



global aquaculture
the alliance

Best Aquaculture Practices Standards Development

Structure, Process

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1. Introduction

Recognizing the urgent need to promote responsible practices throughout the aquaculture industry, the Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA) coordinates the development of Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP) standards for the quantitative evaluation of production and management practices throughout the aquaculture production and distribution process. The standards address environmental and social responsibility, animal welfare, food safety, and traceability in a voluntary certification program.

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

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

Compliance with the BAP standards is determined by evaluators accredited by Aquaculture Certification Council, Inc. (ACC), a nonprofit organization headquartered in Crystal River, Florida, USA. The evaluators must have relevant knowledge, experience, and credentials. ACC is currently undergoing International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Guide 65 accreditation for certification bodies.

Copies of the BAP standards and guidelines, which are copyrighted by the Global Aquaculture Alliance, are currently available free of charge in electronic format on the ACC website.

2. Standards Oversight Committee

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

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

3. Technical Committees

The BAP Technical Committees develop standards via separate committees for specific species or species groups. Each BAP standard is reviewed, revised, and voted upon by a Technical Committee composed of technical experts and representatives of those groups interested in or affected by the standard. The BAP standards drafted by each committee are forwarded to the SOC for approval. The SOC also approves committee membership, insuring that each committee represents a balance of stakeholders.

Committee chairpersons are evaluated by the BAP 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.

4. BAP Standards Coordinator

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

The coordinator — who is a Global Aquaculture Alliance employee appointed by the GAA Board of Directors based on nominations from the SOC and other interested parties — helps chairpersons guide committees, advises on general standards policies, and coordinates between committees. The BAP Standards Coordinator also helps prepare committee draft standards and related documents as needed.

5. Standards Development

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

Care is taken to apply "SMART" criteria in the drafting of BAP 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 BAP 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 BAP Standards Coordinator ensure that the overall process, including procedures and upcoming public input opportunities, is made transparent to the public through the GAA or BAP website. The SOC will also develop a formal public appeals process.

Development Process

The typical stages in the preparation of new Best Aquaculture Practices standards or revisions are listed below. The BAP 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 Aquaculture Alliance approval

Preliminary drafts are developed by Technical Committee chairpersons with the assistance of expert consultants or GAA technical staff members, and the BAP 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 Technical Committees' 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 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 BAP Standards Coordinator in preparation for public comment.

Public comment drafts are made available for 60 days of public comment on the BAP or GAA website. In addition to the general public, members of the SOC are encouraged to submit comments. All comments received are carefully considered by the appropriate Technical Committees, although not all submissions are incorporated into the standards. Those who properly submit comments receive responses from the committee chairpersons. The comments and responses are also posted on the BAP or GAA website.

Finals drafts incorporate the public comment changes upon which the Technical Committee 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 **Standards Oversight Committee 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 75% approval in a vote by a minimum of eight SOC members or return the drafts for further revision to the Technical Committee, along with clear explanation of the reasons the SOC did not approve the draft. At least two members from each main stakeholder group must participate in approval votes. The SOC cannot modify the standards or apply "line item vetoes." The Standards Coordinator is also notified of the status of final drafts.

When final drafts are approved by SOC ballot, they are forwarded for **GAA Board of Directors approval**. The SOC must report its decisions to approve or return final drafts to Technical Committees 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 GAA or BAP website.

The GAA 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 board, the completed standards are forwarded to the Aquaculture Certification Council for implementation.

6. New Standards, Standards Revisions

The priority of new standards development is determined by GAA with guidance from the SOC and BAP Standards Coordinator. The preliminary development of new standards incorporates input from Technical Committee that includes framing the key elements of culture for a given species.

The Standards Oversight Committee works with the Technical Committees to annually review the BAP standards and appropriately improve them at least every three years. The committees attempt to incorporate innovations and progress generated in a range of aquaculture forums, including the World Wildlife Fund Aquaculture Dialogues. Regular reviews ensure the BAP standards represent current international best practices.

Although one goal of the continuous improvement process for the BAP standards is to include additional performance metrics, appropriate metrics are not currently known for all elements of BAP certification. GAA will coordinate with the Aquaculture Certification Council in evaluating pertinent data collected via certification inspections and associated record reviews.

The BAP standards completed before the formation of the Standards Oversight Committee will be reviewed by the SOC, whose members can recommend changes and updates to the standards. The goal is for these reviews to be completed by 2010.

When minor errors are found in published standards documents, proposed corrections are considered by the SOC and appropriate Technical Committee 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.

7. BAP Standards Development Process

1. GAA Board of Directors requests standard from Standards Oversight Committee.
2. Oversight Committee reviews request and works with BAP Standards Coordinator to assign development of preliminary draft.
3. Standards Coordinator coordinates with committee chairperson to form Technical Committee, if needed, or direct existing committee to review preliminary draft.
4. Technical Committee returns revised committee draft to Standards Coordinator. Oversight Committee also reviews committee draft.
5. Coordinator formalizes draft documents with GAA staff and passes on for Public Comment.
6. Comments managed by Technical Committee chairperson and considered by committee.
7. Technical Committee revises committee draft and completes final draft.
8. Technical Committee votes on final draft and returns approved version to Standards Coordinator and Standards Oversight Committee.
9. Standards Coordinator and Oversight Committee review final draft.
10. Oversight Committee votes on final draft and sends approved standards to GAA Board of Directors, or sends draft back to Technical Committee for additional work.
11. GAA Board approves standard and forwards to Aquaculture Certification Council for implementation.



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Best Aquaculture Practices Standards Development

Committee Selection, Duties, Functions

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2. Committee Representation
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6. Committee Meetings

1. Introduction

To promote broad stakeholder involvement, consensus, and transparency in the development of the Best Aquaculture Practices standards, the Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA) delegates primary oversight for the process to a Standards Oversight Committee (SOC). The SOC directs the drafting of all standards by BAP Technical Committees and makes recommendations to the GAA Board of Directors for final standards approval.

The diverse composition of the SOC and BAP Technical Committees provides broad technical and stakeholder representation. GAA's BAP 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 GAA Board of Directors with guidance from the SOC to ensure adequate resource allocation and avoid duplication among BAP committees and external organizations.

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2. Committee Representation

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 trade groups, regulatory bodies, academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and other stakeholders:

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

Initially, members of the SOC will be nominated by stakeholders and appointed by the GAA Board of Directors to serve three-year terms with a maximum of three consecutive terms. Terms will be staggered so that only four members come up for potential replacement each year.

After the SOC is formed, its members will nominate candidates to fill vacancies who must then be approved by the GAA 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 GAA 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.

Technical Committees

Each Technical Committee 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 BAP Technical Committees includes a mix of varied stakeholders:

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

The BAP Standards Coordinator works with the Technical Committee chairpersons in recruiting Technical Committee 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 75% approval in a vote by a minimum of eight SOC members or ask the coordinator to seek additional nominees. At least two 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.

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 provide responses to comments received during the public comment periods for BAP standards.

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 BAP 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 BAP Standards Coordinator.

The Standards Oversight Committee chairperson will initially be appointed by the GAA 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 BAP Standards Coordinator and must be approved by the SOC with at least 75% approval in a vote by a minimum of eight SOC members. At least two members from each main stakeholder group must participate in approval votes. Technical Committee 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. Chairpersons must also be able to meet the costs of occasional BAP-related travel.

4. BAP Standards Coordinator

The BAP Standards Coordinator, a staff member of the Global Aquaculture Alliance, works largely as a conduit of information between the SOC and Technical Committees. In addition to assisting chairpersons with committee membership, the coordinator confers with committee chairpersons in setting progress goals and schedules. The coordinator helps chairpersons guide committee members and coordinates between committees. He or she may participate as needed in technical discussions as an active, but nonvoting participant.

The BAP 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 GAA staff members.

The BAP Standards Coordinator is also generally responsible for inquiries from the public regarding the Best Aquaculture Practices 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 GAA Board of Directors and employed by the Global Aquaculture Alliance. 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.

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.

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 BAP Standards Coordinator.

The costs of travel, accommodations, and time expended on committee activities are met by committee members, their employers, or nominating organizations. This policy is consistent with worldwide standardization practices.

6. Committee Meetings

Meetings are scheduled on a regular basis by committee chairpersons and the BAP 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 Aquaculture 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, BAP Standards Coordinator, or the appropriate committee chairpersons.