

BAP response to the key recommendations in the SeaChoice Report: External Accountability in Aquaculture Certifications

The BAP program acknowledges the importance of external accountability and thanks SeaChoice for its detailed report and recommendations for areas of improvement, which will be brought to the attention of the Standards Oversight Committee. The following comments are provided in response to the four recommendations.

Recommendation

1. Ensure all new standards, revisions and auditing guidelines are subjected to a public consultation.

New and revised standards should be vetted through stakeholder consultation as per the standard development procedure. Consultation documents should be expanded to include publicly available Terms of Reference detailing the standard scope, geographic application, standard justification and the objectives/outcomes that the standard or revision is designed to achieve. Revisions to the auditing guidelines should also be consulted on.

The BAP program is committed to stakeholder consultation on all new and revised BAP standards. The BAP website has 11 such consultation exercises freely downloadable (<https://www.bapcertification.org/Standards>) that include the stakeholder comments followed by BAP responses and changes made in response to the comments. The next set of comments and responses will shortly be published when the BAP Farm standard 3.0 is released. The next public consultation exercise will be for the BAP Hatchery and Nursery Standard.

Recommendation

2. Include stakeholder consultation in the auditing process, including making audits and certificates available. Civil society stakeholders should be given the opportunity to provide local expertise and knowledge. Publishing audit reports with conformance results would provide assurance to stakeholders. Publishing certificates will make the certifying bodies' contact details available to stakeholders, enabling them to provide input to the audits in a timely manner. The confidentiality requirements outlined in the ISO/IEC 17065 standard do provide the flexibility to establish expectations that audit information will be published, as per 4.5.1 "The certification body shall inform the client, in advance, of the information it intends to place in the public domain".

BAP does not make audit reports public. This stems from the confidentiality requirements specified in the ISO 17065 standard that the BAP certification program (and many others) is based on.

However, certified farms are free to share their reports with interested parties or publish them as they wish. When interpreting ISO 17065 Clause 4.5.1, we take into consideration the context of the quote provided by SeaChoice:

ISO 17065, Clause 4.5.1 states: *“Except for information that the client makes publicly available, or when agreed between the certification body and the client (e.g. for the purpose of responding to complaints), all other information is considered proprietary information and shall be regarded as confidential. The certification body shall inform the client, in advance, of the information it intends to place in the public domain.”*

This clause reinforces the confidentiality of the audit information.

Recommendation

3. Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation program. Define the Theory of Change. The M&E process should include stakeholder consultation. Results should help demonstrate to stakeholders the certification’s impacts and effectiveness measured against the Theory of Change.

The BAP program is developing its Monitoring and Evaluation program. Its Theory of Change is based on the work of Dr Michael Tlusty: (Tlusty M. F. (2012) Environmental improvement of seafood through certification and ecolabelling: theory and analysis. *Fish and Fisheries* 2012, 13(1), 1-13). In addition, an independent report on the social impact of the BAP program is due to be published shortly that includes a revised and more detailed Theory of Change.

Recommendation

4. Adopt a third-party dispute settlement mechanism. Internal and external stakeholders should be able to dispute and submit complaints that are investigated through a fair and independent third-party mechanism to ensure conflict of interest is removed.

The BAP program is benchmarked to GSSI and has a Complaints, Appeals and Disputes mechanism that complies with GSSI benchmarking requirements:

<https://www.bapcertification.org/WhatWeDo/ProgramIntegrity>

GSSI conducts office audits of the BAP program, during which a sample of complaints and complaint handling procedures are reviewed.

BAP, 5th February 2021