AWS ver 2.0
Guidance for Step 2: Commit and plan
Version of 11th Sept 2018)

General guidance

A commitment by senior management is essential to ensuring an organization has the motivation for water stewardship and has the intention to provide the investments, in time and money to, commence, complete and continue the water stewardship journey. Public disclosure will help ensure the organization will remain committed, in part to protect its reputation and credibility. Internal disclosure will help establish water stewardship within the organization's culture and send a message to all workers on its importance.

The water stewardship journey will typically take a number of years to achieve full compliance and/or certification. Once achieved, it should remain a long-term activity and commitment. This means planning is essential to prepare for the necessary financial and time commitments. The first aspect is to plan for implementing water stewardship. The second and longer term aspect is to create a permanent Water Stewardship Plan, although one that will develop and evolve.

2.1

The person signing the commitment should be someone in a position to grant and guarantee the necessary human and financial resources to first achieve the organization's status as a water steward, and to maintain it in the long term, including the principle of continuous improvement.

In the event the individual is replaced by another in the same or similar position of responsibility, the new person should reconfirm their commitment by also signing.

In addition to the stated requirements, the commitment will often include an acknowledgement of the following principles, where relevant in the local context (whether or not explicitly stated) to:

- Support and uphold AWS water stewardship outcomes
- Engage relevant stakeholders in an open and transparent manner
- Strive to comply with legal and regulatory requirements
- Respect water-related rights, including access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for all workers
- Support public sector implementation of plans and policies regarding access to water and sanitation (where not already universally achieved locally)

- Apply the principle of continuous improvement to water stewardship
- Support water-related governance policies
- Disclose water-related data and information to relevant audiences and stakeholders

2.1.1
It is assumed that someone within the organization and with direct responsibility for the site's water provision and management (whether physically based at the site or not), is in the best position to provide the required commitments. In the event that person requires further support from a more senior person in the organization or corporate office, they should demonstrate they have that support.

2.1.2
Commitment from the senior executive, with public disclosure, further increases the credibility of the commitment, and helps to lock it in as part of the long term corporate strategy.

2.2, 2.2.1

The requirement to gather knowledge on water-related legal and regulatory requirements is addressed in Indicator 1.5.2.

With regard to the responsible person, this should refer to the job title as the individual may change.

Regulators will define the information they require to different levels of detail. Some may be detailed and specific, for example, specifying precise water quality parameters to report or with reference relevant water quality regulations. Others may be more flexible, for example requiring a report on 'water quality' or requiring a demonstration that water is potable. In this case, the organization should reference appropriate standards, whether local, national or accepted international standards, such as the WHO Drinking Water Guidelines.

Similar principles apply to other compliance requirements, such as water withdrawal limits and wastewater discharge standards.

The site should have a system for itemizing relevant regulations, summarizing the compliance requirements and obligations, and a record of submissions to the relevant agencies. The system should also record any non-compliance warnings or events, including fines, and report on corrective actions. Where a documentation system already exists, this may be referenced, so long as it includes the requirements of this standard.

2.3
2.3.1
The water stewardship plan should address identified risks and include due consideration of the four AWS Outcomes: good water quality status; good water governance; a sustainable water balance; and a healthy status for WHCV features.

With regard to risk, there are three general categories of water-related risk to take into account:

1. Risks to the site and its water supply
2. Risks from the site to other water users and the natural environment
3. Risks related to shared water challenges (which may overlap with the first two categories).

The risks and shared challenges should have been identified under Step 1: Gather & understand.

Actions should align with the following principles:

- Linked to targets or objectives that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-based
- The scope and cost should be appropriate to the urgency and level of risk
- Define who is accountable for what. An ARCI approach to defining roles is recommended, which identifies who is: Accountable, Responsible, Consulted and Informed. Positions rather than names are appropriate, given that individuals may change.

With regard to the sustainable water balance, actions will depend on the conclusions of the assessment in Step 1. Where the water balance is not sustainable, it is important to understand to what extent the organization is responsible for this. Is it a major contributor to the imbalance, or is it due to the combined abstractions of multiple users? This is important for the organizations water stewardship planning. If it is the main cause, then it can more easily plan appropriate actions. If there is a shared cause, then collective action is required, which will likely be more challenging to agree and achieve.

If the water balance is sustainable, actions to achieve it are not relevant. If total withdrawals (by all in the catchment) are much less than natural annual renewal, then specific actions to maintain it are not relevant, although the water steward should still aim to be water efficient and responsible in its water use. Where the balance is currently sustainable, but under threat from growing demand, or growing climatic water scarcity, then there should be actions to monitor it, to avoid it becoming non-sustainable, and ideally to restore a more secure condition.

Example actions to restore or maintain a sustainable water balance:

- Monitor relevant flows and water levels across the catchment for any changes in the balance
- Reduce water use to restore a more secure balance
- Measure, monitor and reduce leakage losses
- Reduce evaporation losses (eg. cover an open storage tank)
- Switch to alternative water sources (eg. to another water body or catchment) which are at lower risk
- Implement or improve the recycling of used water to the original water body
- For agriculture, switch to crop types that require less water

- For agriculture, implement more efficient irrigation systems and methodologies
- Where a shared challenge, work with partners and stakeholders on common actions

With all risks identified, they should be ranked according to a standard 'likelihood x consequence' approach [references to be given].
Each risk is given a score according to the likelihood of it occurring, and a score according to the severity of its consequence. There are then two common ways to present and interpret the results:
- Plot a chart of 'Likelihood' (vertical axis) versus 'Consequence' (horizontal axis). The highest ranked risks are those closer to the top right-hand corner of the chart.
- For each risk, calculate 'likelihood score' x 'consequence score'. The risks can then be ranked, with the highest results representing the highest rank risks. This can clearly be presented in a table.

[Illustrations: Example risk matrix   Example risk ranking table]

The findings will help the organization determine which risks require more urgent action and justify higher investment (in time and cost). It may be concluded that some lower ranked risks do not require action other than monitoring and periodic review.

The organization should distinguish risks over which it has direct control, from those which it cannot directly control. Clearly, the organization is in a much stronger position to influence risks under its control.
Examples of a risk under an organization's direct control:
- The organization's water abstractions are causing water levels to fall in a sensitive wetland nearby
- The site stores chemicals in a way that they could contaminate water bodies
- Storm run-off carries sediment from the site into nearby water bodies
Examples of risk for which an organization has no direct control or influence
- Periodic extreme drought
- A general decline in groundwater levels due to over allocation of water permits to water users across the catchment
- The risk of an upstream chemical spill into the river from which the organization takes its water supply

For some actions, the organization can simply commit and decide to undertake them itself. Others will need agreement and cooperation with regulators or other stakeholders.

There are two principal categories of action:
- **Immediate action** to address an urgent problem or high risk
- **Long-term action** to provide ongoing protection against risk or achieve an improvement of status over time

Examples of immediate actions:
- Replace a failing borehole
- Remove a source of pollution
- Undertake restoration of a WHCV feature in a very poor condition
- Install water efficiency technology and leakage management to immediately reduce total water use
- Upgrade wastewater treatment system to ensure compliance and reduce external risks or impacts

Examples of long-term actions:
- Establish a monitoring program to measure water quality and water levels across the catchment
- Set targets to improve water efficiency (and reduce water use intensity) over time
- Establish a project to improve and protect a WHCV feature (not requiring urgent action)
- Modify land management practices on a farm so as to reduce run-off of sediment and chemicals to nearby surface water bodies

2.3.2
The organization is encouraged to promote increased uptake of AWS through partnership with other sites. This may include shared collective action in the context of being located in a common catchment. If there is no case for collective action (for example, due to using different water bodies for supply), then multiple organizations may promote AWS principles through demonstrating a common approach and shared communication.

2.3.3
For sites in separate catchments, there is less likelihood of opportunities for partnership on shared challenges. However, the organization can still help promote AWS principles and practice through demonstrating a common approach with others, with shared messages and communication.

2.3.4

To show it has sought consensus, the organization should report on how it has engaged with relevant stakeholders and communicated its water stewardship plan to them. It should also show, where relevant, that the plan has taken into account the interests and concerns of stakeholders. Typically, consultation will be undertaken within the context of stakeholder engagement (See Guidance section on Stakeholder Engagement).

Thus, there is a variety of potential forms of communication and feedback. This could be through physical meetings, letters, brochures, or electronic communication. The organization should report on the communications undertaken, and to which stakeholders and interest groups. As much as feasible, it should also report on feedback (taking into account any legal data sharing and confidentiality issues). AWS recognizes the organization cannot insist on feedback from its stakeholders. Where feedback is difficult to gain, the organization should show an absence of serious objections and that the interests of vulnerable stakeholders are not negatively impacted.

Where stakeholders have rights to the water resource, such as some local communities and indigenous peoples with traditional rights, their informed consent must be given in order to use the resource. Where these rights are not formally recognized by a government regulator, there remains a duty to identify and respect them where they exist. Engaging with such communities requires a long-term commitment to achieve meaningful dialogue and build trust between parties.

2.4
2.4.1
From the risk assessment described under 2.3.1, the organization may identify a number of risks that would be considered an emergency if they occurred. These could be events that impact on the site, such as a sudden interruption of water supply, or events where the site impacts externally, such as an accidental release of pollution.

The organization may choose to create a dedicated 'water risk' response plan, into to ensure water-related risks are included in a more comprehensive emergency response plan.

The principle is to accept that some serious risks cannot be reduced to zero. The organization needs to assume that emergency events will occur from time-to-time and that it has a response to plan to respond and to achieve a number of objectives:
- to prevent human harm,
- to prevent or minimize damage to buildings and infrastructure,
- to prevent serious environmental harm, and
- ideally to maintain business and operational continuity

Examples of water-related emergency events are:

- Interruption of water supply causing normal business operations to stop for an extended period
- Contamination of workers drinking water supply
- Flooding
- A serious pollution spill by the organization

2.4.2

Climate scientists project that man-made climate change is increasing or will increase some water-related risks. The type and level of projected change varies from place to place, often with a high level of uncertainty. Impacts may be linked to too much or too little water, such as increased flood risk or less rainfall. Projections suggest that such events will become more frequent and potentially more intense. This means water-related infrastructure at the site, and within the catchment, could be at greater risk than currently designed for. The site and catchment may also become more vulnerable to water scarcity.

Given the complexities and uncertainties around climate change projections, the organization should undertake its assessment in coordination with relevant public-sector agencies, and other expert sources.

The outcome of the assessment may be incorporated into the original water stewardship plan or be provided as an addendum. In any case, risk management actions and emergency response plans should be adapted accordingly.

2.5

The reference to *relevant* stakeholders means it is not necessary to communicate all parts of the plan to all stakeholders. The organization should judge which stakeholders should be informed about which actions or targets. Some examples of how to distinguish relevant stakeholders:
- For water management agencies or regulatory bodies, it is reasonable to share the whole water stewardship plan, in order to demonstrate the organization's comprehensive and responsible approach

2.5.1

The organization may decide what form of communication is appropriate for which stakeholders. Where relevant to achieving AWS Outcomes, this should be included in the communications.