



Summary of changes

From AWS Standard Version 2.0 to Version 3.0

March 2026

INTRODUCTION

This document explains the changes made to the AWS Standard during the revision from Version 2.0 to Version 3.0. An overview of the revision process is provided, followed by a high-level summary of changes to the AWS Standard Version 3.0, as well as a detailed breakdown of changes to individual criteria and requirements.

CONTINUALLY IMPROVING THE AWS STANDARD

Nearly five years after publication in 2019, AWS initiated a review of the AWS Standard Version 2.0 in early 2023, following best practice in the standard-setting sector.

The review considered the Standard's continued relevance, effectiveness and adaptation to external circumstances. It considered auditing results, organisational monitoring and evaluation, and new knowledge and practices, in addition to stakeholder input. AWS Members and other stakeholders contributed their input through focus groups, webinars and a survey which garnered feedback from 235 respondents.

Based on the findings of the review, it was recommended that a major revision be undertaken to develop the AWS Standard Version 3.0. This commenced a rigorous two-year revision process, carried out according to the [AWS Standards Development and Revision Procedure](#) and [ISEAL's Code of Good Practice](#). It was overseen by the AWS Technical Committee and facilitated by the AWS Secretariat. The final draft of the AWS Standard Version 3.0 was arrived at after several iterations, reflecting the disposition of thousands of comments that were received on previous drafts, as further illustrated below:

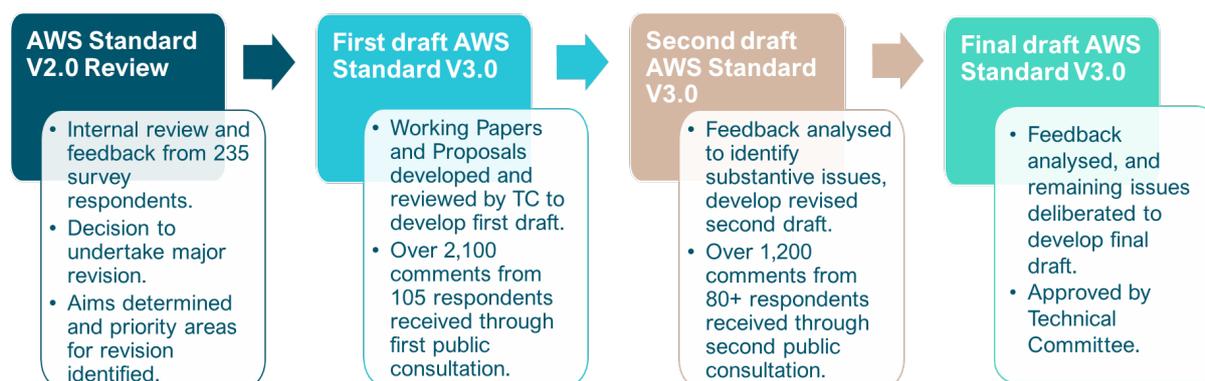


Figure 1 The drafting process of AWS Standard Version 3.0

Following approval from the AWS Technical Committee, the final draft of the AWS Standard Version 3.0 was submitted to AWS Members for voting between 24 November and 15 December 2025. The AWS Standard Version V3.0 was officially approved with 93% of respondents voted in favour.

HIGH-LEVEL OVERVIEW OF KEY CHANGES TO THE AWS STANDARD VERSION 3.0

The aims of the AWS Standard revision were to increase the practicality, utility and value of the AWS Standard Version 3.0. Key changes that were made to the AWS Standard Version 3.0 to fulfil these aims are outlined below:

Practicality – Streamlined for companies to implement cost-effectively at scale

1. **Streamlined requirements:** The AWS Standard Version 3.0 has 72 requirements (previously known as indicators) – 26 fewer than Version 2.0. The comprehensiveness of the Standard has been retained while redundant and low value requirements have been removed.



2. **Accessibility:** The balance between Core, Gold and Platinum requirements has been adjusted to improve accessibility while retaining rigour. Core requirements represent the essential elements of good water stewardship practice while Gold and Platinum requirements recognise higher levels of water stewardship performance.
3. **Improved auditability:** Clear minimum expectations for conformance have been set to reduce room for interpretation. Thresholds for performance against the five outcome areas have been set for Core, Gold and Platinum in Step 3 – Implement.
4. **Enhanced approach to Advanced certification:** Version 3.0 features a smaller, focused set of Advanced requirements at the Gold and Platinum levels, which build logically on Core requirements and provide a pathway for continual improvement.

Utility – Alignment with wider sustainability agendas and priorities

5. **Climate and resilience:** New requirements for sites to understand climate trends and water-related impacts, identify climate risks and climate-proof their water stewardship plans to build resilience are included in Version 3.0.
6. **Biodiversity:** The ‘Important Water-Related Areas’ outcome has been changed to ‘Healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity’, while retaining respect for the social and cultural values of water. Revised requirements focus on the identification and assessment of freshwater ecosystems and species, and the development and implementation of targets and actions to protect, conserve or restore them.
7. **Collective action:** Collective action is an integral part of the AWS Standard Version 3.0, and it features at the Core, Gold and Platinum levels to varying degrees.
8. **Desalination and reuse:** Revisions were made to ensure that the AWS Standard Version 3.0 is equally applicable to sites that depend on desalinated water, in whole or in part. Additionally, requirements were revised to recognise and encourage water reuse, where appropriate.

Value – Strengthened integration with corporate-level reporting

9. **Impacts and dependencies:** Double materiality has been incorporated through a new requirement to identify water-related impacts and dependencies as a precursor to identifying risks and opportunities.
10. **Integration with EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) Corporate Level Reporting:** The AWS Standard Version 3.0 is highly interoperable with the ESRS E3 – Water standard. Information gathered for Version 3.0 can directly inform reporting on all E3 indicators, including policies, targets and actions related to water.

CLASSIFICATION OF CHANGES

To help AWS Standard users understand the significance of revisions introduced in AWS Standard Version 3.0, changes have been categorised according to their potential impact on interpretation and implementation. The four categories used are:

Major changes

- Introduce new requirements or significantly alter the scope, structure or interpretation of requirements.
- May require sites to undertake new activities, expand the scope of management processes or adjust how compliance is demonstrated.

Moderate changes

- Refine or strengthen existing requirements without fundamentally changing their intent.
- Moderate changes typically improve clarity, increase methodological rigor or reorganise related requirements.
- May require some adjustments in implementation but do not introduce entirely new requirements.



Minor changes

- Improve clarity of the Standard without altering the meaning, intent or scope of requirements.
- Not expected to affect how sites implement or demonstrate conformance with the Standard.

Editorial changes

- Non-substantive changes made to improve the presentation or consistency of the Standard.
- Editorial changes have no impact on the substance of the requirements.
- Do not affect interpretation or implementation.

This categorisation aims to help users quickly identify which revisions may require closer attention when transitioning from AWS Standard Version 2.0 to Version 3.0. Detailed changes to the criteria and requirements of the AWS Standard Version 3.0 are provided at the end of this document.

TRANSITION PERIOD

The AWS Standard Version 3.0 launched around World Water Day, on 18 March 2026, and will be followed by a one-year transition period. From 22 March 2027, all initial and recertification audits will be conducted against Version 3.0.

For sites that are already certified against the AWS Standard Version 2.0, or that choose to use Version 2.0 for their initial or recertification audit during the transition period, surveillance audits will be conducted against Version 2.0. Sites may choose to receive a new certification audit against the AWS Standard Version 3.0 before their existing Version 2.0 certificate expires.

Get in touch with AWS at info@a4ws.org for further information about AWS Standard Version 3.0 and the transition period.



DETAILED CHANGES TO THE AWS STANDARD VERSION 3.0

The table below details revisions made to the Criteria and Requirements (formerly Indicators) of the AWS Standard Version 3.0. relative to the AWS Standard Version 2.0.

VERSION 3.0	VERSION 2.0	CHANGE CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
1.1	1.1		Revised to focus on defining the site's boundary and the site's catchment(s) for water stewardship purposes. Concept of 'physical scope' is removed.
1.1.1	1.1.1, 1.3.5	Moderate	Revised to focus on mapping water-related elements within the site boundaries. The elements to be mapped are broadened to include areas and facilities where water is used, on-site wastewater and stormwater discharge points and potential sources of pollution.
1.1.2	1.1.1	Major	New requirement to identify the site's catchment(s) for water stewardship purposes, including what needs to be included in the catchment area and scale range. Explicit mention of surface water and, where applicable, groundwater catchment. Inclusion of HydroBASIN scale as reference. The word 'ultimate' removed from water sources and receiving water bodies to improve clarity.
1.2	1.2		Revised to focus on identification and engagement of stakeholders to understand shared water challenges. Concept of 'the site's ability to influence beyond its boundaries' is removed.
1.2.1	1.2.1	Moderate	Revised to focus on stakeholder identification process. Addition of a prescribed list of stakeholder groups to be covered and addition of 'where present' qualifier. Linkage to the catchment identified in 1.1.2 is made explicit.
1.2.2	1.2.1, 1.2.2	Major	Revised to focus on stakeholder engagement process and identification of stakeholder water-related interests as well as challenges. Addition of requirements to justify level of stakeholder engagement undertaken, demonstrate representation from all relevant stakeholder groups (where present), and to consider factors that impede the ability of stakeholders to engage.
1.3	1.3		Revised to align with change of 'Important Water-Related Area (IWRA)' outcome to 'Healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity'. Addition of water use efficiency. Concept of water-related revenues is removed.
1.3.1	5.1.1	Editorial	Previously indicator 5.1.1 in Version 2.0.
1.3.2	1.3.2	Moderate	Revised to include site's water consumption, water reuse and metering points.
1.3.3	1.3.3	Moderate	Revised to include water consumption and reuse. Addition of quantification of annual site water balance and monthly variance in water usage rates. Addition of analysis of trends.
1.3.4	None	Major	New requirement to capture site water use efficiency.
1.3.5	1.3.4	Moderate	Concept of effluent is replaced by discharge to include stormwater and runoff. Addition of pollutant concentrations and loads. Addition of water quality data requirements for effluent from desalination process and receiving water bodies, where applicable. Addition of analysis of trends.



VERSION 3.0	VERSION 2.0	CHANGE CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
1.3.6	1.3.5	Moderate	Addition of a list of potential pollutants to be included and reference to local legislation. Addition of inventory requirement. Mapping component moved to requirement 1.1.1.
1.3.7	1.3.6	Major	Revised to align with change of 'IWRA' outcome to 'Healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity'. Addition of biodiversity found in the identified freshwater ecosystem(s).
1.3.8	1.3.8	Moderate	Addition of comparison to national regulatory requirements and/or international benchmarks. Addition of requirements for monitoring and documentation of WASH access and adequacy.
1.3.9 (Gold)	1.3.7	Minor	Previously indicator 1.3.7 in Version 2.0., now a Gold requirement. Concepts of water-related revenues and 'shared value creation' are removed. 'Quantified' is replaced with 'documented' to make a distinction between the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this requirement.
1.4	1.5		Revised to specify 'existing data' to improve clarity. Addition of water-related climate trends. Revised to align with change of 'IWRA' outcome to 'Healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity'.
1.4.1	1.5.1	Editorial	Revised to include description of relevant goals of water governance initiatives. Addition of 'possible opportunities for participation' to complement collective action.
1.4.2	1.5.2	Minor	Revised to focus exclusively on water-related legal and regulatory requirements which apply to the site. Addition of description of how the identified legal and regulatory requirements apply to the site.
1.4.3	1.5.2, 1.5.5	Major	Revised requirement consolidates the 'customary water rights' from 1.5.2 and 'water-related areas' that are fundamental for local communities and Indigenous People and for social, cultural and recreational values of water from 1.5.5 in Version 2.0.
1.4.4	1.5.3	Major	Revised to specify that a measure of water stress is acceptable when there is insufficient data to calculate the catchment water balance. Annual and seasonal variances are required to be identified and documented. Addition of description of trends, where applicable.
1.4.5	1.3.4, 1.5.4	Major	Addition of site's water source(s) and receiving water bodies. Annual and seasonal variances are required to be identified and documented. Addition of description of trends, where applicable. Addition of new requirements related to desalinated water.
1.4.6	1.5.5	Major	Revised to align with change of 'IWRA' outcome to Healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity. 'Where appropriate' qualifier for mapping requirement is removed. Addition of list of types of freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity to be covered.
1.4.7	None	Major	New requirement to understand water-related climate trends in the catchment for the purpose of building resilience.
1.4.8	1.5.6	Minor	Revised to specify water-related infrastructure that the site depends on or could be affected by. Addition of mapped necessary action.
1.4.9	1.5.7	Minor	Revised to specify levels of access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.



VERSION 3.0	VERSION 2.0	CHANGE CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
1.4.10 (Gold)	1.5.8 (Advanced)	Moderate	Revised to set a minimum expectation for conformance and to include new requirement to share catchment data with relevant catchment stakeholders.
1.5	None		New criterion to understand the site's water-related impacts and dependencies as a precursor to identifying risks and opportunities.
1.5.1	None	Major	New requirement to demonstrate site's water-related impacts and dependencies as a precursor to identifying risks and opportunities. Linkages to criteria 1.3 and 1.4 are made explicit.
1.5.2 (Gold)	1.4.1	Major	Revised to focus on the identification of indirect water use impacts and dependencies in the site's value chain. Concept of primary input suppliers is replaced with Tier 1 suppliers (upstream) and with 'consumer product use and disposal' (downstream).
1.6	1.6, 1.7		Previous criteria 1.6 and 1.7 in Version 2.0. are consolidated and revised to focus on understanding of the site's water risks, shared water challenges in the catchment and opportunities to address these shared challenges.
1.6.1	1.7.1	Minor	Revised to require identification of risks derived from understanding of impacts and dependencies (1.5.1).
1.6.2	1.6.1	Editorial	Language updated to include explicit reference to site's water risks (1.6.1), water-related challenges of stakeholders (1.2.2) and catchment data (1.4).
1.6.3	1.6.2, 1.7.2	Moderate	Revised to focus on opportunities to address shared water challenges, including opportunities for collective action.
2.1	2.1, 2.3		Revised to include the site's and/or organisation's water stewardship strategy which was originally in indicator 2.3.1 in Version 2.0. Requirement for commitment to make an explicit reference to AWS is removed.
2.1.1	2.3.1	Minor	Revised to allow for either site level strategy or organisational water stewardship strategy.
2.1.2	2.1.1	Minor	Concept of organisational document is removed. Requirement for public disclosure is replaced with internal communication. Requirement to allocate resources is revised to refer to implementation of water stewardship, rather than the AWS Standard specifically.
2.1.3 (Gold)	2.1.2 (Advanced)	Editorial	Previously an advanced indicator (2.1.2) in Version 2.0., now specified as a Gold requirement. Language updated.
2.2	2.2		Updated language to specify water-related legal and regulatory compliance.
2.2.1	2.2.1	Moderate	Scope is broadened to 'water-related' legal and regulatory compliance. Inclusion of 'a process for identifying new or revised legislation' as part of the requirement.
2.3	2.3		Criterion revised to focus solely on the water stewardship plan. Requirement to set targets for each of the five AWS Standard outcome areas and to review and update the plan annually are now made explicit. Addition of the concept of 'minimising adverse impacts'.



VERSION 3.0	VERSION 2.0	CHANGE CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
2.3.1	2.3.2	Major	New requirement to focus on targets for good water governance. Inclusion of 'metrics for measurement' for clarity. Financial budgets are replaced with 'resources'. Addition of annual interim targets as part of the planned timeframes. Requirement to add linkages between each target and water-related impacts, site water risks and/or shared challenges is now made explicit. Requirement to describe how the plan has been informed by the results of evaluation in criteria 4.1 is now made explicit. Addition of collective action requirement, where applicable.
2.3.2	2.3.2	Major	New requirement to focus on targets for sustainable water balance. See 2.3.1 for detailed list of changes.
2.3.3	2.3.2	Major	New requirement to focus on targets for good water quality. See 2.3.1 for detailed list of changes.
2.3.4	2.3.2	Major	New requirement to focus on targets for healthy freshwater and their biodiversity. See 2.3.1 for detailed list of changes.
2.3.5	2.3.2	Major	New requirement to focus on targets for safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all. See 2.3.1 for detailed list of changes.
2.4	2.4		Updated language.
2.4.1	1.3.1, 2.4.1	Moderate	Site's incident response plan reframed as a tool to build resilience to water risks. Revised to specify that the incidents addressed in the response plan shall be related to the risks identified in requirement 1.6.1.
2.4.2 (Gold)	2.4.2 (Advanced)	Moderate	Previously an advanced indicator (2.4.2) in Version 2.0., now specified as a Gold requirement. Revised to focus on climate-proofing the site's water stewardship plan from criteria 2.3 to build resilience to water risks (1.6.1) associated with water-related climate trends identified in requirement 1.4.7, rather than creating a separate plan. The relationship between the water stewardship plan and climate change adaptation is now made explicit.
3.1	3.2		Revised to include respect for social, cultural and recreational uses of water in the catchment.
3.1.1	3.2.1	Editorial	Updated language to improve clarity.
3.1.2	3.1.2, 3.2.2, 3.6.2	Minor	Requirement consolidates 'respecting water rights of others' from indicators 3.1.2 & 3.2.2 and 'not impinging on the human right to safe water and sanitation' from indicator 3.6.2 in Version 2.0. Addition of minimum threshold for conformance. Linkages to water-related impacts and dependencies in requirement 1.5.1 and social, cultural and recreational values of water in requirement 1.4.3 are made explicit.
3.2	3.1		Updated language.
3.2.1	3.1.1	Moderate	Revised to set threshold for conformance. Linkage to identified water governance initiatives in the catchment from requirement 1.4.1 is made explicit.
3.2.2 (Gold)	None	Major	New Gold requirement to demonstrate the site active support for water governance in the catchment.
3.2.3 (Platinum – Water Governance)	None	Major	New Platinum requirement to demonstrate the site active involvement in public policy engagement.



VERSION 3.0	VERSION 2.0	CHANGE CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
3.3	3.3		Linkage to the site's water stewardship plan in criterion 2.3 is made explicit.
3.3.1	3.3.1, 3.3.2	Moderate	Requirement consolidates 'improving site's water efficiency' in indicator 3.3.2 and 'progress meeting water balance target' in indicator 3.3.1 in Version 2.0. Addition of requirement 1.3.4 as the baseline for improvement. 'Where water scarcity' qualifier is removed.
3.3.2 (Gold)	None	Major	New Gold requirement for the site to reduce total water withdrawals or replenish water in the catchment. Addition of requirement 1.3.3 as the baseline to gauge improvement against.
3.3.3 (Platinum – Water Balance)	None	Major	New Platinum requirement for sites to replenish a volume of water in the catchment that is equal to or greater than its total water withdrawals.
3.4	3.4		Linkage to the site's water stewardship plan in criterion 2.3 is made explicit.
3.4.1	3.4.1	Minor	Revised to require sites to demonstrate that site water quality meets thresholds set in legal and regulatory requirements for all parameters.
3.4.2 (Gold)	3.4.2	Major	Revised to require sites to reduce the pollutant load of discharge relative to the baseline established in 1.3.5. Concept of effluent is replaced by discharge to capture other outgoing flows. 'Where water quality is a shared water challenge...' qualifier is removed.
3.4.3 (Platinum – Water Quality)	None	Major	New Platinum requirement to capture site's contribution to improving catchment water quality. Addition of requirement 1.4.5 as the baseline for improvement.
3.5	3.5		Criterion revised to align with change of IWRA outcome to Healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity. Linkage to the site's water stewardship plan in criterion 2.3 is made explicit.
3.5.1	3.5.1	Major	Revised to align with change of 'IWRA' outcome to 'Healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity'. Revised to require protection, conservation or restoration of on-site freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity. Addition of requirement 1.3.7 as the baseline for improvement.
3.5.2 (Gold)	None	Major	New Gold requirement to demonstrate active contribution to the protection or conservation of freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity in the catchment. Addition of requirement 1.4.6 as the baseline for improvement. Linkages to the identified site's water-related impacts and dependencies in requirement 1.5.1 are made explicit.



VERSION 3.0	VERSION 2.0	CHANGE CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
3.5.3 (Platinum - Freshwater Ecosystems & Their Biodiversity)	3.5.2 (Advanced)	Major	Revised to align with change of 'IWRA' outcome to 'Healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity'. Concept of 'completed restoration of non-functioning or severely degraded areas' is replaced with 'contribution to restoration of degraded freshwater ecosystems'. Addition of requirement 1.4.6 as the baseline for improvement.
3.6	3.6		Revised to broaden scope of WASH requirements to the catchment and value chain.
3.6.1	3.6.1	Editorial	Revised to specify that WASH shall be provided for all workers in line with national legal and regulatory requirements or international guidelines where laws and regulations do not exist.
3.6.2 (Gold)	3.6.3 (Advanced), 3.6.4 (Advanced)	Minor	Requirement consolidates indicators 3.6.3 and 3.6.4 from Version 2.0. Revised to require provision of WASH to stakeholders in the catchment, where WASH is identified as a shared water challenge.
3.6.3 (Platinum - WASH)	None	Moderate	New Platinum requirement for sites to demonstrate support access to adequate WASH services in their value chains.
3.7	None		New criterion to demonstrate implementation of collective actions from the water stewardship plan in criterion 2.3.
3.7.1	3.9.12 (Advanced)	Major	Revised to include a minimum level of expectation for the site's involvement in collective action at the Core level.
3.7.2 (Gold)	3.9.12 (Advanced)	Moderate	Revised to include a minimum level of expectation for the site's involvement in collective action at the Gold level.
3.7.3 (Platinum)	3.9.12 (Advanced)	Moderate	Revised to include a minimum level of expectation for the site's involvement in collective action at the Platinum level.
4.1	4.1		
4.1.1	4.1.1	Minor	Requirement to do annual evaluation is now made explicit. Linkage to the site's water stewardship plan in criterion 2.3 is now made explicit.
4.1.2 (Gold)	4.1.2	Moderate	Previously a Core indicator (4.1.2) in Version 2.0., now specified as a Gold requirement. Revised to focus on evaluation of costs, savings and value creation resulting from the water stewardship plan. Addition of the distinction between quantification of costs and savings, and documentation of social, environmental and economic value generation. Requirement to conduct annual evaluation is now made explicit.



VERSION 3.0	VERSION 2.0	CHANGE CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
4.1.3 (Platinum)	4.3.1, 4.3.2 (Advanced)	Moderate	Revised to focus on stakeholder evaluation of the site's water stewardship performance, particularly for efforts to address shared water challenges. Linkage to the identified site's stakeholders in requirement 1.2.1 is made explicit. Addition of requirements to demonstrate of the site's effort to consult stakeholders, to consider factors that impede the ability of stakeholders to engage and to provide evidence of engagement.
4.2	4.2		Criterion broadened to include an additional requirement related to the evaluation of the site's climate change adaptation plan from requirement 2.4.2.
4.2.1	4.2.1	Editorial	Updated language. Addition of 'where necessary' qualifier.
4.2.2 (Gold)	None	Major	New Gold requirement for evaluation of the site's efforts to build resilience through implementation of the climate-proofed water stewardship plan from requirement 2.4.2.
4.3	4.4		Updated language.
4.3.1	None	Major	New requirement to demonstrate the need for sites to provide explanation and develop modifications to the water stewardship plan where targets have not been met or actions have not been implemented.
4.3.2	4.4.1	Editorial	Updated language.
5.1	5.2		Updated language.
5.1.1	5.2.1	Editorial	Updated language to specify threshold for conformance. Linkage to the site's stakeholder engagements from requirement 1.2.2. is now made explicit.
5.1.2 (Gold)	None	Major	New Gold requirement to demonstrate that the site shall gather stakeholder feedback on the summary of site water stewardship plan. Addition of requirements to demonstrate of the site's effort to consult stakeholders in requirement 1.2.2, to consider factors that impede the ability of stakeholders to engage and to provide evidence of consultation on the site's water stewardship plan.
5.2	5.3, 5.4		Criterion consolidates criteria 5.3 and 5.4 from Version 2.0
5.2.1	5.3.1, 5.4.1	Moderate	Requirement consolidates 'efforts to address shared challenges' from indicator 5.4.1 with indicator 5.3.1 in Version 2.0. Revised to replace 'disclosed' with 'communicated'. Linkage to the site's stakeholder engagements from requirement 1.2.2. is now made explicit. Addition of a clause to specify that this requirement comes into effect after one year of implementing the water stewardship plan.
5.2.2 (Gold)	5.3.1, 5.4.1	Minor	Requirement consolidates 'efforts to address shared challenges' from indicator 5.4.1 with indicator 5.3.1 in Version 2.0. Addition of a clause to specify that this requirement comes into effect after one year of implementing the water stewardship plan.
5.3	5.5		Revised to focus more broadly on open and transparent communication.
5.3.1	None	Major	New requirement to demonstrate a process for receiving and responding to stakeholders' feedback on an ongoing basis.
5.3.2	5.5.3	Moderate	Revised to require communication of compliance violations to relevant government agencies, rather than disclosure. Addition of 'where they occur' qualifier. Updated language to improve clarity.

