all relevant training undertaken. It is the responsibility of the CB to ensure any auditor they are using undergoes proper and effective training in between attending full GSA auditor refresher courses. The CB shall demonstrate on a recurring basis that the competence assessment of its lead auditors includes:

- An assessment of knowledge of local and national labor and human rights issues and legislation
- An assessment of skills in interviewing workers on human and labor rights issues
- An assessment of knowledge of the relevant sector
- An assessment of personal attributes of the auditor, to ensure they conduct themselves in a professional manner

Training and monitoring shall also include calibration across auditors and to the Standard(s), report reviews and comparisons, and so on.

Auditors shall be subject to periodic testing by BSP against the relevant standard in addition to course attendance, at GSA discretion.

Note: All auditor application and approvals are be coordinated by BSP on behalf of the GSA.

3.6.5 Attributes and Competencies


The CB shall have a system in place to ensure auditors they employ conduct themselves in a professional manner. The following provide examples of required behavior.

- Ethical, i.e., fair, truthful, sincere, honest, and discreet.
- Open minded, i.e., willing to consider alternative ideas or points of view.
- Diplomatic, i.e., tactful in dealing with people.
- Observant, i.e., actually aware of physical surroundings and activities.
- Perceptive i.e., instinctive, aware of and able to understand situations.
- Versatile, i.e., adjust readily to different situations.
- Tenacious, i.e., persistent, focused on achieving objectives.
- Decisive, i.e., timely conclusions based on logical reasoning.
- Self-Reliant, i.e., acts independently whilst interacting effectively with others.
- Integrity, i.e., aware of need for confidentiality and observing professional code of conduct.

3.6.6 Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality, and Code of Conduct

The CB and the auditors they employ shall avoid any conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality, or ethics. CBs are bound by a contractual agreement with BSP to abide by these requirements. CBs shall also have signed agreements in place with all approved auditors that assess against the RFVS. This agreement shall include, at a minimum, the following types of topics:

- Prohibition against conflict-of-interest situations – the requirement to divulge to the CB any potential conflict of interest (such as prior consulting, prior employment, and the like) before undertaking an audit, or that may arise during an audit.

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- A policy for the CB to investigate notifications of, or incidences or potential, conflict of interest and to exclude the auditor for a specific period (at least 2 years) where appropriate.
- Prohibition against consulting and/or soliciting consultancy or other types of work with a BSP applicant prior to or during an audit, and during the certification process.
- Prohibition against conduct or remarks that may, in the view of GSA/BSP, disparage the scheme, scheme management or owner and related staff, certified vessels, or associated organizations such as the CBs, ABs, or similar.
- Prohibition against using or sharing confidential information of certified vessels, GSA, or other associated organizations.

The CB shall include in the auditor agreement at a minimum the above points, including specific code of ethics / conduct obligations as outlined herein and under point 3.6.5. Copies of these agreements shall be provided to BSP upon request.

Any potential breaches of these requirements that come to the attention of the BSP by the CB or its auditors shall be brought to the attention of the CB. Conversely, the CB is required to also notify GSA of such matters that may come to their attention. At the discretion of BSP, such instances may result in sanctions, suspension, or withdrawal of approval of the CB, auditor, or both.

3.7 Contracted Auditors

Where BSP and CB approved auditors are contracted to the CB, all the requirements detailed throughout this document relating to auditors, and CB responsibilities concerning oversight, training, and competency of auditors, etc., shall apply.

The CB shall not, at any time, use any contracted auditors that are not approved by BSP.

3.8 Auditor Safety

Where BSP and CB approved auditors are boarding a vessel, the CB shall ensure the following:


- Auditors are equipped and wearing the suitable personal protective equipment e.g. safety shoes and a personal flotation device.
- Auditors only boards a vessel when invited to do so by the person in charge of the vessel.
- Auditors do not board a vessel when it is risk assessed that it is not safe to do so.

3.9 CB Personnel and Competency

Note: This section pertains to CB administrative/management personnel involved in RFVS program management, the assignment of auditors, technical reviews, etc. Auditors are discussed separately above.

CB personnel involved in any aspect of the RFVS certification process shall be impartial and competent for the functions they perform, including making required technical judgments, framing policies, and implementing them. Clearly documented instructions shall be available to the personnel describing their duties and responsibilities. These instructions shall be maintained and kept up to date.

To ensure the evaluation and certification are carried out effectively and uniformly, the minimum relevant criteria for the competence of personnel in relation to RFVS certification shall be defined by the CB, and combined, should be equal to that of the RFVS auditor.

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CBs shall ensure that a sufficient level of understanding of the RFVS requirements exists within their organization at all times. All staff with a key role in the RFVS certification process, regardless of their specific function or name of the group (technical committee, review committee, certification committee, etc.) shall have demonstrated experience and knowledge regarding RFVS audit processes, corrective action evidence review, and the RFVS. This includes, for example, functions such as the review of audit reports, nonconformities and corrective action evidence and making decisions regarding certification and other related activities.

At least 1 member of the CB involved in the RFVS program management or administration shall attend a RFVS auditor training course and maintain a valid certificate of observation (created by BSP to acknowledge non auditor participants in the course).

Information on the relevant qualifications, training, and experience of each member of the personnel involved in the RFVS certification process shall be maintained by the CB. Records of training and experience shall be kept up to date. These records shall include at a minimum:

- Name and address.
- Organization affiliation and position held.
- Educational qualifications.
- Experience and training related to seafood, audit processes, assessment of audit reports and corrective action evidence, and any relevant RFVS records including dates, related to training and education.

Personnel utilized by the CB to conduct auditor training, calibration and competency reviews shall also demonstrate proper experience, training and competencies as described above.


Records of CB personnel training, experience and competency shall be provided to GSA upon request.

CB's shall provide to GSA an organizational chart that defines the personnel involved in the GSA scheme and their functions related to BSP. This chart shall be kept up-to-date and GSA shall be notified promptly, in writing, of any changes to such personnel.

3.9.1 Training/Shadow and Witness Assessor Training and Reporting

The CB shall ensure the personnel conducting assessment audits of other RFVS auditors have been properly trained in conducting such assessments. The CB shall further ensure that a report format, checklist, or template is provided for documenting the assessment outcomes for all relevant categories. The report shall include, but is not necessarily limited to:

- The vessel or central office where the assessment(s) is/are taking place and the type of audit (is it a training/shadow/observation audit, or a witness audit).
- Whether or not the assessment audit is the first, second, third or sign off/approval audit or surveillance audit etc.
- The name of the shadow and/or witness assessor, and of the auditor under assessment.
- Anyone else that is part of the audit team (technical expert, CB management observer etc.).
- Any areas of improvement needed.
- Audit preparation.

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- The opening meeting.
- Accuracy of interpretation of the RFVS criteria and intent.
- Accuracy and clarity of statements of conformity and non-conformity.
- Whether or not proper objective evidence was obtained and cited for both conformity and non-conformity.
- Proper assignment of non-conformance levels.
- Proper control over the audit process and time management.
- Time allocation: proper amount of time spent on site versus document review.
- Audit duration: proper amount of time spent to conduct a proper audit (not too long, not too short).
- Professionalism.
- Appropriate questioning techniques (open-minded, not leading, not threatening, not confusing).
- The closing meeting.
- Provision of a non-conformance summary to the applicant before leaving.
- Clarity of the overall report writing.
- Where the minimum required shadow/witness audits have occurred as defined by competency category previously, whether the auditor is recommended to proceed to witness auditing, or if more shadow/training audits are required.
- Where the final witness audit has occurred, whether the auditor is recommended for full approval or needs more supervised audits first.
- Other items as deemed appropriate by the CB.

3.9.2 Training/Shadow and Witness Assessor Experience Requirements


The qualifications for the person conducting the RFVS training/shadow and witness audit/assessments are one of the following options:

- An APSCA Certified Social Compliance Auditor (CSCA level)
- An APSCA Registered Auditor (RA level)

In either case, the witness assessor must have completed the RFVS Training Program administered by BSP.

3.10 Use of the RFVS Certification Mark

The BSP logo and associated claim is the property of GSA and its authorization and rules for use are controlled via an agreement between GSA and certified vessels approved by the CBs. The BSP logo can only be used by the certified vessel or group to promote their direct catching business and not associated supply chain businesses.

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3.11 Bribery and Fraud

This policy has been developed to establish controls defining ethical and acceptable auditor behavior before, during and after the auditing process. The ethics of RFVS auditors and approved CB is at the heart of program integrity.

This policy applies to all RFVS approved auditors and CBs that conduct third party assessments for the RFVS Program.

All RFVS approved auditors and CBs are expected to conduct themselves with the utmost ethical behavior. Auditors shall immediately report to their CB any attempts by an applicant to offer gifts, money, or personal favors to garner favorable results in the certification process. The CB is to immediately inform the GSA Program Integrity Department of any reported fraudulent, or unethical behavior reported by their auditor.

Auditors shall not accept offers including, but not limited to:

- Money.
- Personal favors.
- Tickets or access to events.
- Items of material value.


Any claims by an applicant regarding misconduct by an auditor, such as demanding a bribe for a favorable audit, shall be investigated by the CB in conjunction with the BSP Program Integrity Department.

It shall be the responsibility of the CB to investigate and ultimately decide on disciplinary actions for their employees, or contracted auditors who are accused and or determined to be guilty of fraud, bribery, or unethical behavior. The results of the CB's investigation shall be reported to the BSP Director of Program Integrity.

Applicants who are accused of bribery or providing false documentation to an auditor shall be investigated by the BSP Program Integrity Department with the full cooperation of the CB. Ultimately, it shall be the responsibility of the BSP Program Integrity Director to determine actions against such certified vessels accused of and/or determined to be guilty of unethical behavior, up to and including termination from the RFVS Certification Program.

Investigation results shall not be disclosed or discussed with anyone other than those with a legitimate need to know. This is to protect the reputation of those who may be accused, but ultimately found innocent of wrongdoing.

Note: All Program Integrity issues shall be coordinated by program administrator BSP on behalf of the GSA.

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4.0 The Evaluation Process

4.1 Information to Applicants

CB shall ensure the Applicant has or is provided with all relevant and up-to-date information related to the GSA RFVS including the Standard itself, any interpretation guidelines, and relevant audit policies. The CB shall also require that each applicant:

- Always complies with the relevant provisions of the certification program.
- Makes all necessary arrangements for the conduct of the evaluation, including examination of documents, access to areas, records, personnel, etc.
- Make claims regarding certification only in respect of the scope for which certification has been granted.
- Does not use its certification in such a manner as to bring the CB, BSP Management or any other associated organizations into disrepute and does not make any statements regarding its certification that the CB may consider to be misleading or unauthorized
- Upon suspension or withdrawal of certification, discontinues use of all advertising material that contains any reference thereto and returns any certification documents as required by the CB and Best Seafood Practices.

4.1.1 Applicant/Member Eligibility


If a vessel, or group of vessels, does not meet any of the Eligibility Criteria as stated within Section B of the current active issue of the RFVS, they shall not be considered suitable to apply or retain their certification for the RFVS. If, once certified, an RFVS member is found guilty by their regulatory authority to be in violation of any, or all of these eligibility criteria, their certification shall be **immediately suspended and the assigned Certification Body shall initiate the process to withdraw their RFVS certificate**. In the event of a proven guilty verdict, the applicant will not be allowed to **reapply** to the RFVS for a minimum period of **12 months from the date of prosecution**.

4.1.2 RFVS Application Requirements

The potential applicant for either a single or group of vessels shall need to review the RFVS Eligibility Criteria and complete the relevant **self-declaration form** and RFVS application form.

GSA has a non-discriminatory policy in place which assures that all applicants to the RFVS will be treated equally and no application will be prevented, **unless there is clear evidence that these Eligibility Criteria are not being met or have been breached in the preceding 6 (six) months**. It should also be noted that if an applicant has been found to be in breach of one of these Eligibility Criteria by either GSA or their assigned CB during their RFVS assessment process this will nullify the applicant's self-declaration. The CB can, following discussion with GSA, **stop an applicant's application to the RFVS**. An applicant has the right to appeal this decision and this process will be held in accordance with the GSA's program appeals process.

If no appeal is forthcoming by the applicant following a CB refusal their application shall be suspended and the applicant shall not be allowed to reapply for the RFVS for a period of 12 months from the date of their prosecution.

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If any new applicant has on their self-declaration declared that they have **had a successful prosecution** or are in the process of being prosecuted for any breaches against any of these Eligibility Criteria, they shall have their application temporarily suspended and cannot apply for certification to the RFVS for at least 6 months from the date of their prosecution or if they have pending proceedings taking place.

A Group applicant must ensure that any vessels within the group which have been previously prosecuted must be 6 months from their prosecution date or are no longer pending further investigations. This requirement remains the same if they are to be included within either the initial application group or if they are added to the group after the initial certification.


All applicant cases will be treated on an individual basis and the time frames stated are for guidance and can be increased or reduced depending on the severity of the breach to one or more of these Eligibility Criteria. GSA must be consulted on all occasions before one of these sanctions can be applied to an existing or pending application.

4.2 Evaluation Frequency

It is the responsibility of the Applicant to maintain valid certification. The certification audit frequency for audits against the RFVS is once every 3 calendar years with annual surveillance audits occurring as close to the annual date of initial certification as practicable for the CB and vessel(s).

An RFVS certificate lasts for 3 years for both Single Vessels and Group Entities, and after that period the certificate holder shall need to reapply for certification to maintain their membership in the RFVS Program. Re-certification audits shall be arranged at least three months before the certificate expiry date and shall be carried out to allow the new certification to be completed before the current certificate date expires. Where practical, recertification of an RFVS vessel or group shall be carried out by the same auditor, **but only up to a maximum of three consecutive audits** (this includes initial and annual surveillance assessments) if GSA decides to reallocate the applicant to the same approved CB.

Under extreme circumstances such as major weather events, public safety situations, natural calamities, events that do not allow auditors to travel, etc., the CBs and/or facilities must formally request the BSP for a written approval to issue a temporary extension to the recertification audit timeframe stated above and the certificate expiration date. In situations that require a permanent change to the recertification audit date, a prior written approval by the BSP Management to the CB and the Applicant is required and the Applicant's new recertification date may be changed. In such a case the new recertification date will be the new initial certification audit date going forward. The timeframe of the temporary extension is to be agreed upon by the CB and BSP Management.

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4.3 Duration of Evaluation

BSP audits shall be defined as either full- or half-day based on the time required to complete all required components of the audit. Certification Bodies shall calculate their expected audit costs in increments no smaller than a half day. The total time of an audit day shall be defined as:

- Full Audit Day – Eight hours onsite (+/- 2 hours)
- Half Audit Day – Four hours onsite (+/- 2 hours)

BSP shall insist upon the accurate assessment and duration of evaluations by CB's. Although audit duration shall vary according to audit type and the accompanying risk assessment, audit duration shall be at a MINIMUM, as follows:

- For a crewed vessel, the audit shall have a duration of up to 6-10 hours, but this shall be dependent on how well organized an applicant is with their evidence and the availability of crew members to be interviewed on the day of the audit
- For a single-handed operated vessel, the audit duration shall be up to 2-6 hours.
- For the Central Management System (CMS) audit of a Group Entity, the audit shall have a duration of up to 4-10 hours but is dependent on group size and risk complexity.
- For annual surveillance audits of certified vessels, audit duration will vary greatly based on vessel and crew size, risk rating, and the number of non-conformances assessed during the initial vessel audit. With that, surveillance audit duration shall be a minimum of 2 hours but can last up to 10 hours if necessary.

The Auditor shall, in advance of the on-vessel audit, plan to receive documentation for review. This practice should be encouraged as the time of the vessel at port is restricted and is best spent reviewing the condition of the vessel and equipment and conducting verification interviews with the vessel captain and crew members the auditor has selected.

4.4 Evaluation Format


The CB shall be mindful that the audit format consists of systems review, documentary and records review, physical inspection of the vessel, and interviews with crew and management. Time allocation during the audit shall be such as to provide sufficient and proportionate time for each activity to be carried out in full. Where appropriate, additional time may be granted for investigations. Formal requests to extend allocated audit durations must be made by the CB to BSP in writing. Such requests shall not exceed 25% of the time initially allocated for the audit in question.

CB Responsibilities Prior to the Audit:

- Review of the application to ensure completeness and to include resolution of any questions, unclear or missing information prior to assessment.
- Audit preparation, planning and scheduling, including assignment of a qualified auditor that is available within a reasonable timeframe.
- Where possible, preliminary document assessment in advance.

Required Auditing Elements:

- Opening meeting.
- Vessel assessment.

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- Review of management systems, records, documents, and procedures.
- Crew interviews.
- Management interview.
- Review of non-conformities identified and prepare NC report.
- Closing meeting.
- Provision of a non-conformance summary to the applicant and CB.
- The auditor will complete a formal evaluation report.

All sections of the Standard shall be covered by reviewing the applicant’s records and related procedures, together with an inspection of the vessel.

4.4.1 Crew Interview/Focus Group Guidelines

The crew members shall be selected by the CB auditor for interview. All crew members shall be made available for interview, and the interviews shall be conducted as follows:

- Crew members shall be interviewed either individually or in a focus group setting
- Crew members shall be interviewed in a confidential setting without any supervision or management from the vessel owner or the person ordinarily in charge of the vessel
- Crew members shall be given assurance that the information they provide will be kept anonymous and in confidence by the auditor
- Where possible, crew members shall be interviewed in their own language or through an interpreter employed by the CB. In no circumstances shall the owner or an employed representative act as an interpreter for the auditor
- The CB auditor when selecting crew members shall consider that they are representative of the crew, by characteristics such as nationality, gender, age, and length of service
- A crew interview will take up to 20 minutes if conducted on an individual basis or up to 30 minutes if a focus group of crew members is selected


4.4.2 Crew Selection Requirements

All crew members selected for interview shall be chosen solely by the auditor and not the applicant. The number of crew to be interviewed as part of this assessment will be determined using ASPCA requirements detailed below and will also be risk based dependent on a number of factors.

The total number of crew to select on a vessel shall be the square root of the total number of crew members, rounded up to the nearest whole number, minus the value determined from the risk assessment (Table 2). However, if the auditor wishes to interview more crew members for any reason, this will be allowed at their discretion. If an auditor elects to interview additional crew beyond the required number, the auditor must be able to explain their reasoning for this decision to the applicant.

The minimum number of crew an auditor must interview is 2, regardless of total crew size.

Table 2: Risk assessment calculation to determine how many crew can be removed from total interview

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Risk Factor	Total Number of Crew to Subtract from Square Root Calculation
Vessel is operating on trips lasting less than 30 consecutive days at sea	1
Vessel is operating on trips lasting less than 3 consecutive days at sea	2
All crew hold the same nationality as the flag state of the vessel	2

4.4.3 Group Entity Vessel Sample Selection Requirements

For guidance on vessel sub-sample selection for Group Entity certification, please refer to section 2.2 of the most current version of the BSP Vessel Group Program Policy and Control Document.

4.5 Non-Conformance Categories, Reporting, and Closure Time Frames

Any non-conformances identified during the evaluation must be recorded by the CB auditor as:

Critical: A critical failure to comply with a clause that relates to crew safety, vessel safety or legality, or where circumstances observed represent a risk to the integrity of the RFVS. The auditor shall immediately inform the CB who in turn shall inform the standard owner. Immediate temporary suspension of already certified vessels or groups may follow pending investigation clarification.


Major: A substantial failure to meet the requirements of a statement of intent of any essential clause within the Standard but there is no imminent crew or vessel safety risk or immediate risk to the integrity of the RFVS. The auditor shall record this in the Report Form and communicate the details to the CB. Objective evidence verifying what correction action has been taken, including addressing of root cause, shall be submitted to the CB by the applicant within 35 calendar days of the audit taking place.

Minor: Absolute compliance to an essential clause and the statement of intent has not been demonstrated. The auditor shall record this in the Report Form and communicate the details to the CB. Objective evidence verifying what correction action has been taken, including addressing of root cause, shall be submitted to the CB by the applicant within calendar 35 days of the audit taking place.

The CB auditor must record this in the audit report and communicate the details to the CB. Objective evidence which properly verifies corrective action implemented, including addressing of root cause, shall be submitted to the CB by the applicant within 35 calendar days of the last audit date of the assessment.

At the closing meeting, the auditor shall present his/her findings, and discuss all nonconformities that have been identified during the audit but shall not make comment on the likely outcome of the certification status. A written summary of the nonconformities discussed at the closing meeting shall be left with the applicant upon completion of the audit.

A written non-conformance summary shall be provided to the CB by the auditor within 48 hours of the audit completion. This time frame may be extended by 1 or 2 days under extenuating circumstances.

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The CB technical person or committee shall review the non-conformance summary promptly within the allocated timeframes.

This review shall ensure the non-conformance statements are clear, the severity/rating of non-conformity assigned is appropriate to the non-conformance statement and intent of the clause, and the auditor has not cited multiple non-conformities for the same deviation at multiple clauses.

Once the non-conformance summary has been approved by the CB technical committee, it shall be immediately forwarded to Best Seafood Practices along with page 1 of the audit report. BSP shall receive this information no more than 10 calendar days from the date the audit was completed.

All ESSENTIAL clauses with nonconformities issued during the audits shall be closed prior to granting the certification. In circumstances where the corrective action involves SUPPLEMENTAL clauses, the non-conformities shall be closed by the timeframe stated in the clause information panel (See RFVS Criteria Document for details).

4.6 Audit Reporting

The auditor shall provide a full report of the audit. The auditor shall submit the report to the Technical Manager or committee of the CB.

The report shall follow the format specified by BSP and shall provide full details of the audit. The report shall be issued whether certification is granted or not, and in accordance with BSP guidelines. The applicant who commissioned the audit owns the Audit Report, however, an agreement shall be in place between the applicant and the CB for the authorization of the provision of a report to BSP. The details/comments section of the Audit Report shall be in open text format and in English. Reports shall also include comments both where criteria have been met, and not met. Objective evidence to support both conformance and any non-conformances that have been identified shall be referenced within the report. Within the Audit Report there shall be a record of the duration of the audit and any reason for the lengthening or shortening of the duration from that of typical or expected audit duration. The Audit Report must accurately reflect the findings of the auditor during the audit.

4.7 Corrective Action of Non-Conformities


All non-conformities shall have correction action responses and objective evidence submitted of effective correction and implementation. Such evidence is essential for the audit and CB verify that the applicant has properly closed out the non-conformance and that the Applicant meets the requirements of the Standard.

Verification may take the form of further on-vessel assessment or of objective evidence such as submitted paperwork including updated procedures, records, and photographs etc. The evidence must be assessed by a technically competent member or group within the CB. Note: statements of intent alone by the applicant to correct a non-conformance do not qualify as objective evidence. For evidence to be acceptable, it must address the root cause of the non-conformity.

All evidence of corrective action must be returned, completed, and verified by the CB within a timescale defined by BSP before certification can be awarded.

4.8 Technical Review of Audit Results, and the Certification Decision Making Entity

The audit report, test result and corrective action evidence must be considered by a Certification Manager or Committee of the CB. Audit results shall undergo a technical review prior to granting, suspending, withdrawing, or renewing certification. Certification decisions shall be made by a person, persons or committee that were not involved in the vessel audit. The CB and the decision-making process shall be impartial and free from any conflict of interest to include any commercial or financial pressures or gains.

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The Certification review/decision making group/team shall be adequately staffed to ensure timely reviews and decision making. The committee make up shall be:

- Minimum 2 persons.
- At least 1 at all times having experience and competence in the GSA BSP scheme.

The review shall ensure:

- That the reviewers are impartial and technically competent to understand the content of the reports and corrective action evidence and that these data are accurately assessed to demonstrate satisfactory evidence of compliance with the scheme.
- That all requirements of the Standard have been fully covered, using any supporting notes made during the assessment by a suitably qualified auditor.
- That the scope of the report covers the scope applied for by the applicant and that the report provides satisfactory evidence that all areas of the scope have been fully investigated.
- That all areas of non-conformity have been identified, and effective corrective action has been taken to resolve these non-conformities including the addressing of the root cause.

The result of the certification decision shall be:

- Applicant meets the standard
- Applicant fails to meet the standard


The CB shall at a minimum provide the following below to BSP Office after Certification Decision as part of the audit pack as applicable to vessel types:

- NC Summary Report
- Final Audit Report
- Corrective Action Evidence and NC Closure Reports
- Certificate

4.9 Complaints, Appeals and Disputes

Complaints, appeals, and disputes brought before the CB by applicants, BSP or other parties shall be addressed in accordance with the CB procedure and in compliance with this section. The applicant has the right to appeal the certification decision of the CB. The CB shall have a documented appeals process in place that is publicly available, and ensure the applicant has a copy of that policy upon request and/or in the event of a complaint. Appeals shall be made in writing within the time frame set by the CB. Actions taken and their effectiveness must be documented.

A full investigation shall be conducted, and a written response provided by Certification Body personnel and that are independent of the auditor and Certification decision maker(s). Appeals and complaints must be resolved within the time frame set by the CB. Actions taken and their effectiveness must be documented.

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4.10 Certificate Content

The issuance of an RFVS certificate shall be subject to the approval of the CB Senior Manager who oversees all accredited certification programs and shall be sent to BSP to issue to the applicant. The certificate shall be in the BSP RFVS Standard's agreed format and shall detail:

SINGLE APPLICANT

The CB shall issue certificates that shall conform to the following content requirements:

- Name and home port address of the vessel
- Name and address of Global Seafood Alliance
- Vessel classification (by trip length)
- Standard and version number to which the certificate applies
- Scope of certification, vessel name
- Audit dates
- Certificate expiration date
- Name and address of the Certification Body
- CB Certificate/certification number
- CB Logo
- Signatures of the authorized signatory
- Vessel Identification Number
- Auditor APSCA number and the APSCA Firm number (as applicable)
- Effective date of issue of the certificate/audit report


BSP shall record all certified vessels and groups on the BSP website. If a vessel or group is not listed, then the RFVS certificate will be null and void.

GROUP APPLICANT

Additional information for the group shall be the inclusion of the Group Application name and a list of vessels within this certificate should be listed on the back of the certificate.

The Certificate shall remain the property of the CB and shall be issued subject to the applicant complying with the GSA and CB certification protocols (Client Agreement). A copy of these protocols shall be provided to the applicant at the beginning of the RFVS assessment process by their allocated CB after their completed application form and self-declaration form has been submitted to the BSP.

In the event there are substantial changes to the vessel operations or the owner status, these shall be notified in writing to GSA as this may affect the certification status for the applicant.

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4.11 Annual Surveillance Audit Procedures

In addition to the requirements related to applications and initial audits, certified single vessels and group entities will also be subject to surveillance audits annually in order to maintain certification. Annual surveillance audits are intended to measure compliance with requirements that may not be attainable at the time of certification (the supplementary clauses), RFVS criteria deemed critical to crew safety and welfare, and any non-conformances assessed at the time of the initial audit. For Group applicants, surveillance audits shall assess the current version of the Vessel Group Program Policy and Control Document and all relevant RFVS criteria against a subsample of vessels as defined in Table 8 of this document.

Surveillance audits are conducted annually and shall be scheduled so as to align as closely as possible with the date of initial certification. All certified single vessels shall be subject to annual surveillance, while a subset of vessels within a Group Entity will undergo surveillance annually.

All certified vessels and vessel Groups shall have an annual surveillance audit date scheduled within 60 days of their expiration date (Day & Month). If a vessel or Group fails to schedule an annual surveillance audit within 60 days of their expiration date, they shall be put on the “renewals in process” page of the BSP website. If a vessel fails to schedule a surveillance audit date 90 days from their expiration date (15 months after the certification issued date), the vessel or Group shall be suspended, and their certificate shall be removed from the BSP webpage.

Once a vessel has been allocated to a CB for surveillance audit, the assigned CB will have 14 days to plan and schedule a surveillance audit date. Once the surveillance audit has been conducted, the assigned CB will have 10 days from the final audit date to submit a 1st page audit report to BSP. The vessel or VGM will have no more than 35 days from the final audit date to submit all corrective actions related to the NCs to the assigned CB. Once all corrective actions have been submitted by the vessel or VGM, the assigned CB will have 7 days from the date the corrective actions are submitted, to close out the Non-Conformances. The assigned CB is to send the final audit report and notification of certificate maintenance to BSP no more than 60 days from the final audit date.

Certification Bodies will be able to assign Category 3 “surveillance auditors” to a surveillance audit when the scope does not require advanced social auditing techniques (such as crew interviews). CBs shall make this request to GSA and receive approval before utilizing a Category 3 auditor in a surveillance audit. Details on the Category 3 auditor competency and training requirements can be found in the “RFVS Auditor Competency and Course Approval Requirements” document. Category 3 auditors shall ONLY conduct approved surveillance assessments, never an initial or CMS audit.

For all certified vessels, surveillance audits shall be scheduled as either onsite or remote based on a two-part risk rating (Tables 2-5). This risk rating also determines the total number of vessels to select from a Group Entity for surveillance. The group surveillance audit sample size will not exceed the square root of the total Group size, rounded up, unless the assigned CB determines additional audits are necessary to ensure Group compliance. Risk ratings are based on the combination of country/region-level labor risk indicators of the certified vessel(s), as well as the number and type of non-conformances assessed during the initial audit. For Group Entities, the non-conformance value shall be determined by the average number of minor and major non-conformances across all vessels assessed during the certification audit. See Tables 5-8 below for the full surveillance risk assessment procedure.


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Table 5: Country/Region-Based Surveillance Risk Assessment for Single Vessels and Group Entities

Risk Criteria	Risk Score Calculation			
US State Department Trafficking in Persons (TIP) ¹	Tier 3 = +20 points	Tier 2 Watchlist = +15 points	Tier 2 = +10 points	Tier 1 = +0 points
Country is on Department of Labor List of goods made with significant incidences of known labor violations for the following categories (fish, tilapia, shellfish, shrimp and Nile Perch) ²	Yes = +20		No = +0	
Country is ranked on the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) below a score of 41 ³	Yes = +15		No = +0	
3 in 1000 or more of the country population (within which the vessel is registered to operate) are in modern slavery (Global Slavery Index) ⁴	Yes = +15		No = +0	
Overall Risk Category	Low: Sum ≤ 20	Medium: 20 < Sum < 45	High: Sum ≥ 45	

¹ <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>

² <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods>

³ <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi>

⁴ <https://globallslaveryindex.org>

Table 6: Initial Audit-Based Surveillance Risk Assessment for Single Vessels and Group Entities

Risk Level	Number of Non-Conformances Assessed at Initial Audit		
High	3 or more majors	10 or more minors	2 majors and 7-9 minors
Medium	1-2 majors	5-9 minors	1 major and 7-9 minors
Low	0 majors	<5 minors	N/A

Table 7: Final Determination for Annual Surveillance Assessment Category for Single Vessels and Group Entities

Country/Region-Based Risk Rating	Initial Audit-Based Risk Rating	Final Surveillance Risk Rating
Low	Low	Low
Low	Medium	Low
Low	High	Medium
Medium	Low	Low
Medium	Medium	Medium
Medium	High	High
High	Low	Medium
High	Medium	High
High	High	High

Table 8: Group Surveillance Audit Action Plan Summary

Surveillance Risk Rating	Surveillance Sample Size for Group Entities	Remote Surveillance Audit Allowance for Single Vessels and Group Entities ¹
Low	60% of Square Root Calculation	Always
Medium	75% of Square Root Calculation	Every other year
High	100% of Square Root Calculation	Never

¹Member vessels or the Group VGM may request onsite surveillance audits in lieu of remote at any point if that is their preference. When onsite surveillance audits are required, there is no option to require remote auditing.

All members shall be required to complete a self-declaration form (Appendix 1b) at the time of the annual surveillance to give assurance that they are still in compliance with the RFVS eligibility criteria. If a member fails to declare a successful prosecution and is in breach of these eligibility criteria they shall be removed from the program and shall have their RFVS certificate withdrawn.

Following the annual surveillance assessment, if the CB raises any non-conformances and the individual vessel fail to submit sufficient evidence or to submit all corrective actions within 35 days of the audit date, the vessel owner will be notified of their suspension and their certificate's removal from the RFVS Program. The decision to suspend the member from the Program is made by BSP and shall be communicated to the member within 7 working days of being confirmed.

For Group certificate holders undergoing surveillance assessment, if an individual member vessel's fails submit sufficient evidence or to submit all corrective actions within 35 of the audit date, the vessel operator and Group VGM will be notified of the vessel's suspension and removal from the Group's certificate. When a vessel suspension is issued to a Group, BSP shall initiate an investigation against the Group CMS to

determine if a broader suspension is required. When more than one Group member vessel within the Group’s assessment sample meets the criteria for suspension in the same surveillance audit cycle, then the Group overall shall be suspended and have their certificate withdrawn from the RFVS Program. The initial decision to suspend a member vessel from the Program is made by the CB and shall be communicated to the member within 7 working days of being confirmed.


In the event that a critical non-conformance is raised, or the Zero Tolerance Policy is breached during an annual surveillance audit, the affected vessel shall be immediately suspended, and an investigation shall be initiated by BSP which shall be conducted by the assigned CB. Pending results of the investigation, the suspension shall either be lifted or affirmed. In the case where the critical non-conformance or Zero Tolerance Policy violation is update, the certificate is removed from the certified vessel and the vessel shall be withdrawn from the RFVS Program. When critical non-conformances are raised on a member vessel of a Group certificate, the same process shall be followed with an augmented investigation by BSP to determine if the non-conformance is systemic across the Group entity. In the case that systemic non-conformance is identified by the certifying CB, the Group entity shall be suspended, and their group certificate removed from the RFVS Program.

An RFVS member or Group Entity that is removed from the RFVS program because of Critical non-conformance shall not be able to reapply for the RFVS certification for a period of 12 months. After this time period they shall have to reapply and provide documented evidence that the root cause for this Critical non-conformance has now been effectively managed to ensure that this type of non-conformance cannot occur in the future. RFVS certificate holders can also be removed from the program for confirmed violations of the Zero Tolerance Policy. For details on these offenses and the expected actions by the assigned CB, please refer to the Zero Tolerance Policy on the BSP website.

4.12 Document Control and Document Registry

The appointed CB shall review an applicant’s file 30 days after the relevant certification meeting to ensure that all records, minutes, and certificate are in place. The following records relative to assessments and certification decisions shall be maintained, either as hard copy or on electronic file, for a period of two full certification cycles (6 years) for active RFVS members and for five years if the applicant decides to leave the RFVS certification program;

- Application form.
- Site visit confirmation letter/email and site visit schedule.
- Authorization to the assessor to conduct the audit, where applicable.
- Audit report form.
- Letter/document detailing non-conformance, where applicable.
- Response from applicant on corrective actions.
- Confirmation from auditor of close out of non-conformances.
- Minutes of certification meetings / Technical reviewers’ comments.
- Letter notifying applicant of certification decisions.
- Typed assessment report.
- Certificate and acknowledgement of certification email/letter.

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The applicant's file shall be reviewed according to an internal review program scheduled and conducted by the CB's own Internal Assessor.

4.13 Changes in Certification Requirements

The CB shall give due notice of any changes it intends to make in its requirements for certification and that any time frames, where applicable, for adjustments to such changes are defined and reasonable.

4.14 Support/Tender Vessel Management

4.14.1 GSA Definition

Support or Tender Vessel

A vessel that provides assistance to other fishing vessels, such as fuel supply, fish storage, refrigeration or processing, and/or periodic transportation of fishing vessel crew to and from shore or the periodic transportation of catches to shore. Some fleets use supply vessels to plant and check FADs and to maintain them. A supply vessel can work with one purse seiner or be shared by a group. Such activity allows a fishing vessel to access a larger number of FADs than it would otherwise be able to maintain.

4.14.2 Unit of Certification for Support/Supply/Tender Vessels

Support/Supply/Tender vessels on their own **cannot apply** for an individual certification like the other fishing vessel categories within the RFVS program. **Support/Supply/Tender Vessels shall need to be assessed as a sub-contractor to an RFVS applicant or certificated member, if they have an active part within either a single or group applicant's certification to service the fishing vessels by the transportation of crew, goods or the transshipment of a vessel's catch.**


Vessels in this category shall be highlighted within the applicant's application, or RFVS members annual surveillance/recertification schedule. The Certification body shall need to allocate audit resources to ensure that these vessels meet the requirements of the RFVS conformity clauses that have this scope of vessel aligned to them. If multiple Support/Supply/Tender vessels are used within an applicant's application to the RFVS the Certification Body shall be required to conduct a square root sample assessment of these vessels as per the requirements for the RFVS group certification model.

Support/Supply/Tender vessels shall be listed on the certificate of the intended certified fishing vessel or vessel Group from the initial RFVS application, *but shall be assigned and listed with a unique Support Vessel identifier. BSP shall provide a validation letter outlining a Support Vessel's certification status;* these vessels may also agree to be listed as an RFVS subcontractor for other vessels not listed on the initial application. All assessment and certification activities shall be confined to the timelines and requirements of the original certificate, barring written approval from GSA Program Integrity to amend a Support Vessel's certification cycle.

5.0 Certification Body Performance Monitoring

5.1 CB Internal Monitoring

The CB shall have an internal audit program which includes internal audits of its Quality Management System (see 3.1.2) as well other systems, records, processes, staff and auditor competency programs, and all other aspects of the certification system to ensure compliance and consistency in the application of the RFVS(s). This internal monitoring program shall also include on site CMS and Vessel assessments, shadow and/or witness assessments of auditors.

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The internal audit frequency of the CB’s systems shall be defined and shall occur, at minimum, annually. The CB shall also conduct internal monitoring of the effectiveness of auditor training and competency requirements and assessments as described under “auditor competency” and other parts of this document. Auditor assessments shall be conducted on an ongoing basis to include monitoring of the type and number of nonconformities, competence in evaluating objective evidence, the audit process, the proper application of the RFVS, auditor calibration, training, and knowledge, and so on. These reviews shall include document and record verification, interviews, meetings, etc.

5.2 CB Performance Monitoring

The credibility of the RFVS is directly related to the competence, integrity and performance of the approved CBs and their auditors. BSP shall monitor the performance of a CB (as per the CB Review Procedure) and their auditors to ensure that the Standards are being applied consistently, auditor and CB personnel competence are properly ensured, and that reports, and certification decisions are completed accurately and timely.


Performance monitoring shall include such key performance indicators for CB and auditor competency assessments and related steps as follows:

- The review of audit reports, non-conformance ratings and certificates for quality and consistency.
- Review, upon request, of corrective action evidence accepted by the auditor and CB to close non-conformities.
- The review of auditor competency records, training and onsite shadow and witness audit records.
- Review of CB personnel competency and qualifications.
- Review of CB certification procedures and policies.
- Accreditation Body findings (when the CB is accredited for RFVS).
- Reports of suspensions of CBs under other accredited schemes.
- Audit of the CB office and witness auditing of their auditors.
- Other auditor competency assessments beyond document reviews and witness auditing described above, such as requirements for additional examinations (tests).
- Monitoring compliance with audit duration requirements.
- Unannounced or short notice audits of vessels by BSP or their designees.
- Complaint’s investigation.
- Applicant/Client feedback.

The amount or frequency of the above actions, including CB office audits, auditor witness assessments, other listed CB and auditor competency assessments, and vessel audits are applied by BSP based upon risk assessments.

Risk assessments shall include criteria such as:

- The number of Certifications a CB issues.

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- The number of audits an auditor is conducting as well as the size and complexity of the assessments.
- The results of findings from monitoring activities.
- Unusual patterns in the number or nature of non-conformities issued.
- Changes in personnel, Management or Ownership.
- Changes in RFVS content, regulatory or global standard requirements.

Where, at the discretion of BSP, a CB or their auditor performance does not comply with RFVS requirements, the CB or its auditor(s) may be sanctioned, suspended, or removed from the program.

5.2.1 Complaints Investigation

In the event that BSP is made aware of any failure or potential failure by the CB to apply the principles and criteria of any of the RFVS during the conduct of an audit or otherwise, BSP shall request a documented report of the reasons for the complaint. This report shall be referred to the CB conducting the Certification.

BSP shall require a full investigation of the report by the CB and, where applicable, the certified site and a response shall be submitted to GSA for consideration within 28 days. If the issues raised in the complaints are not addressed to the satisfaction of BSP, the CB shall be sanctioned.

BSP may, at their discretion, suspend or revoke CB approval if in BSP's opinion, the CB fails to properly address matters raised or if the CBs actions may bring the RFVS program into disrepute.

For the avoidance of doubt the CB may not undertake any audits while the contract is suspended or following any termination.

Where a complaint is considered, at the discretion of BSP, to have been justified, the information relating to the complaint may be made available to the CB's Accreditation Body when the RFVS program is accredited.

BSP shall notify the person referring the issue of the outcome of the investigation.


5.2.2 Review of Audit Reports

Audit report formats are determined by BSP and only authorized versions are to be used. A sampling of reports shall be monitored by BSP for completeness as part of the CB's performance monitoring procedures. BSP shall review and assess audit reports completed by an approved CB to ensure accuracy and consistency determined by risk assessment. BSP takes no responsibility for the accuracy of the content and information or omissions contained in each audit report, which are the responsibility of the CB.

Where audit reports do not conform to the RFVS, this shall be discussed with the CB responsible. Where BSP requests further information related to the content of a report, such as notes, records or evidence observed, this information shall be provided within 15 working days. If extra time is needed the CB is to notify BSP immediately as to the reason and time frame for completion. Approval of delay is at BSP's discretion.

5.2.3 Sanctioning, Suspension, and Withdrawal

CB performance monitoring by BSP is intended to help CBs ensure compliance with the requirements of the RFVS to protect the integrity of the program.

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Wherever a CBs performance at the discretion of BSP, falls short of a requirement this shall be brought to their attention and may lead to suspension. Monitoring of CBs for compliance may result in shortfalls in, for example, areas such as adherence to time frames, auditor competency, confidentiality, or code of ethics breaches, CB personnel competency, improperly closed nonconformities, improperly trained or competency of auditors, and so forth.

The CB shall submit a response to the deficiencies along with a corrective action plan to BSP describing steps taken or to be taken, and the time frames. The response and plan shall be provided within 15 working days of receipt of notification of BSP of the deficiency. Objective evidence of proper correction may be requested by BSP and shall be provided promptly.

Repeated failures, a failure to co-operate in the investigation of an issue, failure to address an issue satisfactorily, potential breaches of ethics, confidentiality, or the terms of agreement between BSP and the CB, or the occurrence of a significant failure which could bring the RFVS program into disrepute or other serious incidences as determined by BSP shall result in the sanction, suspension, or withdrawal of a CB.

For the avoidance of doubt the CB may not undertake any audits while the contract is suspended. The CB's Accreditation Body shall be notified (once the RFVS is accredited) of the suspension or withdrawal and the reasons.

6.0 Information Management and Security


6.1 Information Management

The CB shall undertake to immediately notify BSP in writing:

- Of any breach of the Contract by the company.
- Of any claim or threatened claim against the Company by any Applicant to which the Company has provided or is in the course of providing audit services.
- To maintain true and accurate records of each audit completed during the term of the Contract for a period of not less than 6 years from the date of such audit or 5 years if they are no longer a certificate holder.
- To supply GSA with a copy of:
 - Their records of all relevant training completed by the Auditors and their respective qualifications to undertake Audits.
 - The insurance policy taken and maintained in accordance with Clause 7.2 below.

The CB shall agree to immediately notify BSP and, where applicable, to supply a copy of the relevant report when:

- A certificate of an applicant is revoked.
- A certificate of an applicant is suspended.
- An applicant who has previously gained Certification to a Standard, fails to regain certified status after an audit and certification review, after an annual surveillance etc.
- There are significant changes in the management or ownership of the certified vessel.
- The applicant fails to comply with the RFVS eligibility clauses.

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- There is a change in the management or ownership of the CB.

6.2 Confidentiality of Information

During the period of CB approval and for a period of 3 years after termination of approval for any reason, each party shall:

- Keep all confidential information confidential.
- Not disclose the confidential information to any other person without the prior written consent of the other.
- Not use the confidential information for any purpose except the performance of their obligations under the contract

7.0 Legal and Liability Management

7.1 Legal Challenge

If the applicant becomes aware of the notification of an impending prosecution or have been prosecuted with respect to their operational legality, they shall immediately make the CB aware of the situation.


The CB in turn shall take steps to assess the implications of the situation and take appropriate actions. If there is likelihood that the legal proceedings shall lead to adverse publicity or government intervention, the CB shall immediately inform BSP of the incident.

7.2 Liability Insurance

The CB shall ensure that appropriate liability insurance is in place. This insurance shall incorporate employer’s liability, public and product liability, and professional indemnity, errors, and omissions. A copy of the relevant insurance certification shall be submitted to BSP upon request.

It is the responsibility of the approved CB to ensure that the referenced insurance covers all activities, regardless of where performed, or whether carried out directly or subcontracted. Where CBs requires subcontract auditors to carry their own insurance, it is the responsibility of the CB to inform them.

The CB shall agree to indemnify and keep indemnified the BSP from and against any costs, claims, demands, liabilities, expenses, damages, or losses (including without limitation consequential losses and loss of profit, and all interest, penalties and reasonable legal and other professional costs and expenses) arising out of or in connection with BSP certification activities, including CB and/or auditor negligence, default, or breach of the contract.

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