




Global Seafood Alliance Standards Development Process

Issue 3.1
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1.0 Structure and Process

1.1 Introduction

Recognizing the urgent need to promote responsible practices throughout the aquaculture and wild seafood industry, the Global Seafood Alliance (GSA) coordinates the development of Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP) standards to address environmental and social responsibility, animal welfare, food safety, and traceability practices throughout the aquaculture supply chain, and the Best Seafood Practices (BSP) standards to address social responsibility and worker health and safety through a voluntary certification program.

GSA's broad objective is to drive continued industry-wide improvements by setting high standards that deliver significant benefits while representing realistic objectives for the majority of operations. It is recognized that most operations will need to implement changes in their practices to comply with GSA standards, which are dynamic and respond to improved technology, better management practices, greater scientific understanding, and the emergence of new issues.

The BAP standards and certification procedures strive to be consistent with relevant international guidelines for aquaculture certification programs, such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification (2011) and the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labeling Alliance (ISEAL) Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards (2014).

The BSP standards and certification procedures will strive to be consistent with relevant international guidelines for the vessel certification program, such as the United Nations International Bill of Human Rights of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labor Organization Convention 188 working in fishing and the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labeling Alliance (ISEAL) Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards and the ISO 17065 certification protocols .


Compliance with all GSA standards is assessed by auditors supplied by independent certification bodies with training in the standards. The auditors must have relevant knowledge, experience, and credentials.

Copies of the current BAP and BSP standards and guidelines, which are copyrighted by the Global Seafood Alliance, are available free of charge in electronic format on the BAP and BSP websites.

1.2 Standards Oversight Committee

To promote broad stakeholder involvement, consensus, and transparency in the standards development process, GSA delegates the primary guidance and oversight for the process to a Standards Oversight Committee (SOC), whose members represent one-third industry, one-third non-governmental conservation and social justice organizations, and one-third academic and regulatory interests. The SOC directs the drafting of all standards by BAP and BSP Technical Committees (TC's) and reports its recommendations to the GSA Board of Directors for final standards approval.

With guidance from the GSA Board and assistance from the GSA Standards Coordinator, the SOC coordinates revisions and oversees the various processes of standards development. The SOC can recommend adjustments in the standards development process to the GSA Board and set overarching goals for BAP and BSP certification, such as including more performance metrics for consideration by the TC's.

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1.3 Technical Committees

The TC's develop the standards via separate committees for unique species groups (e.g., mollusks, salmon, and seaweed) or production process (e.g., fishing, farming, feed milling, and seafood processing). Each Standard is reviewed, revised, and voted upon by a TC composed of technical experts and representatives of those groups interested in or affected by the standards. The standards drafted by each committee are forwarded to the SOC for approval. The SOC also approves committee membership, ensuring that each committee represents a balance of stakeholders.

TC chairpersons are evaluated by the GSA Standards Coordinator and approved by the SOC based on their technical expertise, leadership experience, and communication skills. Chairpersons are required to act impartially in maintaining the orderly conduct of committee meetings and processing committee input.

1.4 GSA Standards Coordinator

The GSA Standards Coordinator works closely with the Standards Oversight Committee and Technical committee chairpersons to carry out the general administration of the standards. The SOC, Standards Coordinator, and TC chairpersons establish program goals and target dates for the key stages of public comment and publication.

The Standards Coordinator, who is a GSA employee or contractor is appointed by the GSA Board of Directors based on nominations from the SOC and other interested parties. The Standards Coordinator, helps chairpersons guide committees, advises on general standards policies, and coordinates among committees. The Standards Coordinator also helps prepare committee draft standards and related documents as needed and is responsible for assuring that all records remain on file for at least one full standards revision period, including keeping Curriculum Vitae and Conflict of Interest declarations of TC Members as needed to maintain a record of their technical expertise and affiliations.


1.5 Standards Development

GSA's Best Aquaculture Practices standards define the most important elements of responsible aquaculture and provide quantitative metrics and auditing procedures whereby adherence to those practices can be determined. By defining acceptable materials, methods, and processes, and identifying appropriate performance metrics and targets, the standards directly address food safety, environmental, social, animal welfare, and product traceability concerns.

GSA's Best Seafood Practices standards defines the most important elements of responsible practices on board fishing and tender vessels with specific requirements on social compliance and provides quantitative metrics and auditing procedures whereby adherence to those practices can be determined. By defining acceptable materials, methods, and processes, and identifying appropriate performance metrics and targets, the standards directly address social concerns.

Care is taken to apply "SMART" criteria in the drafting of standards so they can be applied objectively in the field. The SMART acronym identifies the characteristics of well-designed standards: Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, and Time-related.

Working with the Standards Coordinator, the SOC strives to ensure that the standards development process is consistent with relevant FAO and ISEAL guidelines. As part of this effort, the SOC and the Standards Coordinator ensure that the overall process, including procedures and public input opportunities, are made transparent to the public through the GSA, BAP, and BSP websites. The SOC will also develop a formal public appeals process.

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1.5.1 Development Process

The stages in the preparation of new or updated Best Aquaculture Practices standards or revisions are listed below. The Standards Coordinator manages and facilitates the flow of information throughout the development process.

1. Preliminary draft
2. Committee draft or drafts
3. Public comment draft
4. Final committee draft
5. Standards Oversight Committee review
6. Global Seafood Alliance Board of Directors approval

Preliminary drafts are developed by TC chairpersons with the assistance of expert consultants or GSA technical staff members, and the Standards Coordinator. Development of preliminary drafts involves reviews of existing best management practices and standards from outside bodies and may include draft material submitted by other interested organizations or individuals.


Committee drafts incorporate TC's changes that arise from their examination of preliminary drafts and must reflect consensus among the committee members. Copies of the drafts are provided to the SOC, which can suggest changes through the Standards Coordinator or Technical Committee chairpersons. If there are many contentious points or points requiring further investigation or testing, there may be several committee drafts. Completed committee drafts pass to the Standards Coordinator in preparation for public comment. If a consensus cannot be achieved among the committee the Technical Committee shall vote on approval of this draft with a majority vote of no less than 75% of Technical Committee members voting. The Technical Committee Chair shall be a non-voting party except in the event of a tie, where they will cast the final vote.

When votes are conducted through email, a period of two weeks (14 calendar days) will be given for response. Only votes received during this two-week period will be counted when establishing a quorum. The Standards Coordinator shall be responsible for establishing the timeline.

Public comment drafts are made available for 60 days of public comment on the BAP or BSP websites. In addition to the public, members of the SOC are encouraged to submit comments. All comments received are carefully considered by the appropriate TC's, although not all submissions are incorporated into the standards. Properly submitted comments will receive responses from the committee chairpersons or the GSA Standards Coordinator, with the assistance of GSA technical staff as needed. The comments and responses will be posted on the BAP/BSP website(s).

Final drafts incorporate the public comment changes upon which the TC members agree. Final drafts are approved by a positive vote by at least 75% of a quorum of 60% or more of the committee membership.

Approved final drafts then proceed to SOC review, in which the proposed standards are examined and voted upon by the members of the SOC. The SOC must endorse the drafts with at least 80% approval in a vote by a minimum of ten SOC members or return the drafts for further revision to the TC, along with clear explanation of the reasons the SOC did not approve the draft. At least three members from each main stakeholder group must participate in approval votes. The SOC cannot modify the standards or apply "line-item vetoes." The Standard Coordinator is also notified of the status of final drafts.

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When votes are conducted through email, a period of two weeks (14 calendar days) will be given for response. Only votes received during this two-week period will be counted when establishing a quorum. The Standards Coordinator shall be responsible for establishing the timeline.

When final drafts are approved by SOC ballot, they are forwarded for GSA Board of Directors approval. The SOC must report its decisions to approve or return final drafts for further revision to TC's within 30 days. If a strong minority position related to the approved standards is expressed, it will also be reported to the board and posted on the BAP/BSP website(s).

The GSA Board of Directors must endorse the final standards with a two-thirds vote of approval or return the standards to the SOC. The board cannot modify the standards or apply "line -item vetoes." Once approved by the GSA board, the completed standards are forwarded to the GSA management office for implementation.

1.6 New Standards and Standards Revisions

The priority of new standards development is determined by GSA with guidance from the SOC and the Standards Coordinator. The preliminary development of new standards incorporates input from TC's that includes framing the key elements associated with a given process for one or more species or product type.

The Standards Oversight Committee works with the TC's to annually review the GSA standards and to make appropriate changes at least every four years. The committees attempt to incorporate innovations and progress generated in a range of seafood forums and international conventions, such as meetings of the International Labor Organization, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Maritime Organization, United Nations Human Rights Council, SEA Forum for Fishers, and the Seafood Task Force, the World Aquaculture Association, etc. Regular reviews ensure the GSA standards represent current international best practices.


Although one goal of the continuous improvement process for the GSA standards is to include additional performance metrics, appropriate metrics may not currently be established for all elements of GSA certification. GSA will continue to evaluate pertinent data collected via certification inspections and associated record reviews.

When minor errors are found in published standards documents, or clarification to existing clauses are necessary, proposed corrections are considered by the SOC and appropriate TC chairpersons, who have the option to enact the corrections or pass them on for further committee review. When new material or other significant changes to existing standards are presented, the complete review and approval process must be followed.

Over time, less-relevant standards may be considered for withdrawal. In such cases, the intention to withdraw a standard will be announced well in advance to allow comment. Where there is sufficient interest, the standard may be revised and retained.

1.7 GSA Standards Development Process

1. GSA highest level of senior leadership requests standard from the Standards Oversight Committee.
2. SOC reviews request and works with Standards Coordinator to assign development of preliminary draft.

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3. Standards Coordinator coordinates with TC chairperson to form TC, if needed, or direct existing TC to review preliminary draft.
4. TC returns revised committee draft to Standards Coordinator, and SOC reviews committee draft.
5. Standards Coordinator formalizes Public Comment draft documents with GSA technical staff and passes on for 60-day Public Comment period.
6. Submitted Public Comments are managed by TC chairperson or the Standards Coordinator and considered by Technical Committee.
7. TC revises committee draft and completes final draft.
8. TC votes on final draft and returns approved version to Standards Coordinator and SOC.
9. Standards Coordinator and SOC review final draft.
10. SOC votes on final draft and sends approved standards to GSA Board of Directors or sends draft back to TC for additional work.
11. GSA Board approves standard and forwards to GSA management office for implementation.

2.0 Committee Selection, Duties and Functions

2.1 Introduction

To promote broad stakeholder involvement, consensus, and transparency in the development of the GSA standards, the GSA delegates primary oversight for the process to a Standards Oversight Committee (SOC). The SOC directs the drafting of all standards by TC's and makes recommendations to the GSA Board of Directors for final standards approval.

The diverse composition of the SOC and TC's provides broad technical and stakeholder representation. GSA's Standards Coordinator works with all committees in a coordinating role within the standards development process.

Committee chairpersons manage committee activities and ensure their members' work falls within project guidelines. New projects commence only after they are endorsed by the GSA Board of Directors with guidance from the SOC to ensure adequate resource allocation and avoid duplication among committees and external organizations.


2.2 Committee Representation

2.2.1 Standards Oversight Committee

The SOC is composed of technical experts and representatives of those groups interested in or affected by the BAP standards. Care is taken to ensure a balance among the different sectors of interest.

The target composition of the Standards Oversight Committee includes a mix of producer organizations, trade groups, regulatory bodies, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders:

- Five representatives from relevant seafood producers or regional seafood industry associations from around the world
- Five representatives from relevant conservation or social justice non-governmental organizations

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- Five representatives from relevant academic, regulatory, or policy groups.

Initially, members of the SOC will be nominated by stakeholders and appointed by the GSA Board of Directors to serve three-year terms with a maximum of four consecutive terms, i.e., max 12 years in total. Terms will be staggered so that no more than four members come up for potential replacement during any particular year.

After the SOC is formed, its members will nominate candidates to fill vacancies who must then be approved by the GSA board. The SOC will also establish a process for public nominations.

Individuals are appointed to the SOC as representatives of companies, organizations, or other entities. They serve until the completion of their appointed terms and may only be replaced upon mutual agreement between the GSA Board and the organizations they represent. Companies or organizations can be represented in successive terms but may not have more than one representative on the SOC at any given time. In cases where an individual acting as a representative of a particular stakeholder category leaves the employ of the organization they were representing, the GSA may, at its sole discretion, either request the original organization to nominate a new representative, or the GSA can elect to retain the individual as a continuing member of the SOC, as long as the individual’s new organizational affiliation does not represent a change in stakeholder category.

2.2.2 Technical Committees

Each Technical Committee (TC) is composed of technical experts and representatives of those groups interested in or affected by the standards. Care is taken to ensure a balance among the different sectors of interest.

Although not rigidly defined, the target composition of the TC’s includes a mix of varied stakeholders:

- Four representatives from relevant seafood producers or regional seafood industry associations from around the world
- Four representatives from relevant conservation or social justice non-governmental organizations
- Four representatives from relevant academic, regulatory, or policy groups.


The Standards Coordinator works with the TC chairpersons in recruiting TC members to participate in the standards development process. Nominations from the SOC are welcome. The SOC must approve in total the slate of proposed committee members with at least 80% approval in a vote by a minimum of ten SOC members or ask the Coordinator to seek additional nominees. At least three members from each main stakeholder group must participate in approval votes.

Committee members serve an initial term of three years or until the work of the committee is completed, as determined by the Standards Coordinator in concert with the SOC. Committee members may be reappointed for two additional terms.

2.2.3 Committee Chairpersons

Effective chairpersons are key to the success of voluntary committees. These individuals must be energetic, credible, knowledgeable, solution-oriented, and statesmen.

The principal tasks of committee chairpersons are to manage committee meetings and ensure that committee members adhere to the defined process in the preparation of standards. Chairpersons encourage committee members to prepare material thoroughly before meetings, work efficiently, adhere to work programs, and be mindful of target dates and priorities. They also assist in providing responses to comments received during the public comment periods for GSA standards.

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Chairpersons have dual roles to communicate the interests of the groups they represent as well as act as neutral facilitators for committee discussions. Chairpersons must declare their interests and make it clear when they put forward the views of their groups as opposed to their normal neutral positions as chairs. In discussions where there could be conflicts of interest, chairpersons can ask the GSA Standards Coordinator or other committee members to chair meetings.

Chairpersons can overrule trivial meeting concerns but should always consider the minority voices on committees. If differing views are irreconcilable, chairpersons can seek advice from the GSA Standards Coordinator.

The Standards Oversight Committee chairperson will initially be appointed by the GSA Board of Directors for a period of one year. In subsequent years, the chairperson will be elected by SOC committee members.

Technical Committee chairpersons are recommended by the GSA Standards Coordinator and must be approved by the SOC with at least 80% approval in a vote by a minimum of ten SOC members. At least three members from each main stakeholder group must participate in approval votes. TC chairpersons serve an initial term of three years or until the work of the committee is completed. They may be reappointed for two additional terms.

Chairperson nominees should carefully consider the resource requirements associated with the role before accepting their positions. These include making time for attending meetings as well as considerable communications outside meetings with committee members, the SOC, and BAP Coordinator.

2.2.4 GSA Standards Coordinator


The GSA Standards Coordinator, a staff member or contractor of the Global Seafood Alliance, works largely as a conduit of information between the SOC and TC's. In addition to assisting chairpersons with committee membership, the Standards Coordinator confers with committee chairpersons in setting progress goals and schedules. The Standards Coordinator helps chairpersons guide committee members and coordinates among committees. He or she may participate as needed in technical discussions as an active, but non-voting participant. The GSA Standards Coordinator may assist in preparing committee draft standards and related papers to enhance consistency among the various standards. The final formatting and presentation of public comment drafts and final standards are the shared responsibility of the Coordinator and GSA technical staff members.

The GSA Standards Coordinator is also generally responsible for inquiries from the public regarding the GSA standards and certification. Depending on the nature and complexity of the inquiries, he or she may enlist the assistance of the SOC, committee chairpersons, or other committee members in developing appropriate responses.

The Standards Coordinator is chosen by the GSA Board of Directors and employed by the Global Seafood Alliance as either a full-time employee or as a contractor. If the position of Coordinator becomes vacant, the board appoints a replacement. In such an event, the SOC is encouraged to nominate candidates for the position.

2.2.5 Committee Member Commitment

Individual committee members review issues, vote on drafts, and consider proposals for both new standards and revisions to existing standards. They participate in meetings whenever possible to provide technical input on standards. During meetings, they must impartially consider other members' positions as well as public comments on draft standards. Following public comment, committee members vote on drafts of standards.

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All members of committees must declare any conflicts of interest they may have in the outcomes of committee decisions. During standards development, committee members are encouraged to interact with colleagues and other stakeholders to gather their viewpoints. However, inquiries from the media should be directed to the GSA Standards Coordinator.


2.2.6 Committee Meetings

Meetings are scheduled on a regular basis by committee chairpersons and the GSA Standards Coordinator. To allow committee members to properly review materials, meeting agendas and associated documents are circulated electronically two weeks prior to meetings.

Whenever practical, meetings are held via audio conferencing and other electronic methods that include the online delivery of standards drafts and other documents. The Global Seafood Alliance minimizes the number of face-to-face meetings. Venue selection considers the elements of cost and convenience to committee members and may often overlap with other international aquaculture meetings.

Each SOC committee member can select an individual to represent him/her and vote by proxy at meetings. These individuals are counted when determining a quorum.

Committee meetings are normally only open to members. Requests for attendance by visitors require the prior approval of the Standards Oversight Committee, GSA Standards Coordinator, or the appropriate committee chairpersons.

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