AWS Standard
Version 3.0 Guidance

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ALLIANCE FOR WATER STEWARDSHIP

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Introduction

This document provides guidance for users of the International Water Stewardship Standard Version 3.0 (AWS Standard V3.0). The purpose of the Guidance is twofold – (1) To help implementers gain a better understanding of how to implement the Standard and (2) To help auditors to ensure consistency and rigour in the interpretation of the Standard.

The Guidance is structured around the Steps, Criteria and Requirements of the AWS Standard V3.0. General guidance is provided for each Requirement following a consistent format, which includes:

- **Aim of the requirement:** Description of the motivation and intent behind each requirement.
- **How to implement the requirement:** Practical advice on how to implement each requirement.
- **Means of verification:** Examples of the type of information or observations that are used to demonstrate that the requirement is being met.
- **External references:** Suggested further reading on specialised subjects related to the requirements.
- **Examples and templates:** Further illustration of the implementation process and optional templates to follow for select requirements.

The Guidance is intended to supplement the AWS Standard V3.0, and to be used in conjunction with the AWS Certification Requirements for purposes of certification. It is not intended to be used as a stand-alone document. The Guidance is not a textbook or primer on specific topics or disciplines. Implementers should not depend on this Guidance to learn or master specific principles or subjects as it does not provide that level of detail. The user may obtain additional expertise on specific topics via the external references and support from experts.

The Guidance was developed by the AWS Secretariat and the AWS Technical Committee based on the AWS Standard V3.0. The Guidance will undergo period review and updating to reflect experience, feedback and current best practice.

Step 1: Gather & Understand

1.1 Gather information to define the site's boundaries and to identify its catchment(s) for water stewardship purposes.

1.1.1 The site shall be *mapped*, including the following elements:

- **Site boundaries;**
- **All on-site water sources and abstraction points;**
- **Areas and facilities where water is used;**
- **Water-related infrastructure, including wells, piping network and any water treatment, recycling or storage systems owned or managed by the site or its parent organisation;**
- **On-site wastewater and stormwater discharge points;**
- **Potential sources of water pollution.**

Aim of the requirement

The aim of this requirement is to produce a map of the site for water stewardship purposes. The site map is fundamental as it underpins the gathering of site data, identification of risks and implementation of improvements on site, and supports the audit process for certification.

How to implement the requirement

The site should create or amend a map, or a series of maps, to cover all the elements listed below. The map(s) should preferably be in a digital format and be of a quality that enables an external party to identify the location, scale and physical properties of the attributes listed. The map(s) should include a title, scale, legend and compass directions, with relevant names and boundaries clearly indicated. Map(s) should also be dated to support identification of changes that occur over time. Map(s) should include:

- **Site boundaries:** The physical boundaries of the land owned or leased by the organisation, where it carries out its operational activities. In most cases, it is a contiguous area of land, but it may also include physically separated but nearby areas.

- **Water sources and abstraction points:** Including surface water intakes, boreholes/wells for groundwater, municipal or third-party supply connections, as well as any alternative or emergency water sources where applicable.
- **Areas and facilities where water is used:** Including production lines, processing areas, cooling systems, cleaning and sanitation areas, laboratories, utility operations, domestic and sanitary facilities, as well as irrigation or landscaping areas where applicable.
- **Water-related infrastructure**: Including wells, pumping systems, piping network and any water treatment, recycling or storage systems owned or managed by the site or its parent organisation.
- **On-site wastewater and stormwater discharge points:** Including points where the site discharges treated or untreated water directly into the environment or to a wastewater treatment plant via sewer pipes, as well as any emergency or overflow discharges that may occur under abnormal operating conditions.
- **Potential sources of water pollution:** Including areas where chemicals, fuels, fertilisers, hazardous wastes or other significant pollutants according to local legislation, are used, transported or stored on site.

Means of verification

- Up to date site map(s)

1.1.2 The surface water catchment(s) and, where applicable, the groundwater catchment(s) for the site's water stewardship purposes shall be *identified* and *mapped*. The catchment area shall:

- **Include the location of the site;**
- **Include the location of the site's water service provider (if applicable) and water source(s);**
- **Include the location of the site's wastewater service provider (if applicable) and receiving water body or bodies;**
- **Be at a scale that is equivalent to level 6-10 of the HydroBASINS dataset.**

Aim of the requirement

The scope of application of the AWS Standard is the operational site and its local water catchment. Identifying the site's catchment is critical, as it provides the foundation for many other aspects of Standard implementation including stakeholder identification and engagement, catchment data collection, identification of risks, opportunities, and shared water challenges, and the development and implementation of water stewardship plans. Therefore, the aim of this requirement is to identify the appropriate catchment(s) for the site's application of the AWS Standard.

How to implement the requirement

A catchment is the geographical zone in which water is captured, flows through and eventually discharges at one or more points. The concept includes both surface water catchments and groundwater catchments. A surface water catchment is defined by the area of land from which all precipitation received flows through a sequence of streams and rivers towards a single river mouth, as a tributary to a larger river or to the sea. A groundwater catchment is defined by the geological structure of an aquifer and groundwater flow paths. It is replenished by water that infiltrates from the surface. It has vertical thickness (from a few metres to hundreds of metres) as well as area. Depending on local conditions, surface and groundwater catchments may be physically separate or interconnected. Alternative terms are watershed, basin and river basin.

Choosing the appropriate scale

For effective water stewardship, the scale of the catchment identified should be appropriate to the site's water use. If too small of a catchment is identified, important stakeholders and risks may be missed. Conversely, if too large of a catchment is identified, the site risks spreading its efforts and resources too thin.

Depending on how they are defined, catchments can range in size from a few square kilometers to many thousands. For instance, the Amazon River Basin covers nearly seven million square kilometres and spans across eight countries. Therefore, sites should identify a smaller sub-catchment which is appropriate for the scale of its water use. Sub-catchments are smaller divisions within a larger catchment area. Like catchments, sub-catchments are typically delineated based on the natural drainage patterns of the land, such as the flow of streams or rivers.

Generally, to identify the appropriate scale of catchment, the site should identify the smallest catchment that contains the location of the site, the location of the site's water service provider (if applicable) and water source(s), and the location of the site's wastewater service provider (if applicable) and receiving water body or bodies. In some cases, particularly when the site's water supply originates from a distance source or when wastewater is piped to a distant wastewater facility, the site may be required to identify multiple surface water catchments.

When the site's water supply is provided by a third party, such as municipal supplier, it may be piped to the point of use over many kilometers, potentially from a physically separate catchment. The concept also applies to 'downstream' when wastewater is piped to a distant wastewater facility. In these cases, the water supplier or wastewater utility are key stakeholders. The organisation should understand how they manage and mitigate water risk.

HydroBASINS

The HydroBASINS public dataset is a useful reference for identifying sub-catchments. This dataset depicts catchment and sub-catchment boundaries at a global scale. It offers 12 different catchment levels, from very small (12) to very large (1). HydroBASINS does not include names, but each sub-catchment carries a Pfafstetter code, a hierarchical coding system designed to encode basin topology and upstream/downstream relationships. This makes it easier to understand connectivity within river networks. It is worth noting that HydroBASINS focuses exclusively on surface water and does not include groundwater catchments. For the sake of this requirement, sites should identify a surface water catchment that is equivalent to level 6-10 of the HydroBASINS dataset. Based on experience, this is considered to be a workable range for implementation of the AWS Standard.

Groundwater catchments

For sites that depend on or impact groundwater, the relevant groundwater catchment(s) should be identified as well. For this, the site should first determine whether abstraction is from the shallow water table (unconfined groundwater) or from a deeper confined aquifer below an impermeable layer. If groundwater is drawn from the shallow water table, its spatial extent may reasonably be considered aligned with the surface water catchment, as these systems are typically hydrologically connected. If groundwater is abstracted from a confined aquifer, the site should seek available information on the spatial extent of that aquifer and its recharge area(s), using hydrogeological maps and information from groundwater management units, regulatory agencies or other credible sources.

Where groundwater is connected to surface water bodies (for example rivers, wetlands or springs), this connectivity should also be considered. When aquifer boundaries are uncertain, poorly mapped or unavailable,

the site should document the sources consulted, state any assumptions made about groundwater flow and recharge, and explain how potential off-site impacts have been considered.

Validation of catchment names and boundaries

While global datasets like HydroBASINS are useful tools for identifying catchments, the catchment boundaries identified may differ from those used by local water management authorities. It's important for sites to be aligned with local stakeholders regarding the catchment boundaries, as discrepancies can hinder shared understanding and the potential for collective action. For this reason, sites should validate the catchment name and boundaries identified with local water management authorities to ensure alignment. If boundaries or names differ, the site should document the discrepancy, select a working stewardship boundary and name that stakeholders will recognise, and retain the HydroBASINS code for reference.

The site should produce a map or series of maps that display the catchment boundaries, as well as the location of the site within the catchment, the site's water service provider (if applicable) and water source(s), and the site's wastewater service provider (if applicable) and receiving water body or bodies. Ultimately, the objective is to identify a clear and justified catchment area for the site's application of the AWS Standard.

Means of verification

- Up to date catchment map(s).

External references

- HydroSHEDS (2025) 'HydroBASINS'[1].
- HydroSHEDS (2014) 'HydroBASINS: Technical Documentation Version 1.c'[2].
- Resource Watch (2013) 'Watershed and sub-basin boundaries'[3].
- World Resources Institute (2021) 'Clear Watershed Boundaries Are Essential for Successful Water Stewardship'[4].

[1] https://www.hydrosheds.org/page/hydrobasins
[2] https://data.hydrosheds.org/file/technical-documentation/HydroBASINS_TechDoc_v1c.pdf
[3] https://resourcewatch.org/data/explore/wat068rw0-Watersheds
[4] https://www.wri.org/update/clear-watershed-boundaries-essential-water-stewardship

1.2 Identify and engage relevant stakeholders and understand their water-related interests and challenges.

1.2.1 Stakeholders with water-related interests within the site's catchment (1.1.2) shall be *identified*. A list of stakeholders shall be *documented*, which covers all relevant stakeholder groups where present, including but not limited to:

- **Local authorities, regulators and/or other government agencies;**
- **Water user associations;**
- **Water utilities;**
- **Industrial and agricultural water users;**
- **Local communities;**
- **Site workers, suppliers and service providers;**
- **Indigenous Peoples and their traditional leaders;**
- **Vulnerable groups;**
- **Social and environmental civil society organisations (CSOs);**
- **Academic institutions**

Aim of the requirement

Effective water stewardship is grounded in inclusive, transparent and contextually appropriate stakeholder engagement. This requirement establishes the foundation for stakeholder engagement by ensuring the site systematically identifies the relevant stakeholders in the catchment. The aim of this requirement is to create a comprehensive list of stakeholders with water-related interests in the catchment to support meaningful engagement, robust risk assessment and coordinated action in later steps.

How to implement the requirement

A recommended approach is to undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise and create and maintain a list or database of stakeholders with water-related interests within the catchment, using the catchment boundaries identified in 1.1.2. There are many reasons groups or individuals may be considered stakeholders, but typically they are those who use or manage water or depend on catchment water conditions in some way, either directly or indirectly. Stakeholders should be listed (ideally in a table format) identifying their name, category, location, contact and reason for being listed as a stakeholder. At a minimum, stakeholders from the groups listed in Requirement 1.2.1 should be included, where present:

The site should have a good understanding of its water use and catchment context to support the identification of stakeholders, including the location and nature of its water sources and discharge points, as well as the relevant legal and regulatory frameworks and institutions. The site should pay particular attention to stakeholders with legitimate water-related interests but limited power or voice, and those groups who may be affected directly or indirectly by the site's water use. Where there are no stakeholders from one of the above groups present, the site should provide a written justification explaining why no stakeholders have been identified.

Means of verification

- List or database of identified stakeholders.

External references

- OECD (2017) 'OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement in the Extractive Sector'[5].
- Science Based Targets Network (2024) 'Stakeholder engagement guidance'[6].

Template

- T1. Stakeholder mapping

1.2.2 The water-related interests and challenges of stakeholders shall be *identified* and *documented* through a stakeholder engagement process. This process shall:

- **Demonstrate the site's efforts to engage stakeholders, with representation from all relevant stakeholder groups outlined in 1.2.1, where present;**
- **Provide justification for the level of stakeholder engagement undertaken based on their level of interest and influence;**
- **Consider factors that may impede the ability of stakeholders to engage.**

Aim of the requirement

Engaging with stakeholders is critical to understanding their water-related interests and challenges, and ultimately, to identifying shared water challenges in the catchment and opportunities for collective action. The aim of this requirement is to develop a credible understanding of stakeholders' water-related interests and challenges through a deliberate engagement process, which covers all relevant stakeholder groups (where present), applies appropriate and justified levels of engagement based on stakeholder influence and interest, and recognises and addresses barriers to engagement. This requirement is also key for establishing relationships with stakeholders, building trust and developing a shared understanding of water-related issues.

How to implement the requirement

Categorise stakeholders

The first step of implementing this requirement involves deciding which stakeholders to engage with and how. To determine, and later justify, the level of stakeholder engagement to be undertaken, the site should categorise the stakeholders identified in 1.2.1 by their level of interest and influence in water-related issues in the catchment. Template 1 provides a matrix which reflects how stakeholders' interest, influence and engagement relate. Categorising the stakeholders within the matrix helps to define and justify the level and form of engagement appropriate to each stakeholder.

The rationale for choosing which stakeholders to engage with and the level of engagement chosen should be documented. For some stakeholders it may be possible to categorise them only after initial engagement. The stakeholder engagement process should be representative rather than exhaustive. Stakeholders from each

[5] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-due-diligence-guidance-for-meaningful-stakeholder-engagement-in-the-extractive-sector_9789264252462-en.html

[6] https://sciencebasedtargetsnetwork.org/companies/take-action/cross-step-guidance/stakeholder-engagement-guidance/

group listed in 1.2.1 should be represented, where present. However, the site is not required to engage all stakeholders identified in 1.2.1.

Design a fit-for-purpose engagement process

After deciding which stakeholders to engage with and to what level, the site should design a process for engagement. Assigning responsibility for stakeholder engagement within the site's team, with defined tasks and a timetable of actions, is a useful first step. The site should select engagement methods – such as bilateral meetings, workshops or forums, survey or interviews – which are appropriate to the stakeholder type and determined from the outcome of the categorisation process.

Engagement on water-related issues in the catchment should be within the context of the policy framework and institutions and should not conflict with them. The site should be conscious of who holds the legal mandate or responsibility for a given issue and aim to include them accordingly. For example, if the site engages stakeholders on issues related to municipal water supply without including the responsible water utility, it may raise mistrust. The site should also be aware of any existing engagement programs and aim to utilise and align with them, so as not to duplicate work or conflict with existing initiatives.

In designing the stakeholder engagement process, the site should consider factors that may impede the ability of stakeholders to engage, such as language or literacy barriers; power imbalances; time, cost or travel constraints; fear of reprisal or distrust; and digital exclusion. If identified, the site should apply reasonable mitigation measures to address barriers to engagement, for example by translating written materials, or adjusting the timing or location of meetings. In general, the methods of engagement should be culturally appropriate and tailored to the needs of stakeholders. It is recognised that in some cases stakeholders may be unwilling to engage with the site on water-related issues and challenges. Where stakeholders are unwilling to engage, the site should demonstrate that it has made a reasonable effort to engage the relevant stakeholders, for instance, through documentation of correspondence.

Engage stakeholders to understand water-related interests

Once the site has determined its process for engagement, it is ready to engage stakeholders to identify and understand their water-related interests and challenges. Throughout the process, the site should seek to understand stakeholder perspectives, rather than seeking validation of their own views. Framing engagement around the five outcomes of the AWS Standard is a practical way to ensure that the main aspects of water security are covered. The scale and nature of water-related interests and challenges can vary tremendously, depending on the stakeholders and local context. Some examples include:

- Over abstraction of water resources;
- Limited access to adequate drinking water services;
- The water quality impacts of excess nutrients from agricultural intensification and expansion;
- Increasing risk of droughts and floods, linked to the capacity of infrastructure and climate change;
- The implications of legal and regulatory changes for wetland conservation.

The site should document stakeholder water-related interests, challenges and areas of alignment or divergence with site priorities and concerns. Understanding is a key element of this requirement, therefore care should be taken to document the specificities of the interests and challenges identified (for example, where are challenges experienced, by whom, and when?). Documenting these details will support the site to later identify shared water challenges and develop appropriate targets and actions. Over time, the site's understanding of stakeholder water-related interests and challenges should be reviewed and updated where necessary. Ideally, this should be done annually, and at a minimum once per certificate cycle for certified sites.

Means of verification

- Documented stakeholder interest and influence analysis and engagement process.
- List of stakeholders engaged and documented summary of water-related interests and challenges.
- Records of meetings, workshops, surveys or interviews.

External references

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2015) 'Getting in Step: Engaging and Involving Stakeholders in Your Watershed'[7].

Template

- T1. Stakeholder mapping

1.3 Gather and understand water-related data for the site including: water governance; water balance; water use efficiency; water quality; freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); and water-related costs and value creation.

1.3.1 The site's water-related internal governance, including the positions of those accountable for compliance with water-related laws and regulations shall be *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that an appropriate governance structure and personnel are in place to manage water-related responsibilities at the site.

How to implement the requirement

Water-related internal governance focuses on responsibility and accountability for water-related matters at the site. Sites should clearly define their water-related governance structure, including roles and responsibilities of personnel, lines of authority and accountability for water-related legal and regulatory compliance. This can be part of existing management systems and does not need to be a separate water committee, as long as responsibilities are clear.

This information should be documented in a table, organisation chart or other suitable format. It should also be communicated internally, so that site staff understand who is responsible for water-related matters and how issues, incidents or concerns should be reported and addressed.

Means of verification

- Documentation of site water-related internal governance.

[7] https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-11/documents/stakeholderguide.pdf

1.3.2 The site water balance, including inflows, consumption, losses, storage, water reuse, outflows and metering points shall be *mapped*.

Aim of the requirement

The site water balance is an assessment of all water inflows, throughflows, outflows and storage. The aim of this requirement is to create a map or diagram to visualise the site water balance and better understand the flow of water as it enters, is used, moves and ultimately exits the boundaries of the site.

How to implement the requirement

Starting with the information gathered for Requirement 1.1.1, each of the following components should be mapped, either on a scaled map of the site, or a schematic diagram:

- **Inflows:** Typically includes all water drawn into the boundaries of the site from water sources such as surface water intakes, wells and incoming piped water supplies from service providers. Rainfall should be included if it is captured and stored/used on site.
- **Consumption:** Refers to water that is withdrawn into the boundaries of the site and not discharged back to the water environment or a third party. This includes the water contained in the products manufactured by the site. Evaporation may also be included, where significant. For the sake of this requirement, the on-site facilities and areas where water is consumed should be mapped.
- **Losses:** Refers to water that is wasted or unaccounted for. For the sake of this requirement, any known leaks, pipe breaks and overflows should be mapped.
- **Storage:** This typically includes reservoirs, tanks, ponds, fire-fighting water tanks or ponds, and water contained in pipework (if significant).
- **Water reuse:** Refers to the process of intentionally capturing wastewater, stormwater, saltwater or greywater, and cleaning it as needed for a designated beneficial purpose. For the sake of this requirement, any facilities where water is treated for reuse should be mapped.
- **Outflows:** Typically includes discharged wastewater, stormwater, runoff and other water that leaves the boundaries of the site and is released to surface water, groundwater or third parties.
- **Metering points:** this includes all points where water meters are installed to monitor water flows and consumption.

The site water balance map or diagram should be documented and update when necessary.

Means of verification

- Documented map or diagram of the site water balance.

External references

- CDP (2025) 'CDP Technical Note on Water Accounting'[8].

[8] https://cdn.cdp.net/cdp-production/cms/guidance_docs/pdfs/000/001/561/original/CDP-technical-note-water-accounting-definitions.pdf?1523617481/

1.3.3 The site water balance, including inflows, consumption, losses, storage, reuse and outflows, shall be *monitored* and *quantified*. The annual site water balance and monthly variance in water usage rates (including high and low variances) shall be *quantified* and *documented*, including an analysis of trends.

Aim of the requirement

Quantifying the site water balance and tracking variability in water use supports effective operational water management and enables the identification of trends, risks and opportunities related to water use and availability at the site.

How to implement the requirement

The site's water balance should be calculated using monitoring data that accounts for inflows, consumption, losses, storage, reuse and outflows. Water volumes may be determined using direct measurement (for example, flow meters, tank volumes, abstraction records) or reasonable estimation where direct measurement is not feasible. Estimates should be based on appropriate assumptions and documented. The site water balance equation should be expressed as:

total inflows = total outflows + water consumption +/- change in storage

The equation should balance approximately, so it is useful for verifying that water volumes and flows are reliably measured and accounted for. For example, if measured outflows are too small compared to inflows, it can be an indication of unaccounted leakages or evaporation. Given that it may be difficult to accurately measure some flows, an error in the water balance calculation of up to five percent is acceptable.

The site water balance should be calculated on an annual basis, at a minimum. Monthly water use data should also be compiled to identify variance in water usage rates, including periods of relatively high and low use. Where relevant, shorter time periods (for example, weekly or daily) should be used to support understanding of variability, provided annual and monthly requirements are met. Use of spreadsheets and graphs charting variability can be useful here. The site should analyse annual water balance results and monthly usage data to identify trends over time, including changes in total water use, shifts in seasonal demand or emerging patterns in water losses, reuse or consumption.

This information is important for understanding how water use variability throughout the year correlates with water supply availability. The site needs to know whether water availability is sufficient to meet peak demands without negative impacts on the natural environment or other water users. A condition where peak demand matches or exceeds what is available in the catchment indicates that there is likely a negative impact associated with the site's water use, or a high risk of impact.

Means of verification

- Documented annual site water balance, with details of monthly water usage to allow variance analysis.
- Records of monitoring data for inflows, consumption, losses, storage, reuse and outflows.
- Documented monthly water usage rates and analysis of trends.

External references

- Hoekstra, Arjen Y., et al. (2011) 'The Water Footprint Assessment Manual: Setting the Global Standard'[9].

1.3.4 The site water use efficiency (m^3 per unit of output, activity or area) shall be *monitored* and *quantified* at least annually, including an analysis of trends.

Aim of the requirement

To ensure the site understands how efficiently water is used in relation to its level of output, activity or area over time. Tracking water use efficiency and analysing trends supports informed site water management and provides insight into changes in operational performance and production patterns.

How to implement the requirement

The site should calculate its water use efficiency by relating total site water use to an appropriate unit of output, activity or area that reflects the nature of the site's operations. The chosen efficiency metric should be clearly defined (including which water flows are included or excluded) and applied consistently to allow meaningful comparison over time. Where there are industry published best practice values for water use efficiency available, for instance for bottled water factories, it is suggested that sites use these to benchmark performance.

Water use volumes used in the efficiency calculation should be derived from the site water balance and monitoring data documented for requirement 1.3.3. The unit of output, activity or area (for example, tonnes of product, number of units produced, hectares managed or operational throughput) should be selected by the site based on relevance to its operations. Once selected, the unit should be applied consistently across reporting periods to support trend analysis. Where a change in the unit is made, the site should ensure that water use efficiency monitoring remains comparable across years.

The site should calculate water use efficiency at least annually and analyse trends over time, noting significant increases, decreases or variability and, where relevant, contextual factors influencing those trends. Where sites produce products or services with very different water use efficiencies (for example, dry-mix products and beverages) they are encouraged to assess water use efficiency by relevant product categories, in addition to reporting overall site water use efficiency, to ensure more meaningful tracking of efficiency improvements.

Means of verification

- Documented annual site water use efficiency calculations.
- Trend analysis based on multiple years of data (where available).

[9] https://www.waterfootprint.org/resources/TheWaterFootprintAssessmentManual_English.pdf

1.3.5 Water quality of the site's on-site source(s), provided waters and discharge shall be *monitored* and *quantified*. For discharge, pollutant concentrations and loads shall be *identified* and *quantified*. Annual and seasonal high and low variances shall be *identified*, including an analysis of trends.

Aim of the requirement

Water quality information is important for understanding the site's impacts and risks, as well as for demonstrating legal compliance. The aim of this requirement is to ensure that the site monitors water quality on an ongoing basis.

How to implement the requirement

The site should monitor and maintain records of water quality for all on-site sources, provided waters and discharge. For on-site sources, most sites will collect their own samples on a regular basis for laboratory analyses. When sampling on-site sources, the parameters to consider should follow a risk-based approach, aligned to the intended use (for example, drinking water or process water), operational sensitivity (for example, scaling or corrosion) and known local issues (for example, low dissolved oxygen levels).

For provided waters, external service providers can usually provide water quality data. If the data is not already publicly available, the site should request it. Note that the provider may claim that any information not legally required to be disclosed is confidential. In such cases, the site should conduct its own monitoring, similar to the monitoring for on-site sources.

Discharge includes effluent, stormwater, runoff and other water leaving the boundaries of the site and released to surface water, groundwater or third parties. For discharge, monitoring should cover parameters stipulated by legal and regulatory requirements and include both pollutant concentrations and loads. The pollutant load is the rate at which a pollutant, such as nutrients, is delivered to a receiving water body, specified in units of mass per time (for example, kg P/day).

It is considered good practice for sites to develop and follow a water quality monitoring plan, which includes:

- The monitoring points where samples are taken and the sampling method;
- The parameters to be tested based on the nature of the water and legal and regulatory requirements; and
- The frequency and timing of sampling, considering seasonality.

The site should identify annual and seasonal high and low variances and analyse trends over time. Trends of concern should be considered as site water risks. For instance, a discharge parameter may be within legal limits but gradually increasing over time, indicating a risk of future non-compliance.

Means of verification

- Water quality monitoring records.
- Documented high and low variances and analysis of annual and seasonal trends.

External references

- World Health Organization (2022) 'Guidelines for drinking-water quality: fourth edition incorporating the first and second addenda'[10].

[10] https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240045064

1.3.6 Potential sources of water pollution shall be *identified*. An inventory of all potential sources of water pollution shall be *documented*, including all chemicals, fuels, fertilisers, hazardous wastes or other significant pollutants according to local legislation, which are used or stored on-site.

Aim of the requirement

Sites have a responsibility to avoid causing pollution of the natural environment, including water bodies. The aim of this requirement is to ensure the site has an understanding of all potential sources of water pollution on-site, so that they can be properly managed and mitigate risks.

How to implement the requirement

In Requirement 1.1.1, sites must map potential sources of water pollution, including areas where chemicals, fuels, fertilisers, hazardous wastes or other significant pollutants according to local legislation, are used, transported or stored on-site. For this requirement, the site should identify and maintain an inventory of all the potential sources of water pollution on-site. In addition, sites should ensure appropriate storage and handling requirements are in effect, including secondary containment, in case of accidental spillage. Measures to be taken in the case of accidental spillage, or emergency events such as floods, should be included in the site's incident response plan (2.4.1).

Means of verification

- Documented inventory of all potential sources of water pollution on site.

1.3.7 On-site freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity shall be *identified*, and *mapped* or *documented*, and their condition assessed, including but not limited to:

- **Water bodies and wetlands;**
- **Floodplains and aquifer recharge zones;**
- **Threatened and endangered species;**
- **Invasive species.**

Aim of the requirement

To understand the freshwater ecosystems and the associated biodiversity that exist on-site and their condition, to inform the site's understanding of its water-related impacts, risks and opportunities.

How to implement the requirement

Where freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity are found on-site, their location should be mapped and their attributes, including an assessment of their condition, should be documented. Freshwater ecosystems encompass water bodies such as lakes, reservoirs, rivers, streams, canals, estuaries, groundwater aquifers, and several types of wetlands such as bogs, marshes and swamps. Floodplains and aquifer recharge zones are also within the scope of this requirement as they provide important habitat for freshwater species. Their biodiversity refers to the rich diversity of species that inhabit these freshwater ecosystems, with a particular focus on threatened, endangered and invasive species.

When assessing the condition of freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity, the intent is to gain a sense of whether they are in good condition, degraded or somewhere in between. Desk-based research and stakeholder interviews, especially with government agencies, environmental NGOs and academic institutions identified in 1.2.1 should be adequate to gather this information in many cases. However, it may be necessary to conduct a field survey, ideally with the support of a qualified specialist.

Assessing the condition of freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity on-site through a field survey involves identifying relevant characteristics, developing indicators for those characteristics and combining them to assess the overall condition (Capitals Coalition, 2023). Potential types of indicators include:

- **Biological indicators:** Species abundance including the diversity and abundance of fish, macroinvertebrates, benthic algae and vegetation. 'Indicator species' can be used to assess ecosystem health, for example the presence of predators such as otters can indicate a healthy ecosystem.
- **Chemical indicators:** Water bodies should be tested for water quality including levels of nutrients (for example, nitrogen, phosphorus), dissolved oxygen, pH and toxic pollutants.
- **Physical and hydrological indicators:** These reflect the biophysical properties of ecosystems and include things like stable riverbanks, riparian vegetation, and varied substrates such as sand, gravel and mud. Water levels and water flow are also important to assess as they provide important information on the health of freshwater ecosystems.

Means of verification

- Site map displaying the freshwater ecosystems identified.
- Documentation of identified freshwater ecosystems and associated biodiversity, including their condition.

External references

- Arcadis, UNEP-WCMC, Capitals Coalition, ICF, WCMC Europe (2023) 'Measuring and valuing biodiversity at site level, Aligning accounting approaches for nature'[11].
- UNEP-WCMC, Capitals Coalition, Arcadis, ICF, WCMC Europe (2023) 'Measuring Ecosystem Condition – A primer for business, Aligning accounting approaches for nature'[12].

1.3.8 Levels of access and adequacy of WASH provision at the site, in comparison to national regulatory requirements or international guidelines where laws and regulations do not exist, shall be *documented* and *monitored*, including:

- **Availability and quality of water available to workers for drinking, food preparation and washing;**
- **Number of toilets and handwashing stations and a description of location, design, condition, safety and frequency of cleaning and maintenance;**
- **Number of workers that WASH facilities cater to.**

Aim of the requirement

In all countries and all sectors, employers are responsible for ensuring the availability of sufficient, free, physically accessible potable water to provide adequate hydration and hygiene for all workers, sensitive to worksite conditions, within a reasonable distance from the working task or the worksite. Employers are also

[11] https://capitalscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Align_site_level_implementation_guidance.pdf
[12] https://capitalscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Align_eco_condition_primer.pdf

responsible for providing sanitation and hygiene facilities at the site that allow workers to go to the toilet safely and discretely without harming their health, or the health of others, and that allow women to manage their menstrual hygiene needs. This includes all categories of on-site workers, contractors and visitors to the site. The aim of this requirement is to monitor WASH provision at the site level in order to demonstrate adequate levels of access and provision, or to identify risks and inform subsequent actions in the water stewardship plan.

How to implement the requirement

Implementing this requirement involves gathering quantitative and qualitative data relating to levels of access and adequacy of WASH provision at the site level on an ongoing basis. This data should include:

- **Drinking water:** The information gathered for 1.3.8 should include the quantity and quality of water available for drinking and food preparation. Many countries specify parameters for potable water and testing should be carried out to ensure potable water quality is compliant with national regulatory standards, or where those do not exist, international guidelines. The quantity of safe water required for drinking and food preparation will be context specific, dependent on, for example, the type of work, the climate and the size of the workforce. Where it is not feasible to measure the quantity of water provided, an estimate may be provided.
- **Sanitation:** The information gathered for 1.3.8 should include the number, location, design, condition and safety of sanitation facilities, as well as the number of people the facility caters to and their gender, and the frequency of cleaning and maintenance.
- **Hygiene:** Evidence shows that hygienic behaviour, such as handwashing, is a key preventative measure in reducing the spread of illness and disease. The provision of facilities is an essential starting point. Information gathered should include the number of hand-washing facilities and their location, condition and ease of access. It is also important to ascertain how many people are expected to use the hygiene facilities and if the timing of use is clustered at specific points in the day. Those having to wait at a crowded time may neglect to wash their hands. Efforts made to positively influence behaviours, such as adjustments to break times and hygiene awareness raising campaigns should also be documented.

Comparison to WASH-related regulatory requirements and international guidelines

The information gathered for 1.3.8 should be compared to the levels of WASH provision required by national regulatory requirements, or where those do not exist, international guidelines. This understanding is critical, as the site will be required to demonstrate legal and regulatory compliance in order to fulfil Requirement 3.6.1. The national laws and regulations for WASH provision for workers effectively determine the minimum threshold for WASH performance at the site to achieve compliance with the AWS Standard.

Means of verification

- WASH facility records including number, location, design and condition, cleaning and maintenance.
- Records of drinking water quality testing.
- Lists of workers and attendance records.
- Records of educational and awareness raising campaigns.
- National regulations and international guidelines.

External references

- International Labour Organization (2021) ‘WASH@Work: a Self-Training Handbook’[13].

[13] https://www.ilo.org/resource/training-material/washwork-self-training-handbook-revised

- WaterAid (2018) 'Strengthening the business case for water, sanitation and hygiene - how to measure value for your business'[14].
- World Health Organization (2021) 'Compendium of WHO and other UN guidance on health and environment'[15].
- World Health Organization (2022) 'Guidelines for drinking-water quality: fourth edition incorporating the first and second addenda'[16].

1.3.9 (Gold Requirement): Annual water-related costs shall be *quantified*, and the social, environmental and economic water-related value generated by the site shall be *identified* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

To understand the true cost of water for the site and the social, environmental and economic value generated through the site's water use. This information is also used to understand the true cost of water for site operations and demonstrate how its water stewardship activities generate value beyond compliance, including benefits for the site, stakeholders and the catchment. This information serves as a baseline for evaluating the costs, savings and value creation resulting from implementation of the site's water stewardship plan in requirement 4.1.2.

How to implement the requirement

The site should quantify its water-related costs on an on annual basis. Water-related costs are often broader than initially perceived; they include operations and maintenance, capital expenditures and management costs such as:

- **Operations and maintenance:** Including water supply fees, permits and licenses, chemicals for on-site water treatment, wastewater discharge fees, water quality sampling and laboratory analysis, and energy for water pumping, treatment and distribution.
- **Capital expenditures:** Including the purchase and maintenance of water-related infrastructure and depreciations.
- **Management:** Including staff costs, contractor fees, technical studies, data collection and stakeholder engagement.

The site should also identify and document the social, environmental and economic value generated through its water use and stewardship activities on an annual basis. This information may be presented qualitatively or quantitatively, depending on availability. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- **Social value:** Including improved WASH provision for workers, reduced competition with other water users, and improved relationships with local communities and authorities.
- **Environmental value:** Including preservation of environmental flows, reduced pollutant loads in receiving water bodies, and improved condition of freshwater ecosystems and associated ecosystem services.
- **Economic value:** Including avoided costs (such as reduced treatment needs, avoided fines), improved operational resilience and reduced downtime, and reduced water and energy costs due to efficiency improvements.

[14] https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/strengthening-the-business-case-for-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-how-to-measure-value
[15] https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/who-compendium-on-health-and-environment/who_compendium_chapter3_01092021.pdf?sfvrsn=d525db63_5
[16] https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240045064

Means of verification

- Quantification of annual water-related costs.
- Documentation of social, environmental and economic value generated.

External references

- UNESCO (2021) 'The United Nations world water development report 2021: Valuing water'[17].

1.4 Gather and understand existing water-related data for the catchment (1.1.2), including: water governance; water balance; water quality; freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity; water-related climate trends; infrastructure and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

1.4.1 Water governance initiatives in the catchment shall be *identified* and *documented*, including catchment plan(s), water-related public policies and major publicly led initiatives. The relevant goals of the water governance initiatives shall be *identified*, to help inform the site of possible opportunities for participation or collective action.

Aim of the requirement

To demonstrate an understanding of water governance initiatives in the catchment and their relevance to the site. Gathering this information is intended to enable the site to participate in relevant initiatives and identify opportunities for collective action.

How to implement the requirement

Water governance refers all aspects of how water is managed by governments, regulators, suppliers and users. It encompasses water resources management, protection, allocation, monitoring, quality control, treatment, regulation, policy and distribution. Examples of water governance include:

- Catchment or basin management plans;
- Water allocation frameworks;
- Water quality management plans;
- Local drought or climate adaptation strategies;
- WASH programmes;
- Infrastructure investment plans and regulatory reforms;
- Basin committees, water user associations or municipal water forums.

Where water governance programs already exist for a catchment or region, it is important to be familiar with them and to work with them. Most countries have comprehensive water governance institutions and frameworks, with plans and responsibilities divided according to administrative, hydrological and political

[17] https://www.unesco.org/reports/wwdr/2021/en/download-report

boundaries. However, the degree of funding and implementation of water governance varies considerably from place to place.

To implement this requirement, the site should research the initiatives in its catchment(s). Public sector stakeholders identified in 1.2.1, such as municipal water suppliers or water resources regulators, are good sources of this information. Sites that belong to a chamber of business, water user association, industry sector organisation or any other collective body should consider engaging through these bodies to gain more information. More advanced water governance initiatives in the catchment may already include a component of multi-stakeholder engagement.

The site should gather and document information about the initiatives identified including key issues, goals and objectives, participants and progress to date to understand their relevance to the site and to identify potential opportunities for participation or collective action. Sites should be aware of how initiatives may affect their own operations, as illustrated in the following scenarios:

- The water resources of the catchment are judged to be over-allocated. There is a policy to reduce or withdraw some allocations/permits/licenses to bring the catchment back into balance.
- There is a plan to significantly increase municipal water supply charges to encourage efficiency and raise funds for essential renovation and upgrades of the water supply infrastructure.
- There is a plan to apply stricter limits on the quality of wastewater received by municipal treatment plants, so some businesses will have to install their own pre-treatment facility.
- There is a plan to increase public investment in water supply which will reduce the occurrence of supply interruptions, thus creating a beneficial impact.

Means of verification

- Documentation of identified water governance initiatives.

1.4.2 Water-related legal and regulatory requirements which apply to the site shall be *identified* and *documented*. A description of how the identified legal and regulatory requirements apply to the site shall be *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

Legal and regulatory compliance is a fundamental part of responsible water stewardship. The aim of this requirement is to demonstrate an understanding of which water-related legal and regulatory requirements apply to the site and how.

How to implement the requirement

A register of water-related legal and regulatory requirements should be created, along with an explanation of how each applies to the site. This register forms the basis for Requirements 2.2.1 and 3.1.1, which pertain to demonstrating legal and regulatory compliance. Water-related legal and regulatory requirements may include:

- Water abstraction limits and approvals;
- Wastewater discharge requirements and approvals;
- Water reuse regulations;
- Environmental regulations to protect water bodies from pollution.

Means of verification

- Register of water-related legal and regulatory requirements.
- Copies of applicable permits and licenses.

1.4.3 Social, cultural and recreational values of water in the catchment shall be *identified* and *documented* through consultation with stakeholders from 1.2.2, including:

- **Water-related areas that are fundamental for satisfying the basic needs of local communities or Indigenous Peoples;**
- **Water-related areas deemed to have social, cultural or recreational value;**
- **The customary water rights of stakeholders in the catchment, where applicable.**

Aim of the requirement

To understand and respect how water in the catchment supports people's lives, identities, livelihoods and wellbeing, beyond purely economic or ecological uses.

How to implement the requirement

When engaging with stakeholders as required in 1.2.2, the site should consider the social, cultural and recreational values of water in the catchment. In particular, the site should seek to identify:

- **Water related areas fundamental to meeting basic needs**: This could include domestic water collection points (formal or informal); water sources used for drinking, washing, or food preparation; fishing areas.
- **Water-related areas deemed to have social, cultural or recreational value**: This could include areas used for cultural, spiritual or religious practices; areas linked to heritage, identity or customary practices; recreational areas (for example swimming spots or tourism/leisure sites).
- **Customary water rights of stakeholders in the catchment**: This refers to a collection of water allocation rules and traditional practices used by Indigenous communities. It is based on practice, generally recorded orally rather than in written code.

When documenting the values of water, the site should describe for whom they are important and any existing types of formal recognition, such as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Understanding these values is essential to avoiding harm, identifying shared water challenges and informing responsible decision-making in later steps of the AWS Standard, particularly impact mitigation (3.1.2) and collective action planning.

Means of verification

- Records of stakeholder consultation on the social, cultural and recreational values of water in the catchment.

1.4.4 The water balance of the catchment shall be *quantified* and *documented*. Where there is insufficient data to calculate the catchment water balance, a measure of water stress shall be *quantified*. Annual and seasonal variances shall be *identified* and *documented*, where available, including a description of trends.

Aim of the requirement

Calculating the catchment water balance helps sites to understand the availability of water in the catchment, as well as their own potential impact on water availability and any risks they may face. The aim of this requirement is to establish a quantified baseline for the catchment water balance.

How to implement the requirement

A catchment water balance is an assessment of the water inflows, throughflows and outflows, and water storage within the catchment over a set period of time. It is similar in principle to a site water balance (1.3.3), but on a much larger scale. It is useful for identifying when there is increasing water scarcity. This occurs when outflows are consistently larger than inflows, so that water storage and availability in the catchment gradually decrease over time. A catchment water balance equation should be expressed as:

water outflows = water inflows ± changes in storage

Depending on local conditions, geology and how water is used, a catchment water balance could be based on surface water only, or groundwater only. However, it is necessary to combine the two where there is significant surface-groundwater interaction, as there is in most cases.

The site should gather secondary data from existing studies, public datasets, government agencies, research institutions or other credible third-party sources. Sometimes, this information is available for a city, region or administrative area that doesn't match the boundaries of the hydrological catchment. This is sufficient if it includes the necessary elements of the catchment area listed in 1.1.2.

A catchment water balance is typically quantified for a one-year period, although it may be appropriate to calculate it for a shorter timeframe if there is significant seasonal variability in water availability and/or demand. Sites are also required to identify annual and seasonal variances, and to provide a description of trends. Analysing and identifying long term trends, such as declining groundwater levels or increasing seasonal variability, is more useful for understanding water risks than a one-year snapshot.

Where existing data to calculate the catchment water balance is unavailable or insufficient, the site should document data gaps, as these may constitute a water risk or area for collective action. In these cases, a measure of water stress for the catchment should be quantified instead. Acceptable indicators include the withdrawal-to-availability ratio (preferably adjusted to account for environmental flow requirements, such as the SDG 6.4.2 indicator reported by UN Water), the Baseline Water Stress metric, or an officially adopted water stress metric published by a competent river basin authority or national water agency.

Means of verification

- Quantified catchment water balance or measure of water stress, and data sources.
- Documented annual and season variances, and a description of trends.

External references

- Ding, Grace Kam Chun and Ghosh, Sumita (2017) 'Sustainable Water Management – A Strategy for Maintaining Future Water Resources'[18].
- WULCA (no date) 'What is AWARE?'[19].

1.4.5 Water quality of the catchment shall be *identified* and *quantified*, including but not limited to the site's water source(s) and receiving water bodies. Physical, chemical and biological parameters of concern shall be *identified*. Annual and seasonal high and low variances shall be *identified* and *documented*, where available, including a description of trends. Where the site uses any desalinated water, water quality of effluent from the desalination process and the receiving water bodies shall be included.

Aim of the requirement

Knowledge of catchment water quality helps sites to understand their own potential impact on water quality and any risks they may face. The aim of this requirement is to establish a quantified baseline for the catchment water quality, with a focus on the site's water sources and the receiving bodies.

How to implement the requirement

Water quality data for the catchment should be obtained from secondary sources. Sources may include regulators, environmental agencies, water utilities and academic studies. Other stakeholders may also have data available to share. At a minimum, the site should gather water quality data for its water sources and receiving water bodies. For sites that use desalinated water, this should also include water quality data for the effluent from the desalination process and the receiving water bodies.

Ideally, the information gathered should include the current state of water quality in the catchment, as well as historical records to identify trends. The site should also seek to understand how activities in the catchment affect water quality, to inform potential actions. With the information gathered, the site should identify any physical, chemical or biological parameters of concern, for instance:

- **Physical**: Including high turbidity from erosion and excess temperature from discharge of heated effluent.
- **Chemical**: Including high levels of phosphorus or nitrogen from agriculture runoff and heavy metals from industry.
- **Biological**: Including E. coli from improperly treated sewage and low dissolved oxygen levels from organic waste.

Once the parameters of concern are identified, the site should document variances, identifying the seasonal (within-year) and annual (between-year) highest/lowest values observed. This is useful to evaluate trends in relation to the parameters of concern and drivers (for example, rainfall/runoff, low-flow dilution, abstraction, wastewater discharges).

Where secondary data is unavailable or limited, the site should document its efforts to procure the data. In these cases, sites may use surrogate measures to infer water quality problems. Such surrogate measures could include fish kills in rivers; algal blooms in dams and rivers; illness and disease outbreaks; declining biodiversity indexes; and modification of water courses through sediment deposits or erosion. Sites may also consider

[18] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/chapter/referencework/pii/B978012409548910171X
[19] https://wulca-waterlca.org/what-is-aware/

collecting their own water quality samples for analysis from water sources and receiving water bodies in the catchment to meet Gold Requirement 1.4.10, which relates to catchment-level data collection.

Means of verification

- Catchment water quality records with quantification of the identified parameters of concern.
- Documented assessment of trends for observed data.

External references

- O'Grady, et al. (2021) A comprehensive review of catchment water quality monitoring using a tiered framework of integrated sensing technologies[20].

1.4.6 Freshwater ecosystems in the catchment and their biodiversity shall be *identified*, and *mapped* or *documented*, and their condition assessed, including but not limited to:

- **Protected and conserved areas;**
- **Key Biodiversity Areas;**
- **Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance;**
- **Environmental flows;**
- **Threatened and endangered species;**
- **Invasive species;**
- **Freshwater ecosystems and species identified as important by catchment stakeholders from 1.2.2;**
- **Common freshwater ecosystems and species showing rapid declines at local or global scales.**

Aim of the requirement

Healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity are essential to the prosperity of societies and economies. Conversely, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse represent one of the greatest risks to business and society. The aim of this requirement is to demonstrate an understanding of the extent and condition of freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity in the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

Based on the catchment map (1.1.2) and secondary information, the site should identify, and where applicable map, freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity in the catchment, including the following elements:

- **Protected and conserved areas:** Lists and maps of protected and conserved areas should be available from government sources as well as international databases. Under the Convention on Biological Diversity governments should also identify areas that are under Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs), such as Indigenous People's territories and private or public land where long-term management will ensure ecosystem protection.
- **Key Biodiversity Areas:** These are sites of global importance for the persistence of biodiversity. They are designated based on five criteria related to threatened biodiversity, rare biodiversity, the ecological

[20] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969720362951

integrity of broader systems, biological processes and irreplaceability based on quantitative criteria. The Key Biodiversity Area Partnership maintains a global map and database of these sites.

- **Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance:** Ramsar wetlands are ecosystems of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention. There are over 2,500 Ramsar sites around the world, a list of which can be found on the Ramsar website.
- **Environmental flows:** These describe the quantity, timing and quality of water flows required to sustain freshwater and estuarine ecosystems and the human livelihoods and wellbeing that depend on these ecosystems. Information may be available from government sources, research institutions or international databases such as Global Environmental Flow Information System developed by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI).
- **Threatened and engaged species:** Information on globally threatened species can be found in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, or from national or sub-national 'red lists' that have been developed based on IUCN criteria. Consultation with NGO and government stakeholders can also be a source for species that are considered threatened but are not yet identified in published sources.
- **Invasive species:** It is important to understand which invasive species are present in the catchment and how they can be managed. Invasive species information should be available from government or NGO sources at the national level. IUCN also maintains a Global Invasive Species Database.
- **Freshwater ecosystems and species identified as important by catchment stakeholders from 1.2.2:** These may include ecosystems and biodiversity which do not have an official designation but are nonetheless deemed as important by local stakeholders for social, cultural or recreational reasons.
- **Common freshwater ecosystems and species showing rapid declines at local or global scales:** According to the Living Planet Report (2024), freshwater species are declining faster than those of any other biome with populations crashing by 85% between 1970 and 2020. Information on the status of freshwater ecosystems and species in rapid decline in the catchment should be available from government and NGO sources, and through consultation with stakeholders.

To assess the condition of the freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity identified, sites should refer to the aforementioned sources from government agencies, research institutions and NGOs and tools such as the WWF Biodiversity Risk Filter. Ecosystems and species with an official designation should be subject to regular monitoring and reporting. Sites are not expected to conduct field surveys or primary data collection in the catchment, although they may choose to do so to meet Gold Requirement 1.4.10. As in Requirement 1.3.7, the intent is to gain a sense of whether ecosystems are in good condition, degraded or somewhere in between.

Means of verification

- List and catchment map of identified freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity.
- Documented assessment of freshwater ecosystem and biodiversity condition.

External references

- Protected Planet (2026) 'Discover the world's protected and conserved areas'[21].
- Key Biodiversity Areas (2026) 'Key Biodiversity Areas'[22].
- Ramsar (2026) 'Ramsar Sites Information Service'[23].
- International Water Management Institute (2026) 'Global Environmental Flow Information System'[24].

[21] https://www.protectedplanet.net/en
[22] https://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/
[23] https://rsis.ramsar.org/
[24] https://eflows.iwmi.org/

- International Union for Conservation of Nature (2026) 'Red List of Threatened Species'[25].
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (2026) 'Global Invasive Species Database'[26].
- WWF (2025) 'Biodiversity Risk Filter'[27].
- Acreman, Mike (2016) 'Environmental flows - basics for novices'[28].

1.4.7 Water-related climate trends for the catchment shall be *identified* and *documented*, including observed and projected changes in precipitation and water-related extreme events. Current and potential future impacts of climate change on water shall be *identified* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

The effects of climate change are expressed primarily through water. Impacts are felt through increasing water scarcity, changing precipitation patterns and increased severity of extreme water-related events, including floods and droughts. The aim of this requirement is to understand how climate change is already affecting, and is likely to affect, water availability, water quality and water-related risks in the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

The site should start by gathering historical data on observed changes in precipitation and extreme water-related events in the catchment. Most often, this information is available from local and national weather stations and meteorological institutions and sometimes summarised in reports.

In the context of climate change, which is pushing temperatures and atmospheric conditions into unprecedented territory, historical data is no longer sufficient for predicting future climate conditions. Therefore, it is important to understand future projections. The site should gather information on climate change projections related to precipitation and extreme water-related extreme events from secondary sources, including national climate atlases and global platforms such those by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the World Bank. This information may also be available in national climate adaptation plans, catchment-level assessments and academic papers.

It is recognised that in many places, observed climate data and future projections are more likely to be available according to administrative boundaries, rather than at the catchment level. In these situations, the site should gather available data at the closest spatial resolution – this may be at a national or regional level. Where secondary data is unavailable or limited, the site should document its efforts to procure the data.

With the information gathered, the site should identify the current and potential future impacts of climate change on water in the catchment, especially as they related to the site's use, for example:

Climate Change Driver	Water Impact
Increasing rainfall variability	Less predictable river flows
More frequent droughts	Reduced baseflow, higher salinity
More intense rainfall	Flooding, erosion, turbidity spikes

[25] https://www.iucnredlist.org/
[26] https://www.iucngisd.org/gisd/
[27] https://riskfilter.org/biodiversity/home
[28] https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/wat2.1160

Climate Change Driver	Water Impact
Rising temperatures	Higher evaporation, lower dissolved oxygen
Reduced snowpack (if relevant)	Reduced dry-season recharge
Sea-level rise (coastal)	Saline intrusion into aquifers

Means of verification

- Documented summary of observed and projected water-related climate trends.
- Description of current and potential future impacts of climate change on water in the catchment.

External references

- International Panel on Climate Change (2021) 'IPCC WGI Interactive Atlas'[29].
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (2026) 'Climate Data Online'[30].
- The World Bank Group (2026) 'Climate Change Knowledge Portal'[31].

1.4.8 Shared water-related infrastructure in the catchment, which the site depends on or could be affected by, shall be *identified* and *mapped*. A description of the condition of infrastructure and potential exposure to extreme events shall be *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

To ensure the site understands its dependence on water-related infrastructure in the catchment and potential risks associated with its condition and exposure to extreme events.

How to implement the requirement

The site should start by identifying and mapping water-related infrastructure within the catchment that it depends on or could reasonably be affected by. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Dams, reservoirs, weirs, canals and intakes;
- Water treatment works and pumping stations;
- Distribution pipelines and bulk conveyance systems;
- Wastewater collection, treatment and discharge infrastructure;
- Stormwater and flood management infrastructure.

The site is not expected to undertake a detailed technical assessment of catchment infrastructure. Instead, it should document its condition – including age, size, and any known problems and constraints - and exposure to extreme events, such as droughts, floods and power outages. This can usually be achieved through publicly available reports and planning documents, and consultation with water authorities, utilities or regulators.

[29] https://interactive-atlas.ipcc.ch/
[30] https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/cdo-web/
[31] https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/

In many catchments, water and wastewater infrastructure is ageing, costly to maintain and vulnerable to failure. Where infrastructure is known to be in poor condition, or where upgrade plans are limited or uncertain, the site should explicitly note the associated risks, such as increased likelihood of pipe bursts, water contamination and significant water loss through leaks. Where information cannot be obtained, this should be clearly stated, as lack of transparency or data availability may itself represent a material risk.

Means of verification

- Catchment map with the identified water-related infrastructure.
- Documentation of condition and exposure to extreme events.

1.4.9 Levels of access to adequate WASH services in the catchment shall be identified and documented, including:

- **Percentage of population with access to safe drinking water services;**
- **Percentage of population with access to sanitation services;**
- **Percentage of population with access to hygiene services;**

Aim of the requirement

While near universal WASH provision is taken for granted in some parts of the world, there are still many regions in which access to adequate WASH services is lacking. The aim of this requirement is to understand the level of WASH provision in the catchment in which the site operates and implements water stewardship activities. Gathering and understanding this information helps the site to identify potential risks and shared water challenges, and opportunities to support WASH provision beyond its fenceline.

How to implement the requirement

There is a wide array of resources available to assist in gathering WASH data. At the national level, governments report to the Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) of the WHO/UNICEF on the status of WASH services. Providing regular global reports on drinking-water and sanitation coverage, the JMP focuses on monitoring progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets:

- **6.1:** By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.
- **6.2:** By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

As for details of WASH provision in the catchment, government agencies, multi-laterals and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may be able to provide the relevant data. It is recognised that in many places, WASH data is more likely to be available according to administrative rather than catchment boundaries. In these situations, the site should gather available data at the closest spatial resolution – this may be at a state, district or broader basin level. Regardless, the most up to date information available should be gathered. In all cases, it should include the percentage of the population with access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

The information gathered for this requirement may be further enhanced by bespoke information collected from stakeholders in the catchment. This may be done in partnership with an experienced local NGO or civil society organisation (CSO), although this is not required. Sites should focus their efforts on understanding the levels of

access to safe WASH for workers at home, and for communities in close proximity to the site. This could be achieved using available data and reports. Where data is lacking, the site and its partner(s) may carry out interviews with key stakeholders including government agents and organisations with knowledge of conditions, as well as collecting information directly from households and communities through, for example, focus group discussions and surveys.

Means of verification

- Documented percentages of population with access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

External references

- United Nations (2025) 'Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: Water and Sanitation'[32].
- World Health Organization and UNICEF (2026) 'Joint Monitoring Programme'[33].

1.4.10 (Gold Requirement): The site shall support and/or undertake catchment-level data collection to the extent that an existing or new data point is improved in terms of accuracy and/or frequency. The catchment data shall be *documented* and shared with relevant catchment stakeholders.

Aim of the requirement

To fill identified data gaps and support an improved understanding of the catchment for the site and stakeholders.

How to implement the requirement

To fulfil the Core requirements of Criterion 1.4, sites are required to gather existing, secondary water-related data for the catchment. However, in the process of gathering catchment data, the site may find some data is missing or insufficient. This requirement is intended to recognise efforts by the site to fill data gaps by collecting primary data at the catchment level.

To implement this requirement, the site should either undertake catchment data collection independently, or support the efforts of others, such as government agencies or research institutions. The site's efforts should address existing data gaps, such that at least one existing or new data point is improved in terms of accuracy or frequency. A data point is a discrete unit information, that represents a specific value, measurement or observation within a larger dataset.

The catchment data collected by the site should be shared with relevant stakeholders and contribute to an improved, shared understanding of the catchment. Ideally, this information should support others in the catchment with their water stewardship efforts.

Means of verification

Catchment data collected by the site.

Records of communication showing data-sharing with stakeholders.

[32] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/

[33] https://washdata.org/

Examples

- **Water balance:** Install/upgrade a gauging station or support a partner to increase flow monitoring frequency at a priority tributary.
- **Water quality:** Quarterly sampling (lab-based) at upstream/downstream points where stakeholder concerns exist and sharing results with the municipality/community forum.
- **Freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity:** Seasonal biomonitoring (such as macroinvertebrates) at agreed sites to establish a baseline where none existed
- **WASH:** Community water point reliability/quality monitoring at agreed intervals to support service planning.

1.5 Understand the site's water-related impacts and dependencies in the catchment and value chain.

1.5.1 The site shall *identify* and *document* its water-related impacts and dependencies based on an understanding of the site (1.3) and catchment context (1.4). This shall include:

- **Identification of at least one impact and one dependency for water balance, water quality and freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity;**
- **Documentation of data sources, assumptions and gaps;**
- **A description of seasonal or long-term trends, where sufficient data is available.**

Aim of the requirement

In the course of carrying out their activities, sites both impact and depend upon water resources in the catchment. The aim of this requirement is for the site to demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the site and catchment context by identifying water-related impacts and dependencies. This requirement also serves as a precursor to the identification of risks, shared water challenges and opportunities in Criterion 1.6.

How to implement the requirement

For this requirement, water-related impacts refer to changes in the condition of freshwater (quantity, quality and ecosystems) which are the result of the site's actions. Water-related dependencies, on the other hand, refer to aspects of environmental assets and ecosystem services that the site relies on to function, such as water flow and quality regulation.

Using the information gathered for Criteria 1.3 and 1.4, the site should identify its impacts and dependencies for water balance, water quality, and freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity. At a minimum, the site should identify at least one impact and one dependency for each of the three areas, with a focus on those that are most material and relevant to the site's operations.

A description of the site's water-related impacts and dependencies and their relevance should be documented. Where sufficient information is available, a description of relevant seasonal patterns (for example, dry-season stress) and/or long-term trends (such as declining groundwater levels) should be included. Where trends cannot be assessed, this should be stated clearly. The site should also record its data sources and be transparent about uncertainty, data limitations, assumptions and gaps.

Means of verification

- Documentation of the site's impacts and dependencies, including links to relevant data and a description of trends.

External references

- Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (2023) 'Guidance on the identification and assessment of nature-related issues: The LEAP approach'[34].
- World Resources Institute (2026) 'Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas'[35].

Examples

Outcome area	Impacts	Dependencies
Water balance	• Net consumptive use reducing downstream availability during dry seasons. • Altered timing of return flows affecting catchment water availability.	• Reliable abstraction volumes from a river, aquifer or municipal supply to maintain operations during peak demand periods. • Sufficient seasonal availability to meet irrigation or production needs.
Water quality	• Discharges contributing nutrients, salinity or temperature changes to receiving water bodies. • Accidental spills or diffuse runoff affecting water quality for downstream users or ecosystems.	• Adequate incoming water quality to meet process, cooling or product specifications. • Receiving water bodies maintaining quality suitable for discharge compliance.
Freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity	• Reduced flows or altered flow regimes affecting aquatic habitats and species. • Unintentional introduction of invasive aquatic species.	• Healthy rivers that provide baseflows and dilution capacity. • Wetlands that improve water quality and provide natural protection against floods.

Template

- T2. Impacts and dependencies

[34] https://tnfd.global/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Guidance_on_the_identification_and_assessment_of_nature-related_Issues_The_TNFD_LEAP_approach_V1.1_October2023.pdf?v=1698403116

[35] https://www.wri.org/applications/aqueduct/water-risk-atlas/

1.5.2 (Gold Requirement): The site shall *identify* and *document* indirect water use impacts and dependencies in its value chain, including:

- **The country and catchment of origin and level of water risk for Tier 1 suppliers;**
- **A description of the water use impacts and dependencies associated with the products and/or services sourced from Tier 1 suppliers;**
- **A description of the water use impacts and dependencies associated with consumer product use and disposal.**

Aim of the requirement

The indirect water use associated with global supply chains is a significant driver of water pollution and scarcity. Similarly, for some products, consumer product use requires more water than the manufacturing process. The aim of this requirement is to broaden the site's understanding of its water-related impacts and dependencies by incorporating the value chain.

How to implement the requirement

The site should begin by identifying its Tier 1 suppliers and, where relevant, key product use stages that are likely to be water intensive or associated with elevated water risk. Tier 1 suppliers are those that provide or sell products or services directly to the site or its parent organisation.

For each supplier, the site should identify the country of origin and, where feasible, the relevant catchment in which production occurs. Using publicly available water-risk tools or studies, the site should then describe the level of water risk in those locations, such as water stress, water quality challenges or ecosystem degradation. Screening-level tools and regional data are acceptable at this stage. Where catchment-level detail is not available, the site should document the level of geographic resolution used and explain any limitations.

For each supplier, the site should describe the water-related dependencies associated with its production, such as reliance on irrigation water, groundwater availability or consistent water quality. To assess dependencies, the site should provide a measure or estimate of the volume of water used by suppliers. This may be informed by direct supplier data where available, or the use of sector averages, water-footprint databases or literature-based benchmarks.

The site should also describe water-related impacts, such as abstraction pressure, consumptive use, wastewater discharges, or effects on freshwater ecosystems. This information may be gathered directly from suppliers, or estimated based on water withdrawals and consumption, and common water quality impacts associated with the product or service.

Where relevant, the site should also describe water-related impacts and dependencies associated with consumer or downstream use of its products. This may include water consumed during product use, water quality impacts arising from use or disposal, or reliance on water availability for effective product performance. This assessment should be proportionate and focused on products or use phases where water use or water risk is material.

For all value-chain impacts and dependencies, the site should document the data sources used, including supplier information, public water-risk tools, water-footprint databases, or academic and sector studies. All assumptions, such as the use of regional averages or proxy indicators, should be stated explicitly. It is recognised that in some cases, supplier data will be unavailable. In these cases, any data gaps should be clearly documented, including what information is missing, why it is unavailable and whether the gap is material.

Means of verification

- Documentation of identified water-related impacts and dependencies in the value chain.

External references

- Bluerisk (2026) 'Accelerating water action in agricultural supply chains: Practical steps for building supply chain water resilience'[36].
- Water Footprint Network (2026) 'Water Footprint Assessment Tool'[37].

Template

- T2: Impacts and dependencies

1.6 Understand water risks faced by the site, shared water challenges in the catchment and opportunities to address them.

1.6.1 Water risks faced by the site shall be *identified* and *documented*, based on an understanding of the site's impacts and dependencies (1.5.1). Risks shall be prioritised based on an assessment of likelihood and severity of impact within a given timeframe, as well as potential costs and business impact.

Aim of the requirement

To ensure the site has a clear, documented understanding of the water-related risks it faces, and that these risks are prioritised in a way that informs decision-making, planning and business continuity. This requirement builds the business case for water stewardship by linking water challenges to potential operational, financial, regulatory and reputational impacts.

How to implement

Water risk refers to the possibility of a site experiencing a water-related challenge. The degree of risk is determined by the likelihood of a water-related challenge occurring and the severity of the challenge's impact, were it to occur. There are three main types of water risks faced by sites: physical, regulatory and reputational:

- **Physical:** Having too little water, too much water, water that is unfit for use or inaccessible. For instance, drought, flooding, declining water availability and/quality or infrastructure failure
- **Regulatory:** Changing, ineffective or poorly implemented public water policy and/or regulations, and the possibility of non-compliances. For instance, tightening abstraction limits, discharge standards or permit non-compliance.
- **Reputational:** Stakeholder perceptions that a company does not conduct business in a sustainable or responsible fashion with respect to water. For instance, stakeholder concerns about real or perceived overuse or pollution by the site.

Using the information gathered for 1.3 and 1.4, and the site's understanding of its water-related impacts and dependencies (1.5.1), the site should identify water risks across the three main categories. It's worth noting that some risks may fall into multiple categories. For each identified risk, assess the likelihood of occurrence and the

[36] https://blueriskintel.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Accelerating-water-action-in-agricultural-supply-chains_May-2026.pdf
[37] https://www.waterfootprintassessmenttool.org/

severity of impact were it to occur, within a given timeframe. This can be done using a simple risk matrix, like the one below:

Severity / Likelihood	Insignificant (1)	Minor (2)	Significant (3)	Major (4)	Severe (5)
Rare (1)	Very low (1)	Very low (2)	Low (3)	Medium (4)	Medium (5)
Unlikely (2)	Very low (2)	Low (4)	Medium (6)	Medium (8)	High (10)
Moderate (3)	Low (3)	Medium (6)	Medium (9)	High (12)	Very high (15)
Likely (4)	Medium (4)	Medium (8)	High (12)	Very high (16)	Extreme (20)
Almost certain (5)	Medium (5)	High (10)	Very high (15)	Extreme (20)	Extreme (25)

For each risk, the site should also assess the potential costs and business impact. This should consider factors like potential operational downtime or production losses, increased costs (water, treatment, energy, fines), legal or compliance consequences, impacts on reputation, stakeholder trust or licence to operate.

With the combined assessment or likelihood, severity of impact, potential cots and business impact, the site should develop and document a prioritised list of water risks. This list should directly inform actions in the site's water stewardship plan.

Means of verification

- Documented site water risk assessment.

External references

- Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (2023) 'Guidance on the identification and assessment of nature-related issues: The LEAP approach'[38].
- World Resources Institute (2026) 'Aqueduct'[39].
- WWF (2026) 'Water Risk Filter'[40].
- WaterAid (2025) 'Risk screening guidance for corporate water, sanitation and hygiene'[41].

Template

- T3. Site water risks

[38] https://tnfd.global/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Guidance_on_the_identification_and_assessment_of_nature-related_Issues_The_TNFD_LEAP_approach_V1.1_October2023.pdf?v=1698403116

[39] https://www.wri.org/aqueduct

[40] https://riskfilter.org/

[41] https://www.wateraid.org/washmatters/resources/risk-screening-guidance-corporate-water-sanitation-hygiene

1.6.2 Shared water challenges shall be *identified*, prioritised and *documented* from the information gathered, including:

- **Site water risks (1.6.1);**
- **Water-related challenges of stakeholders (1.2.2);**
- **Catchment data (1.4).**

Aim of the requirement

To identify the shared water challenges that concern both the site and other stakeholders in the catchment, and prioritise them in a way that supports planning, collective action and long-term catchment resilience.

How to implement the requirement

The site should start by compiling information already gathered for earlier requirements in Step 1 of the Standard, including the water-related challenges of stakeholders identified for Requirement 1.2.2, catchment data gathered for Criterion 1.4 and the site water risks identified in Requirement 1.6.1. These combined inputs provide the evidence base for identifying shared water challenges and should be referenced rather than recreated.

Using the compiled information, the site should identify water-related issues that are shared between the site and one or more other stakeholders in the catchment. Shared challenges may relate to water quantity, water quality, governance, freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity, or WASH, and may be current or emerging. The focus should be on challenges that extend beyond the site boundary and reflect conditions in the catchment. The site should be as specific as possible when identifying shared water challenges and identify their cause, where possible. Examples include:

- Seasonal water scarcity contributing to water shortages for industry, agriculture and communities;
- Nutrient or chemical pollution from agriculture affecting raw water quality for the water utility;
- Flooding of commercial and residential areas exacerbated by land use change and aging infrastructure;
- Over-abstraction of a shared aquifer contributing to water shortages;
- Limited access to safe water or sanitation in parts of the catchment.

The shared water challenges identified should be listed and prioritised in terms of their significance and urgency. This may include reflecting on the scale of the challenge within the catchment, the severity of potential social, environmental or economic impacts, and whether the issue is already occurring or likely to emerge in future. The site should document the prioritised list of shared water challenges, as well as the justification for prioritisation and references to supporting information. This information will be used to inform the development of targets and actions in the water stewardship plan.

Means of verification

- Documented, prioritised list of shared water challenges and supporting information.

Template

- T4. Shared water challenges

1.6.3 Opportunities to address shared water challenges in the catchment shall be *identified*, prioritised and *documented*, including a description of how the site may participate in collective action.

Aim of the requirement

Good water stewardship practice involves both site- and catchment-based actions. The aim of this requirement is to link the sites understanding of shared water challenges (1.6.2) and existing initiatives (1.4.1) in the catchment to inform actions in the water stewardship plan (2.3).

How to implement the requirement

Starting with the list of prioritised shared water challenges from 1.6.2, the site should consider what types of changes are needed to address the challenges at the catchment level. This ensures that opportunities are grounded in catchment needs and shared outcomes. While there may be actions that the site can take on its own, often these will not be enough be achieve long-term change at the catchment level.

Sites are therefore required to identify opportunities for collective action. In the first instance, sites should identify opportunities to participate in existing water governance initiatives in the catchment (1.4.1) to avoid duplication of effort. Where new initiatives are required, the site should consider what type of initiative is needed and which actors should be involved. Collective action initiatives may include joint or blended funding mechanisms, shared data and monitoring arrangements, and capacity building, amongst other interventions.

For each opportunity identified, the site should clearly define its intended role, focusing on the most appropriate contribution rather than the largest or most visible one. Roles may include convener or facilitator, participant or delivery partner, funder or supporter, technical contributor, data provider or advocate. Role definition helps to ensure complementarity and supports effective collaboration.

Before prioritising opportunities, site should assess whether they meet the conditions for effective collective action. This includes having accessible and transparent multi-stakeholder governance at the appropriate scale, respectful engagement with local communities and Indigenous Peoples, coordination with existing initiatives to avoid fragmentation, and clear arrangements for monitoring, data sharing and learning. This step helps ensure that collective actions are credible, inclusive and outcome focused.

The site may define its own approach to prioritisation. However, it should favour opportunities with the greatest shared value and likelihood of success. The final list of prioritised opportunities should be documented, with the opportunities selected for implementation featured in the site's water stewardship plan (2.3).

Means of verification

- Documented list of prioritised opportunities to address shared water challenges.

External references

- CEO Water Mandate and Water Integrity Network (2015) 'Guide to Managing Integrity in Water Stewardship Initiatives'[42].
- Various Organisations (2024) 'Unpacking Collective Action in Water Stewardship: Shared Solutions for Shared Water Challenges'[43].

[42] https://ceowatermandate.org/integrity/

[43] https://a4ws.org/resource/unpacking-collective-action-in-water-stewardship/

Step 2: Commit & Plan

2.1 Develop a water stewardship strategy and commit by having the senior-most manager at the site or, if necessary, a suitable individual within the organisation head office, sign and publicly disclose a water stewardship commitment.

2.1.1 The site and/or organisation's water stewardship strategy shall be *documented*. The strategy shall define the overarching mission, vision and goals of the organisation for good water stewardship in line with the AWS Standard.

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that the site has a clear and coherent strategic direction for water stewardship.

How to implement the requirement

The strategy should describe the importance of water stewardship for the organisation, what long-term success looks like and the high-level goals that will guide actions. It provides direction for the water stewardship plan (Criterion 2.3) and for implementation in Step 3, ensuring that planning and actions are intentional, consistent and explicitly aligned with AWS outcomes. The strategy may be site specific, or applicable to an entire organisation. In terms of format, it may be a stand-alone document or be included within a broader sustainability strategy. Regardless, it should include the following elements:

- **Mission:** A description of the core purpose of the site or organisation's water stewardship efforts.
- **Vision:** A definition of the site or organisation's desired future state, typically within a three- to ten-year timeline, which captures what success looks like.
- **Goals:** High-level statements of ambition that capture a larger more strategic vision that an organisation aims to accomplish within a specified timeframe. Goals inform the development of targets in the water stewardship plan.

The strategy should be clearly documented and contain a version number and revision plan.

Means of verification

- Documented water stewardship strategy.

External references

- WWF (2021) 'Putting Water Strategy Into Context: A Practical Guide to Connect Corporate Strategic Objectives to Local Water Context'[44].

2.1.2 The site's signed commitment statement shall be *documented* and communicated internally. The statement shall include the following commitments:

- **The site will implement and disclose progress on efforts to achieve improvement(s) against the five AWS Standard outcomes;**
- **The site's water stewardship efforts will be aligned to, and in support of, existing catchment sustainability policies and plans;**
- **The site's stakeholders will be engaged in an open and transparent manner;**
- **The site will allocate the necessary resources for water stewardship implementation.**

Aim of the requirement

To ensure accountability and resourcing for AWS Standard implementation from site management, and to foster understanding and buy-in from site staff.

How to implement the requirement

The site should develop a commitment statement which covers the elements listed in the requirement above. The person signing the commitment statement should be someone in a position to grant and guarantee the necessary human and financial resources to achieve the organisation's status as a water steward, and to maintain it in the long-term, including the principle of continuous improvement. If the individual is replaced by another in the same or similar position of responsibility, the new person should reconfirm their commitment by also signing.

The statement should be communicated internally to ensure that it is understood by site staff. Like the water stewardship strategy, the commitment should be clearly documented and contain a version number and revision plan.

Means of verification

- Signed commitment statement and records of internal communication.

2.1.3 (Gold Requirement): A commitment statement that meets the requirements set out in 2.1.2, signed by the organisation's senior-most executive or governance body, shall be *documented* and publicly *disclosed*.

[44] wwf_embedding_context_into_strategy_hr.pdf

Aim of the requirement

To ensure top-level accountability and resourcing for AWS Standard implementation from the organisation's senior-most executive or governance body and demonstrate transparency and leadership through public disclosure.

How to implement the requirement

There are two distinctions between this Gold level requirement and 2.1.2. First, the commitment statement should be signed by the organisation's senior-most executive, in addition to site management. Secondly, the commitment statement should be publicly disclosed in addition to being communicated internally. Otherwise, please refer to the guidance for 2.1.2 for the steps to undertake.

The commitment should be publicly disclosed in a manner that is accessible to local stakeholders as well as global audiences. Channels for disclosure may include:

- Display on corporate websites;
- Inclusion in sustainability, ESG or integrated reports that are publicly available;
- Publication in newsletters or on social media channel/s;
- Display on external site signage and notice boards.

Means of verification

- Signed commitment statement and records of public disclosure.

2.2 Develop and document a system to achieve and maintain water-related legal and regulatory compliance.

2.2.1 The site's system to manage water-related legal and regulatory compliance shall be *documented*, including:

- **Identification of positions within the organisational structure responsible for compliance;**
- **A process for submissions to regulatory agencies and record keeping;**
- **A process for identifying new or revised legislation.**

Aim of the requirement

To ensure the site has a structured, documented system to achieve and maintain compliance with all applicable water-related legal and regulatory requirements. The system may be standalone or embedded within existing legal, environmental, risk or operational management systems.

How to implement the requirement

The identification of water-related legal and regulatory requirements and their relevancy to the site is addressed in requirement 1.4.2. This requirement is about how compliance is managed, not just whether the site is currently compliant. The site should document a system that clearly shows:

- Who is responsible for water-related compliance;
- How regulatory submissions and records are managed;
- How the site stays up to date with changes in legislation.

The system should also record any compliance violations or warnings, including fines, and report on corrective actions. Regarding the responsible persons, this should refer to the job title as the individual may change.

Regulators will often 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 on with reference to 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 organisation should reference appropriate standards, whether local, national or accepted international standards.

Means of verification

- Up-to-date documented system for legal and regulatory compliance.

2.3 Develop a water stewardship plan which contains targets for each of the five AWS Standard outcome areas, which minimise adverse impacts and address site water risks and shared water challenges in the catchment. Review and update the plan annually.

Introduction

Criterion 2.3 contains the five requirements for the site's water stewardship plan, which reflect the five outcomes of the AWS Standard: good water governance; sustainable water balance; good water quality status; healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity; and safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for all. The water stewardship plan is the crux of the AWS Standard, as it involves translating the site's understanding of water-related impacts, dependencies, risks, shared water challenges and opportunities from Step 1 into a credible, outcome-focused plan for action.

Sites are required to develop targets for each of the five AWS Standard outcome areas. Targets, as defined in the AWS Standard Glossary, include specific, timebound objectives and a measurable level of performance. The targets in the water stewardship plan should capture performance towards achieving the goals articulated in the site's water stewardship strategy (2.1.1).

Approach to target setting

The AWS Standard takes a contextual approach to target setting. Contextual water targets are those that are informed by the surrounding catchment context and help focus resources on water-related challenges that are strategically relevant to both the target-setting water user and other water users in the catchment. This type of target primarily aims to ensure that water targets are focussed on the most important water-related challenges in the catchment. Targets may also be informed by other recognised and complementary target-setting approaches, such as:

- **Science-Based Targets Network (SBTN) – Freshwater:** These are measurable, actionable and time-bound objectives based on the best available science that allow companies to align with Earth's limits and societal sustainability goals. This approach uses basin-level thresholds to set targets for water quantity and quality that align with what the catchment can sustainably provide or absorb.

- **Net Positive Water Impact:** This leadership ambition set at the enterprise level aims to ensure that the water user's positive contributions exceed their impacts in water-stressed basins. There are three pillars to this approach: 1) avoided or reduced operational impacts; 2) replenished, restored or regenerated operational footprint; and 3) delivered measurable watershed outcomes, through meaningful collaborations and collective action to address shared water challenges.

Developing the water stewardship plan

The following section provides overarching guidance for developing the site's water stewardship plan, which applies to Requirements 2.3.1 to 2.3.5.

Confirm priorities and baselines
Using the outputs from Step 1, the site should confirm its priority water risks and shared water challenges in the catchment, as well as its baseline performance for each of the five AWS outcome areas. The site should distinguish between areas it controls directly, those it can influence and those that require collective action.

Set targets
Sites are required to set targets for each of the five AWS Standard outcomes which minimise adverse impacts and address site water risks and shared water challenges in the catchment. Targets should be proportionate and clearly linked to the site's water-related impacts, risks and/or shared water challenges in the catchment. Depending on the site and catchment context, targets may be set to improve or maintain performance. For instance, if a site provides adequate access to WASH for all workers and does not identify any shared water challenges related to WASH in the catchment, it may choose to set a target to maintain its current level of performance.

Sites should always consider the requirements in Step 3 when setting targets. These requirements set thresholds for performance against the five outcome areas at the Core, Gold and Platinum levels. While the Core requirements can typically be met with site-based improvements, the Gold and Platinum requirements generally involve collective action and demonstration of catchment-level impact. Sites are encouraged, where relevant and feasible, to include both site-level and catchment-level targets across the water stewardship plan.

Determine actions and resources
The water stewardship plan should include appropriate actions and adequate resources for the site to achieve, maintain or exceed targets. For each action in the plan, the site should assign responsibilities and allocate resources, including budget and staff time. Where the water stewardship plan includes collective actions, the role of the site and other organisations involved should be clearly articulated. Actions should ultimately be integrated into operational planning, standard operating procedures, and capital or maintenance planning to ensure implementation.

Document the integrated plan
The water stewardship plan should be documented as a single, coherent plan structured around the five AWS outcomes, with clear traceability from impacts, risks and shared water challenges to targets and actions. Requirements 2.3.1 to 2.3.5 follow the same structure and clearly stipulate the information that must be included in the plan for each of the five outcome areas. Template 5 provides a clear, easy-to-use format for sites to document their water stewardship plan. Use of the template is optional, and sites may choose to document their plan in another format, so long as all the essential information is provided.

Monitor, evaluate and update annually
The water stewardship plan should include metrics for how each target will be measured and monitored. Timelines to achieve each target should also be documented. While targets may be long-term, annual interim targets should be provided to monitor progress and ensure plans are on track. Sites are required to evaluate their performance, and review and update their water stewardship plan on an annual basis, as stipulated in the requirements in Step 4. These requirements embed continual improvement in the water stewardship plan and

ensure that it remains relevant as conditions change over time. Where the plan has been informed by the results of evaluation, this should be clearly indicated.

External References

- CEO Water Mandate (2024) 'Implementing Positive Water Impact: Technical Guidance'[45].
- Science Based Targets Network (2024) 'Freshwater Technical Guidance V1.1'[46]:
- WWF (2021) 'Contextual Water Targets: A Practical Guide to Setting Contextual Corporate and Site-Level Water Targets[47].

2.3.1 The water stewardship plan shall contain targets for good water governance, including:

- **Metrics for how each target will be measured and *monitored*;**
- **Actions and resources to achieve, maintain or exceed targets;**
- **Planned timeframes to achieve targets, with annual interim targets;**
- **Linkages between each target and water related-impacts, site water risks and/or shared water challenges;**
- **Identification and description of collective actions (where applicable), including the organisations involved, and the role(s) to be played by the site;**
- **If and how the plan has been informed by the results of evaluation (4.1).**

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that the site's water stewardship plan defines clear, measurable and time-bound targets for good water governance. Targets and actions should address impacts, risks, opportunities and shared water challenges identified at the site and within the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

Good water governance ensures responsible sharing of water resources in the interests of users and the natural environment in line with the principles of water stewardship. In many cases, water crises are really governance crises, driven by weak institutions and fragmented decision-making. Where water governance is identified as a risk or shared water challenge, the site should play a role in supporting and influencing its improvement.

Targets should be informed by the information gathered for Requirement 1.4.1, and actions should seize on the opportunities identified in 1.6.3. Water governance is highly context dependent, and it is important that the site's contributions be strategic and tailored to the catchment context. See Criterion 2.3 for overarching guidance on developing a water stewardship plan.

Means of verification

- Water stewardship plan.

[45] https://ceowatermandate.org/resources/net-positive-water-impact-technical-guidance/
[46] https://sciencebasedtargetsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Technical-Guidance-2024-Step3-Freshwater-v1-1.pdf
[47] https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_contextual_water_targets_hr.pdf

Examples

Some examples of targets for good water governance include:

- 100% attendance at water user association meetings;
- Co-funding establishment of a catchment data-sharing platform.;
- Support of the regulatory review process through participation in a technical working group.

Template

- T5. Water stewardship plan

2.3.2 The water stewardship plan shall contain targets for sustainable water balance, including:

- **Metrics for how each target will be measured and *monitored*;**
- **Actions and resources to achieve and maintain (or exceed) targets;**
- **Planned timeframes to achieve targets, with annual interim targets;**
- **Linkages between each target and water related-impacts, site water risks and/or shared water challenges;**
- **Identification and description of collective actions (where applicable), including the organisations involved, and the role(s) to be played by the site;**
- **If and how the plan has been informed by the results of evaluation (4.1).**

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that the site's water stewardship plan defines clear, measurable and time-bound targets for sustainable water balance. Targets and actions should address impacts, risks, opportunities and shared water challenges identified at the site ad within the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

Although it is experienced locally, water scarcity is increasingly a problem around the world. It is intensified by increased demand, decreased water quality and the effects of climate change. A sustainable water balance is the condition whereby ongoing water use in the catchment has no long-term negative impact on the availability of water for the natural environment and other water users.

Sustainable water balance targets may involve improving water use efficiency, reducing water withdrawals or replenishing water in the catchment. Actions may include a combination of site-level improvements and collective initiatives in the catchment. See Criterion 2.3 for overarching guidance on developing a water stewardship plan.

Means of verification

- Water stewardship plan.

Examples

Examples of targets for sustainable water balance include:

- Improve site water use efficiency by 30% from baseline by 2028;
- Reduce site water withdrawals by 20% from baseline by 2029;
- Offset 100% of site consumptive water use through catchment replenishment projects.

Template

- T5. Water stewardship plan

2.3.3 The water stewardship plan shall contain targets for good water quality, including:

- **Metrics for how each target will be measured and *monitored*;**
- **Actions and resources to achieve and maintain (or exceed) targets;**
- **Planned timeframes to achieve targets, with annual interim targets;**
- **Linkages between each target and water related-impacts, site water risks and/or shared water challenges;**
- **Identification and description of collective actions (where applicable), including the organisations involved, and the role(s) to be played by the site;**
- **If and how the plan has been informed by the results of evaluation (4.1).**

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that the site's water stewardship plan defines clear, measurable and time-bound targets for good water quality. Targets and actions should address impacts, risks, opportunities and shared water challenges identified at the site and within the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

Good water quality status is when water is suitable for its intended use, such as drinking water, irrigation or supporting ecosystems. Globally, water quality ranks as one of the top water-related concerns amongst experts and the public, who view water quality improvements as one of the top priorities for environmentally responsible companies (WWF and GlobeScan, 2025). Where water quality impacts, risks or shared water challenges are identified, sites are responsible for driving improvements.

Targets should be informed by the information gathered for Requirements 1.3.5, 1.3.6 and 1.4.5. Actions may involve a combination of site-level improvements and collective initiatives in the catchment, depending on the scale and nature of the impacts, risks and shared water challenges identified. In some cases, there may be overlaps or synergies between water quality, freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity, and WASH targets. See Criterion 2.3 for overarching guidance on developing a water stewardship plan.

Means of verification

- Water stewardship plan.

External references

WWF and GlobeScan (2025) 'The Future Water Agenda: How water can lead the way for sustainability and collective action'[48]

Examples

Some examples of targets for good water quality include:

- Maintain 100% compliance with all wastewater discharge permit parameters;
- Reduce Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) and nutrient loads of site runoff by 25% from baseline by 2028;
- Reduce nitrate levels of local water body by 15% from baseline by 2028.

Template

- T5. Water stewardship plan

2.3.4 The water stewardship plan shall contain targets for healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity, including:

- **Metrics for how each target will be measured and *monitored*;**
- **Actions and resources to achieve and maintain (or exceed) targets;**
- **Planned timeframes to achieve targets, with annual interim targets;**
- **Linkages between each target and water related-impacts, site water risks and/or shared water challenges;**
- **Identification and description of collective actions (where applicable), including the organisations involved, and the role(s) to be played by the site;**
- **If and how the plan has been informed by the results of evaluation (4.1).**

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that the site's water stewardship plan defines clear, measurable and time-bound targets for healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity. Targets and actions should address impacts, risks, opportunities and shared water challenges identified at the site and within the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

Over the last 50 years, freshwater habitats and species have experienced the greatest decline compared to marine and terrestrial biodiversity. Water stewards therefore have a critical role to play in protecting and restoring freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity, both on-site and in the broader catchment. A healthy freshwater ecosystem sustains its ecological structure, processes, functions and resilience within its range of natural variability.

Targets should be informed by the information gathered for Requirements 1.3.7 and 1.4.6 and address the specific threats identified. Actions should include the mitigation of the site's impacts on freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity, which are directly related to water quantity and quality in most cases, as well as measures

[48] https://globescan.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-Future-Water-Agenda-Report-GlobeScan-WWF-March-2025_Final-Version.pdf

to protect and restore them. See Criterion 2.3 for overarching guidance on developing a water stewardship plan.

Means of verification

- Water stewardship plan.

Examples

Some examples of targets for healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity include:

- Establish 15 metre riparian buffer along the on-site portion of local stream;
- Reduce level of nitrates in site runoff to less than five mg/L;
- Restore 10 hectares of degraded wetlands in the catchment.

Template

- T5. Water stewardship plan

2.3.5 The water stewardship plan shall contain targets for safe water, sanitation and hygiene, including:

- **Metrics for how each target will be measured and *monitored*;**
- **Actions and resources to achieve and maintain (or exceed) targets;**
- **Planned timeframes to achieve targets, with annual interim targets;**
- **Linkages between each target and water related-impacts, site water risks and/or shared water challenges;**
- **Identification and description of collective actions (where applicable), including the organisations involved, and the role(s) to be played by the site;**
- **If and how the plan has been informed by the results of evaluation (4.1).**

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that the site's water stewardship plan defines clear, measurable and time-bound targets for safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for all. Targets and actions should address impacts, risks, opportunities and shared water challenges identified at the site and within the catchment and value chain.

How to implement the requirement

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a basic human right, with important consequences for health, wellbeing, dignity, social justice, livelihoods, educational opportunities and economic development. Where access and adequacy of WASH provision is identified as a risk inside or beyond the fenceline, it should be considered an issue of high importance. By acting in a timely way to remove, reduce or mitigate WASH risks, a site can ensure business continuity and protect itself and its workers from unexpected costs and impacts.

Plans should be informed by the data collected and address the specific challenges identified. Sites should be mindful to avoid blanket implementation of corporate-wide WASH targets that do not respond to the specific challenges identified through implementation of the AWS Standard. See Criterion 2.3 for overarching guidance on developing a water stewardship plan.

Means of verification

- Water stewardship plan.

Examples

Some examples of targets for safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) include:

- On-site sanitation facilities include a minimum of two toilets and two urinals per 45 male workers, and four toilets per 50 female workers;
- 10% increase in the proportion of people with safely managed drinking water services in the catchment within three years;
- 25% increase in the average level of WASH knowledge, awareness and understanding for supplier site staff.

Template

- T5. Water stewardship plan

2.4 Demonstrate the site's responsiveness and resilience to water risks.

2.4.1 The site's incident response plan shall be *documented*. The plan shall respond to incidents related to the water-related risks identified in 1.6.1.

Aim of the requirement

This requirement recognises that not all water risks can be prevented, and therefore preparedness and response capability are essential components of responsible water stewardship. The aim is to ensure that the site’s incident response plan is responsive to water-related risks.

How to implement the requirement

An incident response plan is a written document that outlines the procedures and responsibilities for responding to environmental, health and safety incidents. For the sake of this requirement, the site should ensure that its incident response plan responds to potential incidents associated with water risks identified in 1.6.1, including but not limited to:

- Water supply interruption or failure;
- Acute water quality contamination;
- Wastewater system failure or non-compliant discharge;
- Flooding or extreme rainfall events;
- Drought-related restrictions or loss of source availability.

For each incident type, the plan should outline triggers and early warning indicators, immediate response actions, roles and responsibilities (including decision authority), internal and external communication requirements, regulatory notification requirements where applicable, and short-term mitigation and recovery

actions. The incident response plan should be documented, including the date and version number, and embedded in the site's management system.

Means of verification

- Documented site incident response plan.

2.4.2 (Gold Requirement): The site's water stewardship plan (2.3) shall be climate-proofed to build resilience to water risks (1.6.1) associated with climate trends in the catchment (1.4.7). The water stewardship plan shall include:

- **An indication of the site's vulnerability to water-related climate risks;**
- **The site's adaptation goals, targets and actions.**

Aim of the requirement

This requirement recognises that climate change can amplify existing water risks and introduce new ones. The aim is to build resilience by mainstreaming climate change adaptation into the site's water stewardship plan.

How to implement the requirement

With the information gathered about climate trends in the catchment (1.4.7) and associated risks (1.6.1), the site should assess their degree of vulnerability to the water-related climate risks identified. There are many different tools and methodologies that a site may use for conducting a climate vulnerability assessment, but at a minimum they should consider the site's exposure and sensitivity to water-related climate risks, and adaptive capacity.

Climate change adaptation refers the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate impacts. The aim of climate-proofing the water stewardship plan is to build resilience to the effects of climate change through the site's water stewardship efforts. For the sake of this requirement, the site's water stewardship plan should include a section or addendum describing its vulnerability to water-related climate risks, as well as its adaptation goals, and relevant targets and actions.

Means of verification

- Water stewardship plan, with attention to risks related with climate trends.

External references

- Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, CEO Water Mandate, International Water Management Institute, Pacific Institute, and World Resources Institute (2022) 'Water Resilience Assessment Framework – Corporate Guidance'[49].
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2025) 'Adaptation Planning for Business – Navigating uncertainty to build long term resilience'[50].

[49] https://ceowatermandate.org/resilience-assessment-framework/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2022/11/WRAF-Corporate-Guidance.pdf
[50] https://www.wbcsd.org/resources/adaptation-planning-for-business-navigating-uncertainty-to-build-long-term-resilience/

Step 3: Implement

3.1 Implement system to comply with water-related legal and regulatory requirements, and respect the social, cultural and recreational values of water in the catchment.

3.1.1 The site's system to maintain water-related legal and regulatory compliance shall be implemented and full compliance shall be *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

The aim of this requirement is to implement the system developed for Requirement 2.2.1 to demonstrate full compliance with the water-related legal and regulatory requirements identified for Requirement 1.4.2.

How to implement the requirement

Building on the work done for Requirements 1.4.2 and 2.2.1, the site should be able to provide documentation demonstrating legal and regulatory compliance. Documentation may take different forms, including permits, licenses, internal records, compliance submissions, etc., but it is essential that the site be able to demonstrate full compliance. Sites may also reference documentation already gathered by regulatory bodies where appropriate, provided they are accessible to the auditor for verification. Any compliance violations should be immediately communicated to the relevant government and regulatory agencies, as outlined in Requirement 5.3.2.

Means of verification

- Permits, licenses and other relevant authorisations.
- Traceable internal records and compliance submissions.
- Findings of inspections from regulatory agencies.

3.1.2 The site shall mitigate any adverse impacts (1.5.1) on the social, cultural and recreational values of water in the catchment (1.4.3). Measures to mitigate impacts shall be *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

To ensure the site takes action to avoid, reduce or remedy its impacts on the social, cultural and recreational values of water in the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

This requirement does not expect all catchment-level issues to be resolved. Instead, it requires sites to recognise their impacts and take reasonable, appropriate steps to proactively mitigate them. The site's impacts may include access to the resource (for social, cultural or recreational purposes), or have the potential to cause conflict, exclusion, harm to wellbeing, or degradation of culturally or socially significant water-related sites.

After identifying which social, cultural or recreational water values may be affected by site activities (see 1.4.3), and deciding which of those impacts are material and within the site's responsibility to mitigate, the site should document the measures to mitigate its impact which may include:

- **Avoidance**: Such as modifying operations, discharge points or timing of activities to prevent interference with culturally or recreationally important water uses;
- **Reduction**: Such as improving water quality, reducing abstraction or limiting access restrictions;
- **Restoration**: Such as rehabilitating affected water bodies or access points.

Engagement-based measures, including agreements, protocols or communication processes with affected stakeholders or Indigenous Peoples should be considered as a part of the mitigation efforts. The mitigation measures should respect customary water rights and existing governance arrangements where applicable.

Means of verification

- Records of measures to mitigate impact(s).

Examples

A perennial river downstream, to which a site discharges treated effluent, is used by local communities for informal recreation and has a significance for ceremonial use. A deterioration in water quality during high-production periods could reduce recreational use and raise community concerns, even though legal discharge limits are met. This impact was assessed as material due to repeated stakeholder feedback and reputational risk. Once confirmed as the responsibility of the site, the site implements the following actions:

- Adjusted production scheduling to avoid peak discharge volumes during weekends and known cultural event periods;
- Upgraded internal solids removal prior to discharge to reduce turbidity peaks;
- Introduction of tighter internal operational controls during high-flow events;
- Establishment of a regular communication channel with community representatives (see 1.2.2) to share information on discharge timing and improvements. The site agreed on a simple notification protocol for unusual discharge events or maintenance activities.

3.2 Implement the site's water stewardship plan to achieve targets for good water governance.

3.2.1 The site shall participate in water governance initiatives in the catchment (1.4.1). Participation shall be *monitored* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

To demonstrate that the site is engaged and aligned with water governance in the catchment through participation in the initiatives identified in Requirement 1.4.1.

How to implement the requirement

From the work done for Requirement 1.4.1, the site should have a good understanding of the water governance initiatives in the catchment, their relevant goals and opportunities for participation. Opportunities for participation may include becoming a member of a water user association, catchment committee or municipal water forum, as well as attending formal meetings or joint discussions. Sites are encouraged to participate meaningfully in these initiatives by fostering connections with other stakeholders, sharing best practices and integrating learning into their own water stewardship practice.

The site should document how it has participated in catchment governance in relation to the targets set in the water stewardship plan. Where there are no initiatives to participate in, the site should demonstrate reasonable efforts to engage relevant authorities or other convened stakeholder groups. The site is not required (at Core level) to establish new governance platforms but must demonstrate that it is participating where possible.

Means of verification

- Records of site participation in water governance initiatives.

External references

- OECD (2018) 'Water Governance Indicator Framework'[51].
- OECD (2022) 'How to Assess Water Governance: A Methodology Based on the OECD Principles on Water Governance'[52].

3.2.2 (Gold Requirement): The site shall actively support water governance initiatives in the catchment (1.4.1). The site's inputs and involvement shall be *monitored* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that the site moves beyond participation in water governance initiatives (3.2.1) to provide active, material support to water governance initiatives in the catchment.

[51] https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2024/06/oecd-water-governance-indicator-framework.html
[52] https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topics/policy-sub-issues/water-governance/How-to-assess-water-governance.pdf

How to implement the requirement

While Requirement 3.2.1 focuses on participation and engagement, this requirement asks the site to contribute with tangible inputs (financial, technical, organisational or strategic) that strengthen governance functioning, coordination, transparency or implementation. Engagement may occur at local level (such as water user associations), regional/catchment level (such as catchment management agencies), or at (trans)national level (such as sector coordination platforms).

The site's contribution may take the shape of resources, expertise, influence or coordination capacity for the governance initiatives identified under Requirement 1.4.1. Examples of acceptable active support include:

- Providing technical expertise to water user associations, basin committees or regulatory working groups;
- Contributing data or analysis to inform water allocation, water quality or catchment planning processes;
- Co-funding governance studies, institutional strengthening efforts or data platforms;
- Co-facilitation of multi-stakeholder water governance forums or processes;
- Seconding staff or dedicating staff time to working groups.

Sponsorship of activities may also count but only where it meaningfully strengthens governance capacity (for example, funding a basin management plan update, financing technical modelling or supporting stakeholder facilitation). Sites may act directly or through sector associations, chambers of business or industry platforms, provided their contribution is identifiable and substantive.

Means of verification

- Records of the site's active support for water governance initiatives.

3.2.3 (Platinum Requirement | Water governance): The site shall be actively involved in public policy engagement to improve water governance in the catchment. The's site's contributions shall be *monitored* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that the site plays a role in improving water governance in the catchment through involvement in public policy engagement.

How to implement the requirement

In contrast to Requirements 3.2.1 and 3.2.2, which involve participation in existing initiatives, this requirement calls for sites to demonstrate engagement with public policy to improve water governance in the catchment in some manner. This may involve engagement with public authorities and regulatory bodies at local, regional and/or national levels to improve clarity, coordination, transparency, implementation or effectiveness of water-related policies, regulations and institutional arrangements.

The focus is not lobbying for narrow commercial benefit but contributing to improved governance. At this level, the site is requested to document its contributions to sustainable and equitable water management in the catchment. This may include:

- Participating in formal policy consultations or regulatory review processes;

- Providing technical feedback on draft regulations, water allocation frameworks, discharge standards or enforcement mechanisms;
- Supporting improved coordination between government agencies with overlapping mandates;
- Engaging transparently in water allocation reform or water quality management planning;
- Supporting capacity-building initiatives for local regulators where appropriate.

The site's role should be constructive and solutions-oriented, aiming to improve clarity of roles and responsibilities, reduce regulatory contradictions or gaps, increase transparency and accountability, strengthen implementation of existing frameworks and improve practicality of governance instruments.

The contributions of the site may be visible at a later stage when progress is tangible (for example, revised guidelines, clarified procedures or improved coordination mechanisms), but the site is required to document its contributions at all stages.

Means of verification

- Records of the site's public policy engagement.

3.3 Implement the site's water stewardship plan to achieve targets for sustainable water balance.

3.3.1 The site shall improve its water use efficiency relative to the baseline established in 1.3.4. Progress shall be *monitored* and *quantified*.

Aim of the requirement

Given increasing demands and the limited volume of freshwater available, it is imperative that water be used more efficiently across the globe. This is reflected in the SDG 6.4, "By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity". The aim of this requirement is for the site to improve water use efficiency to reduce pressure on shared water resources in the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

Water use efficiency is defined as minimisation of the amount of water used to accomplish a function, task or result. It is measured by cubic metres (m^3) of water used per unit of output, activity or area. In general, water use has become more efficient in the last decade plus, and there is potential for that trend to continue in all sectors. To implement this requirement, the site should take actions to improve water use efficiency relative to the baseline established in 1.3.4. Actions to improve efficiency may include:

- Process optimisation through behavioural change, operational controls or technology upgrades;
- Introduction of water reuse technology;
- Investment in leak detection and pumping/piping infrastructure maintenance.

Water use efficiency targets should be proportionate to the scale of the site's water use and the severity of water stress in the catchment (1.4.4). For many sectors, recognised sectoral benchmarks and best practices for water use efficiency are available through industry associations. The site's water use efficiency targets and

actions may be specific to particular product lines, processes or operational areas of the site; however, the site should be able to demonstrate a net improvement in overall water use efficiency.

For mature sites that have already achieved high levels of water use efficiency, continual improvement may become incremental. Where temporary increases in water use per unit of production occur (for example, commissioning or testing of new infrastructure, product mix changes or unavoidable operational constraints), the site should document and justify the reasons for the increase, the expected duration and any mitigation measures in place. Short-term increases should not undermine long-term improvement trajectories.

Means of verification

Records of implemented water use efficiency actions.

Monitoring data showing quantified efficiency improvements over time.

External references

- Beverage Industry Environmental Roundtable (2025) 'Beverage Industry Water, Energy, and Emissions Benchmarking Executive Summary'[53].
- Ecolab (2026) 'The beverage producer's guide to optimizing water use ratio'[54].
- UN-Water (2021) 'UN-Water analytical brief: Water use efficiency'[55].

3.3.2 (Gold Requirement): The site shall reduce its total water withdrawals relative to the baseline established in 1.3.3 or replenish water in the catchment. Progress shall be *monitored* and *quantified*.

Aim of the requirement

In many catchments around the world, long term water use has exceeded renewable inflows and safe depletion levels. The aim of this requirement is for the site to contribute to an improved water balance in the catchment through reduced withdrawals and/or replenishment.

How to implement the requirement

To meet the aim of this requirement, sites may implement actions to reduce total water withdrawals relative to the baseline established in 1.3.3, replenish water in the catchment, or both. In any case, actions should be proportionate to the scale of the site's water use and the severity of water stress in the catchment (1.4.4).

Actions that result in reduced water withdrawals may include improved water use efficiency, demand reduction, water reuse, or changes in operational scale or timing. Where replenishment is pursued, the site should implement or support actions that measurably increase water availability in the catchment, such as aquifer recharge, wetland or floodplain restoration, invasive alien plant removal, stormwater capture or improved return flows. The site should ensure that replenishment actions are appropriate to the catchment context.

The site should be able to explain how progress is monitored and prove any reductions or replenishments claimed with records and documents explaining methodologies and assumptions.

[53] https://www.bieroundtable.com/2025-water-energy-and-emissions-benchmarking-summary-bier

[54] https://www.ecolab.com/-/media/Widen/Food-Beverage/Sustainable-Beverage-ebook.pdf

[55] https://www.unwater.org/sites/default/files/app/uploads/2021/10/UN-Water-analytical-brief-Water-use-efficiency_October2021.pdf

Means of verification

- Records of actions to reduce water withdrawals and/or replenish water in the catchment.
- Monitoring data showing quantified reductions or replenishment over time.

External references

- Bluerisk, Valuing Nature, and CEO Water Mandate (2021) 'Volumetric Water Benefit Accounting (VWBA): A Practical Guide to Implementing Water Replenishment Targets'[56].
- United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH) (2026) 'Global Water Bankruptcy: Living Beyond Our Hydrological Means in the Post-Crisis Era'[57].

3.3.3 (Platinum Requirement | Water Balance): The site shall replenish a volume of water in the catchment which is equal to or greater than its total water withdrawals. Progress shall be *monitored* and *quantified*.

Aim of the requirement

In the context of the AWS Standard, this requirement is intended to recognise the highest level of performance in terms of sustainable water balance. The aim is for the site to reach a point where it is replenishing as much or more water than it withdraws in the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

This requirement builds on Requirements 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 and represents the culmination of the site's efforts toward the sustainable water balance outcome. It may be achieved through a combination of actions to improve water use efficiency, reduce withdrawals and replenish water in the catchment. To start, the site should define a baseline for total water withdrawals from the information gathered for 1.3.3.

The site should select a recognised quantification method for replenishment benefits, for instance Volumetric Water Benefit Accounting (VWBA) and document the scope of the work and any assumptions. Replenishment actions must be hydrologically appropriate and aligned to catchment needs, such as managed aquifer recharge, wetland/floodplain restoration, invasive alien plant removal, stormwater capture/infiltration, leakage reduction in municipal systems (where it increases available supply), and return-flow improvement where relevant. Typically, the site should work on multiple projects rather than relying on a single intervention.

Where the site engages in collective action to achieve this requirement, the specific role of the site should be clearly defined and documented. Accurate, proportional attribution for replenishment is critical where multiple parties are involved. Roles the site may play include:

- Convening or coordinating a catchment replenishment coalition or technical working group;
- Co-funding projects and leveraging public or donor finance;
- Providing hydrological, withdrawal or monitoring data to enable shared water accounting;
- Piloting tools or methodologies that are adopted by others;
- Supporting enabling governance frameworks and implementation capacity.

[56] https://ceowatermandate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/VWBA_Guidebook_F_Web.pdf
[57] https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:10445/Global_Water_Bankruptcy_Report__2026_.pdf

The site should keep comprehensive records of actions taken and replenishment benefits claimed, and the annual replenishment contributions should be quantified each year in contrast to total water withdrawals.

Means of verification

- Records of replenishment actions taken and quantification of associated benefits.
- Monitoring data showing total water withdrawals versus quantified replenishment over time.

External references

- CEO Water Mandate (2024) 'Implementing Net Positive Water Impact: Technical Guidance'[58].
- World Resources Institute, LimnoTech, Bluerisk, Bonneville Environmental Foundation (2025) 'Volumetric Water Benefit Accounting 2.0: Guidance for implementing, evaluating, and claiming volumetric water benefits of water stewardship projects'[59].

3.4 Implement the site's water stewardship plan to achieve targets for good water quality.

3.4.1 Site water quality shall meet thresholds set in legal and regulatory requirements for all parameters. Progress shall be *monitored* and *quantified*.

Aim of the requirement

Good water quality status is vital to maintaining public and ecosystem health and supporting economic development. The aim of this requirement is to demonstrate that the site's water quality meets the thresholds set in legal and regulatory requirements.

How to implement the requirement

The site should begin by compiling all applicable legal and regulatory water quality requirements from 1.4.2, including discharge permits, required parameters, threshold limits (such as concentration, pH range and temperature), and reporting obligations. Site water quality monitoring results from 1.3.5 should be regularly reviewed against these legal and regulatory requirements to demonstrate that the thresholds for all parameters are met. Where the site is consistently compliant, it should demonstrate that operational and treatment controls are maintained to ensure continued compliance.

Where exceedances, risks of non-compliance or areas for improvement are identified, the site should conduct a root cause analysis and implement corrective and preventive actions, documenting both the issue and the response. Actions to meet this requirement may include improvements to discharge capture and treatment, adjustments to site inputs and processes, or enhancements to natural and agricultural landscapes. Sites are also encouraged to go beyond compliance to reduce pollution and improve water quality in the catchment in line with requirements 3.4.2 and 3.4.3 at the Gold and Platinum levels, respectively.

[58] https://ceowatermandate.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/NPWI_TechGuidance_F.pdf
[59] https://www.wri.org/research/volumetric-water-benefit-accounting-2-0

Means of verification

- Site water quality monitoring data.
- Records of legal and regulatory compliance and site-level improvements.

3.4.2 (Gold Requirement): The site shall reduce the pollutant load of its discharge relative to the baseline established in 1.3.5. Progress shall be *monitored* and *quantified*.

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that the site goes beyond legal compliance to demonstrate improvement to water quality through a measurable reduction in the pollutant load of the site's discharge.

How to implement the requirement

This requirement focuses on water quality impacts directly attributable to the site's operations, specifically the pollutant load of the site's discharge. The pollutant load is the rate at which a pollutant, such as nutrients, is delivered to a receiving water body, specified in units of mass per time (for example, kg P/day). Reducing the pollutant load may be achieved through a combination of reductions to the quantity and concentration of pollutants in effluent or other discharges from the site.

Improvements may include enhanced treatment, source reduction, segregation of waste streams, water reuse or improved stormwater management. For agricultural sites, improvements might involve reducing the application of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, constructing interception facilities for farmland runoff to mitigate soil erosion, promoting ecological agriculture models and establishing vegetation buffer zones to lower the risks of chemical runoff and leaching. Regardless of how it is achieved, the site should be able to clearly demonstrate a measurable reduction in pollutant load relative to the baseline established in 1.3.5.

In the context of the AWS Standard, discharge includes any water leaving the site boundary to surface water, groundwater or third parties, whereas irrigation of green areas on-site is considered water consumption. Therefore, sites claiming Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) must carefully assess whether treated wastewater applied on-site (such as recharge pits, infiltration wells, evaporation ponds or stormwater overflows) may result in water moving beyond the site boundary, including via groundwater pathways. Only when a site can demonstrate that no water leaves the site boundary — including no subsurface migration to groundwater beyond the boundary — can they credibly claim that the pollutant load leaving the site is effectively zero.

Means of verification

- Records of site level improvements to water quality.
- Monitoring data showing total reduction to the pollutant load of discharge over time.

External references

- World Resources Institute (2025) 'Water Quality Benefit Accounting: Guidance for implementing, evaluating, and claiming water quality benefits of water stewardship projects'[60].

[60] https://www.wri.org/research/water-quality-benefit-accounting

3.4.3 (Platinum Requirement | Water quality): The site shall improve water quality in the catchment for one or more physical, chemical or biological parameters of concern relative to the baseline established in 1.4.5. Progress shall be *monitored* and *quantified*.

Aim of the requirement

To demonstrate the site's contributions to a measurable improvement in catchment water quality. Success at this level depends on the site's ability to catalyse, guide, influence and sustain collective action that leads to measurable improvement in one or more parameters of concern (for example, nutrients, sediment, salinity, BOD, E. coli or macroinvertebrate index). The emphasis is not on acting alone, but on demonstrating leadership that results in measurable improvement at catchment scale.

How to implement the requirement

This requirement shifts the focus from site-level water quality improvements to improving the water quality status of one or more water bodies in the catchment. The site should begin by selecting one or more parameters of concern identified in the catchment baseline (1.4.5) to focus on. The parameter should be material to shared water challenges, scientifically measurable and linked to a defined monitoring location and timeframe.

Since catchment-level water quality improvement often cannot be achieved by one actor alone, the site should anchor its approach in collective action (see Criterion 3.7). This involves engaging relevant stakeholders, sharing baseline data transparently, and aligning proposed actions with existing catchment governance initiatives (1.4.1). The site's role may include convening, technical input, co-funding, coordination, advocacy or strengthening monitoring systems.

Depending on the context, actions may include improving agricultural nutrient management, supporting erosion control and riparian restoration, enhancing wastewater treatment performance, strengthening compliance systems, or addressing sanitation gaps contributing to contamination. The focus should be on interventions that are realistic, evidence-based and capable of generating measurable improvement over time.

Monitoring must be consistent with the baseline methodology and conducted at appropriate intervals to detect trends. The site should analyse seasonal and annual variations to distinguish genuine improvement from climate-driven variability. Progress should be quantified and compared against the baseline and target.

Finally, the site should clearly document its contribution to the improvement achieved. While responsibility for catchment conditions is shared, Platinum performance requires demonstrating the site's contribution to measurable positive change.

Means of verification

- Records of contributions to improved catchment water quality.
- Monitoring data showing improvements to catchment water quality.

3.5 Implement the site's water stewardship plan to achieve targets for healthy freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity.

3.5.1 On-site freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity, which are identified in 1.3.7, shall be protected, conserved or restored. Progress shall be *monitored* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

To demonstrate that on-site freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity identified under 1.3.7 are actively protected, conserved or restored.

How to implement the requirement

The actions taken to protect, conserve or restore freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity should be proportionate to their condition. Where ecosystems are in relatively good condition, the emphasis should be on protection and conservation to maintain and optimise their status through ongoing management and proactive interventions. For example, actions may include establishing buffer zones, removing invasive species and upgrading infrastructure to manage stormwater.

Where ecosystems are degraded, the site should take measures to restore them. For example, actions may include replanting riparian forest, re-establishing natural hydrology and reintroducing native species. For restoration, sites should follow national and internationally recognised guidelines and seek to learn from case studies of similar efforts.

To monitor and document progress, the site should use the same indicators from 1.3.7 to measure changes to the condition of on-site freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity. Photographs and videos may also be useful for documenting changes in condition. If no on-site freshwater ecosystems are identified, this must be clearly documented. In such cases, no action is required.

Means of verification

- Records of activities to protect or on-site freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity.
- Monitoring data demonstrating progress and changes in condition.

External references

- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2025) 'Agriculture and wetlands: Maintaining and restoring wetlands for sustainable food production and ecosystem health'[61].
- Water Resource Center, Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (2020) 'Stormwater Best Management Practices'[62].
- Ramsar (2002) 'Principles and Guidelines for Wetland Restoration'[63].

[61] https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/STRP_TR13_Eng_v2.pdf
[62] https://spcwater.org/topics/stormwater-management/stormwater-best-management-practices
[63] https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/guide/guide-restoration.pdf

3.5.2 (Gold Requirement) The site shall contribute to the protection or conservation of freshwater ecosystems in the catchment and their biodiversity, which are identified in 1.4.6, and mitigate any adverse impacts identified in 1.5.1. Progress shall be *monitored* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

To demonstrate that the site's impacts on freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity in the catchment are mitigated, and that the site is contributing to their protection or conservation.

How to implement the requirement

For requirement 1.5.1, sites are asked to identify their water-related impacts and dependencies, including those associated with freshwater ecosystems in the catchment. Here, sites are required to mitigate any adverse impacts identified. This may involve actions related to water balance and quality, for instance, reduction of water withdrawals or improved pollution control. Examples of mitigation measures include:

- Changing the timing of water withdrawals to maintain environmental flows in the source water body;
- Improving cooling processes to minimise heater transfer to receiving water bodies and maintain dissolved oxygen levels for aquatic species;
- Reducing nutrient runoff and resultant eutrophication through precision agriculture methods.

Beyond the mitigation of negative impacts, the site should also contribute to the protection or conservation of freshwater ecosystems in the catchment and their biodiversity, where they are identified. Protection and conservation are strategies to safeguard ecosystems through preservation, and sustainable use and management, respectively. Areas where the site has identified risks or shared water challenges should be prioritised, although other opportunities to contribute to protection or conservation may be identified. In all cases, the focus should be on meaningful, risk-informed contributions that address material drivers of degradation and deliver tangible conservation outcomes, rather than generic or symbolic activities.

While the site may work independently, most often, efforts to protect or conserve freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity in the catchment will require some degree of collaboration. Actions may be taken in partnership with relevant government agencies or conservation organisations, or through new or existing catchment-level initiatives. Potential activities include:

- Investment in green infrastructure, including constructed wetlands and buffer strips;
- Monitoring and removal of invasive aquatic species;
- Targeted education and awareness-raising activities, including cleanups and community workshops.

The site's contributions may take different forms – such as funding or other resources, expertise, or staff time and labour – depending on the context. To monitor and document progress, the site should refer to the findings from 1.4.6 to measure any changes to the condition of catchment freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity. Photographs and videos may also be useful for documenting changes in condition.

Means of verification

- Records of contributions to protect or conserve catchment freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity, and measures taken to mitigate site impacts.
- Monitoring data demonstrating progress and changes in condition.

External references

- Pacific Institute, United Nations Global Compact CEO Water Mandate, LimnoTech, The Nature Conservancy, Second Nature Ecology + Design (2026) 'Biodiversity Benefit Accounting: Guidance for quantifying and evaluating the biodiversity benefits of water stewardship projects'[64].

3.5.3 (Platinum Requirement | Freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity): The site shall contribute to the restoration of degraded freshwater ecosystems in the catchment and their biodiversity, which are identified in 1.4.6. Progress shall be *monitored* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

To demonstrate the site's contribution to the restoration of degraded freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity in the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

Much of the guidance for 3.5.2 applies here, however, the distinction is that this requirement calls for the site to contribute to the restoration of degraded freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity. Restoration is the process of supporting the recovery of ecosystems that have been converted or degraded because of human activities. Restoration is often a long-term endeavour. It generally takes years, or decades even, to restore an ecosystem to its natural state. However, partial restoration can lead to significant improvements in biodiversity and ecosystem services. In recognition of this, sites are required to demonstrate their contribution to a measurable improvement in freshwater ecosystem and biodiversity condition, rather than complete restoration. Restoration activities may include:

- Planting native riparian shrub and tree species;
- Removal of in-stream barriers or dams to improve stream connectivity;
- Restoring small wetlands with public and private landowners.

Similar to 3.5.2, the nature of the site's contribution may vary, but collaboration with other stakeholders in the catchment is highly recommended. To monitor and document progress, the site should use the findings from 1.4.6 as a baseline to measure changes to the condition of degraded freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity.

Means of verification

- Records of contributions to restore catchment freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity.
- Monitoring data demonstrating progress and changes in condition.

External references

- Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust (2025) 'The River Pant & Blackwater Restoration Plan'[65].
- Government of Zambia (2022) 'Restoration and Protection Plan: Magoye River Catchment 2022-2023'[66].

[64] https://ceowatermandate.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/BioBA_Revised.pdf
[65] https://www.essexsuffolkriverstrust.org/projects/blackwater-pant-restoration
[66] https://www.mwds.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/20230314-Restoration-and-Protection-Plan-Magoye.pdf

- International Network of Basin Organisations (INBO) (2015) 'The Handbook for Management and Restoration of Aquatic Ecosystems in River and Lake Basins'[67].

3.6 Implement the site's water stewardship plan to achieve targets for safe drinking water, effective sanitation and protective hygiene (WASH).

3.6.1 On-site access to adequate WASH shall be provided for all workers in line with national legal and regulatory requirements or international guidelines where laws and regulations to do not exist. Implementation shall be *monitored* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

Investment in adequate WASH services in the workplace reduces operational costs and risks and creates benefits for productivity and public health. The aim of this requirement is to demonstrate that workers on-site are being provided with adequate WASH services in line with national legal and regulatory requirements, or international guidelines where laws and regulations do not exist.

How to implement the requirement

For sites that are already providing adequate WASH services, documentation of WASH provision at the site should be adequate to implement this requirement. However, sites are encouraged to go beyond compliance to demonstrate leadership on WASH in the workplace. Resources such as the International Labour Organization's WASH@Work Self Training Handbook (referenced below) offer practical tools for self-assessment and guidance on how to improve WASH provision, working conditions and productivity.

For sites that have identified gaps in provision or areas for improvement, actions to meet this requirement may include improvements to the provision of drinking water, toilets, washing facilities, hygienic areas for food and drink consumption, and potentially showers, as well as awareness raising and training, and any additional efforts to positively influence behaviours. Measures taken to improve WASH provision at the site should consider gender, work schedules and incentive structures – as explained below – as well as any other special needs. Implementation of actions and associated improvements should be monitored and documented on an ongoing basis.

- **Gender considerations:** Women make up a large percentage of the labour force in certain sectors including, for example, the apparel and agriculture sectors. There is a great deal of evidence that demonstrates that women (and girls in communities) tend to be significantly more affected by both the siting and design of WASH facilities. Issues such as personal safety and the prevalence of sexual assault highlights the need for facilities with, for example, gender segregated toilets with internal locks, adequate lighting and privacy. Solutions proposed to remedy issues that arise from disadvantages to women related to WASH should be considered carefully. For example, if sanitation facilities for culturally acceptable menstrual hygiene management are not available in the workplace, including menstrual hygiene-related materials and disposal options, this can result in increased absenteeism of women when menstruating. A key principle is that WASH facilities and programs designed collaboratively with women are far more likely to meet the needs of women.

[67] https://www.inbo-news.org/documents/management-and-restoration-of-aquatic-ecosystems-in-river-and-lake-basins/

- **Work schedules and incentive structures:** At the site, care must be taken to ensure access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is not restricted, intentionally or otherwise, by work schedules (for example, one break in an eight-hour shift or inability to leave the assembly line) or incentive structures (for example, workers paid according by piece rate for each unit produced or action performed, so they skip breaks to increase output).

Means of verification

- WASH facility records including number, location, design, condition, cleaning and maintenance.
- Records of site attendance and any awareness raising or behavioural change activities.
- National regulations and international guidelines.

External references

- International Labour Organization (2021) 'WASH@Work: a Self-Training Handbook'[68].

3.6.2 (Gold Requirement): Where WASH is identified as a shared water challenge, the site shall support access to adequate WASH services in the catchment through direct provision or support for government agencies or civil society partners. Implementation shall be *monitored* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

The aim of this requirement is for the site to implement actions to support access to adequate WASH for stakeholders in the catchment. Where local communities in the catchment are home to the site's workers, business benefits include healthier workers and improved productivity. But wider gains can be made through strengthened community relations, enhanced government and regulatory relationships, increased school attendance, improved health systems, sustainable management of essential water resources and an enhanced social license to operate.

How to implement the requirement

Requirement 1.6.2 asks sites to identify shared water challenges in the catchment. In WASH-challenged locations, any gaps in WASH that are identified could justifiably – reflective of WASH's status as a human right and an enabler of economic growth –be considered by the implementing site as an important shared water challenge, rather than something which solely impacts external communities. In instances where WASH is not identified as a shared water challenge and the site is seeking Gold or Platinum certification, this requirement may be determined to be not applicable.

To implement this requirement, the site should implement actions from the water stewardship plan to improve WASH services beyond the fenceline, for underserved communities in the catchment. Actions may be implemented independently, but it is recommended that sites partner with local organisations, government authorities and/or NGOs. Actions may involve improvements to WASH infrastructure or service provision, or awareness-raising and behavioural change activities. Rewards and incentives for workers and/or communities to improve access to safe WASH at home may be introduced, such as nominated WASH Champions (WASH NGOs will be able to advise on effective strategies for building local action by affected stakeholders). Whatever the proposed solutions developed may be, the impacted communities should be consulted and ideally involved

[68] https://www.ilo.org/resource/training-material/washwork-self-training-handbook-revised

in decision-making. Implementers should also be aware of any existing initiatives being undertaken by other stakeholders, as joining and enhancing these may avoid duplication of effort.

For this requirement, it is recommended that the monitoring and documentation of implementation be comprised of qualitative reporting on the actions the site has undertaken, and qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the changes these actions have contributed to. Quantitative reporting should use the WASH definitions and indicators for drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities from the Joint Monitoring Program (JMP). Being aligned with the JMP means that implementers will be well positioned to report on how the site has contributed to achievement of SDG 6. This may bring important reputational, regulatory and community relationship benefits for the site and the broader company. Doing so will also leave the site in a strong position to report on achievements more broadly, including under Step 5: Communicate and Disclose.

Means of verification

- Quantitative and qualitative reports on actions implemented to improve WASH in the catchment.
- Stakeholder interviews with partner agencies and community members.
- Visual inspection of WASH facilities in the catchment.

External references

- UN General Assembly (2010) 'The human right to water and sanitation: resolution adopted by the General Assembly'[69].

3.6.3 (Platinum Requirement | WASH): The site shall support access to adequate WASH services in its value chain through direct provision or support for government agencies or civil society partners. Implementation shall be *monitored* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

The aim of this requirement is for the site to implement actions to support access to adequate WASH for suppliers in the value chain, where risks are identified. Sites that implement this requirement are well positioned to demonstrate leadership on WASH in the workplace, for example, through fulfilment of the WASH Pledge under the WASH4WORK initiative. By signing the WASH Pledge, companies commit to implementing access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene at the workplace at an appropriate level of standard for all employees in all premises, under their control within three years of signature. Under the Pledge, companies also commit to taking action on WASH across their value chain, including among their suppliers, as well as in the communities that surround their workplaces and/or where their workers live.

How to implement the requirement

This requirement builds on the work done for Gold Requirement 1.5.2. Starting with an understanding of indirect water use impacts and dependencies in the value chain, the site should work with Tier 1 suppliers to further assess WASH conditions in the workplace and in worker households. This may be achieved through questionnaire or assessment against a supplier code of conduct for WASH. Some of this information may already be available for suppliers participating in other social and environmental supplier certification schemes that include WASH components. Where non-compliances or areas for improvement are identified, the site should work directly with the supplier to develop and implement corrective actions.

[69] https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/687002?ln=en&v=pdf

Similar to Requirement 3.6.2, the interventions to improve WASH in the value chain may be carried out directly with suppliers or through local partners. Interventions may take many different forms, including direct provision or financial support, delivery of capacity building training, or implementation of reward or incentive structures for suppliers to improve access to WASH in the workplace. Regardless, plans should be supported by relevant stakeholders, including suppliers and workers, and aligned with any existing initiatives. To fulfil this requirement, the site should be able to demonstrate improvements in WASH provision for at least one supplier.

As in Requirement 3.6.2, it is recommended that the monitoring and documentation of implementation be comprised of qualitative reporting on the actions the site has undertaken, and qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the changes these actions have contributed to. Quantitative reporting should use the WASH definitions and indicators for drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities from the Joint Monitoring Program (JMP).

Means of verification

- Quantitative and qualitative reports on actions implemented to improve WASH with suppliers.
- Stakeholder interviews with suppliers.

External references

- World Business Council for Sustainable Development and WASH4WORK (2020) 'WASH Pledge: Guiding principles A business commitment to WASH'[70].
- WaterAid (2025) 'Risk screening guidance for corporate water, sanitation and hygiene'[71].

3.7 Implement collective actions from the site's water stewardship plan.

3.7.1 Collective actions from the site's water stewardship plan (2.3) shall be *implemented*, and progress shall be *monitored* and *documented*. The nature of the collective actions and the site's role shall involve, at a minimum:

- **Participation in collective action initiatives where present;**
- **Sharing of water-related data and information with stakeholders involved;**
- **Bilateral collaboration.**

Aim of the requirement

To demonstrate that the site's water stewardship activities have moved beyond the fenceline to implementation of collective action in the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

The AWS Standard outcomes typically cannot be fully achieved for a catchment by a single site. Therefore, collective action at the catchment level, inclusive of the site and relevant stakeholders, is an important feature of the Standard. This reflects widespread consensus across the water stewardship community. In a global survey

[70] https://wash4work.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/09/WASH-pledge-guidance-principles_WBCSD.pdf
[71] https://www.wateraid.org/washmatters/resources/risk-screening-guidance-corporate-water-sanitation-hygiene

of over 350 sustainability experts, collective action at the catchment level was ranked as the most effective and impactful way for companies to achieve meaningful water stewardship outcomes (WWF and GlobeScan, 2025).

Collective action is embedded in the Standard through the water stewardship plan (2.3), and is considered along a spectrum, with increasingly advanced requirements from Core to Gold to Platinum. What distinguishes these requirements – 3.7.1, 3.7.2 and 3.7.3 – is the level of participation expected from the site, the maturity of the governance and management structure of collective action initiatives, and the scale of collaboration.

To meet this requirement for collective action at the Core level, sites should demonstrate the following:

- **Participation in initiatives where present:** The site should participate in existing collective action initiatives in the catchment identified from 1.4.1. The site's involvement should be formalised and documented, for instance, through membership or a memorandum of understanding (MoU). Participation should also be documented on an ongoing basis through attendance records, meetings minutes, etc. Where there are no pre-existing collective action initiatives, this should be documented.
- **Sharing of water-related data and information with stakeholders involved:** The exchange of data, information and knowledge is a key feature of water stewardship. The site should share water-related data and information with the stakeholders involved. This may include monitoring data, studies, forecasts, plans or other relevant information. The site should set data sharing rules and keep records of what was shared, when, with whom and for what purpose.
- **Bilateral collaboration:** The site should demonstrate collaboration with at least one other stakeholder in the catchment, and ideally more. This may be formalised through a shared work plan or commitment to implement joint activities. The site should maintain a record of agreements, actions and outputs.

Means of verification

- Records of implementation of collective actions.
- Monitoring showing progress on implementation of collective actions over time.

External references

- Various Organisations (2024) 'Unpacking Collective Action in Water Stewardship: Shared Solutions for Shared Water Challenges'[72].
- WWF and GlobeScan (2025) 'The Future Water Agenda: How water can lead the way for sustainability and collective action'[73].
- WWF, CEO Water Mandate, Global Water Challenge, & WaterAid (2026) 'Defining a collective action spectrum: A brief for water stewardship practitioners'[74].

[72] https://a4ws.org/resource/unpacking-collective-action-in-water-stewardship/

[73] https://globescan.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-Future-Water-Agenda-Report-GlobeScan-WWF-March-2025_Final-Version.pdf

[74] https://ceowatermandate.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/CA-Spectrum-Paper-GB0303.pdf

3.7.2 (Gold Requirement): Collective actions from the site's water stewardship plan (2.3) shall be *implemented*, and progress shall be *monitored* and *documented*. The nature of the collective actions and the site's role shall involve, at a minimum:

- **Active participation in collective action initiatives, with a clearly defined role;**
- **Consultation with stakeholders to create a shared understanding of water-related interests and challenges to inform decision-making;**
- **Collaboration with sector-based groups.**

Aim of the requirement

To demonstrate the growth and maturity of the site's involvement in collective action in the catchment.

How to implement the requirement

Much of the guidance for 3.7.1 applies here, however, the distinction is that this requirement calls for a higher level of participation in collective action initiatives, greater maturity of governance and decision-making structures, and broader collaboration. To meet this requirement for collective action at the Gold level, sites should demonstrate at least the following:

- **Active participation in collective action initiatives, with a clearly defined role:** The site should contribute to collective action initiatives in a meaningful way. This may include taking responsibility for defined actions or workstreams, providing data, technical input or expertise, supporting implementation of agreed activities, contributing financial or in-kind resources, or supporting monitoring and reporting efforts. The site's role should be formalised and documented, and records of outputs should be maintained. Where collective action initiatives do not already exist, the site should be involved in initiating one.
- **Consultation with stakeholders to create a shared understanding of water-related interests and challenges to inform decision-making**: The site should show how consultation with stakeholders has created shared understanding and informed decision-making related to goals, objectives and priorities for collective action. This may overlap with other requirements related to stakeholder engagement, namely 1.2.2.
- **Collaboration with sector-based groups:** The scale of collaboration expected for this requirement is broader than 3.7.1. At a minimum, the site should demonstrate collaboration with sector-based groups. This may involve working through existing platforms like industry associations or chambers of commerce, or convening stakeholders on an ad hoc basis.

Means of verification

- Records of implementation of collective actions.
- Monitoring showing progress on implementation of collective actions over time.

External references

- CEO Water Mandate (2013) 'Guide to Water-Related Collective Action'[75].
- Diageo (2025) 'Diageo Water Collective Action Implementation Guide'[76].

[75] https://ceowatermandate.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Water_Guide_Collective_Action.pdf

[76] https://ceowatermandate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Diageo-Water-Collective-Action-Implementation-Guide-May-2021-ext.pdf

3.7.3 (Platinum Requirement): Collective actions from the site's water stewardship plan (2.3) shall be *implemented*, and progress shall be *monitored* and *documented*. The nature of the collective actions and the site's role shall involve, at a minimum:

- **Convening or co-convening of collective action initiatives;**
- **Establishment of common objectives, responsibilities and decision-making;**
- **Collaboration with multi-sectoral groups.**

Aim of the requirement

To demonstrate additional growth and maturity in scope, complexity and governance of collective action initiatives in the catchment, and the site's role within them.

How to implement the requirement

This Platinum level requirement builds on 3.7.1 and 3.7.2 and represents the top level of ambition and achievement for collective action. To meet this requirement, sites should demonstrate the following:

- **Convening or co-convening of collective action initiatives:** The intent is for the site to take a leadership role in collective action by convening, co-convening or leading defined components of initiative(s). This may include co-convening meetings or workstreams, providing secretariat or facilitation support, contributing financial or in-kind resources, leading technical initiatives, coordinating monitoring or reporting, or formalising governance arrangements.
- **Establishment of common objectives, responsibilities and decision-making**: This level of collective action should include shared identification of water challenges, agreement on common objectives and targets, ad clear roles and responsibilities, as well as joint-decision making and impact monitoring.
- **Collaboration with multi-sectoral groups:** Initiatives should involve multiple stakeholders from different sectoral groups including business, government and civil society. As collective action initiatives advance and demonstrate impact, they are likely to attract engagement from additional stakeholders

Means of verification

- Records of implementation of collective actions.
- Monitoring showing progress on implementation of collective actions over time.

External references

- CEO Water Mandate (2024) 'Water Action Hub Guide'[77].
- WRAP (2026) 'Collective Action Portal for Water in Doñana-Huelva'[78].

[77] https://ceowatermandate.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Water-Action-Hub-Guide-July-2024.pdf
[78] https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/86c524942cbc4c03b09a78dc4bc5e96f

Step 4: Evaluate

4.1 Evaluate the site's performance relative to its water stewardship plan and demonstrate its contribution to achieving water stewardship outcomes.

4.1.1 The site's performance against all targets in the water stewardship plan (2.3) shall be *evaluated* annually, and the results shall be *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the design, implementation or results of an initiative for the purposes of learning or decision-making. The aim of this requirement is to carry out an annual evaluation process to understand to what extent targets in the water stewardship plan have, or have not, been met. The results and learning from the evaluation are intended to inform the next iteration of the water stewardship plan for Criterion 4.3.

How to implement the requirement

The site's water stewardship plan (2.3) and documentation of implementation from Step 3 provide the foundation for this requirement. The evaluation should cover the execution, effectiveness and impact of implementation:

- **Execution** refers to whether or not the actions in the plan were carried out within the expected timeline and budget.
- **Effectiveness** is the extent to which implementation of the plan has resulted in achievement of the targets set. In some cases, implementation may lead to unintended effects, both positive and negative.
- **Impact** is determined by analysing how conditions in the catchment have changed as a result of implementation. This is relevant for evaluating performance against catchment level targets.

The evaluation process should cover performance against all targets in the water stewardship plan. Performance should be evaluated at least annually, although the site may wish to carry out an evaluation process on a more frequent basis, and the results should be clearly documented.

Means of verification

- Documented annual evaluation process.

- Performance data supporting conclusions.

External references

- The Nature Conservancy and ABInBev (2021) 'Measuring and Evaluating the Impact of Corporate Watershed Projects'[79].

4.1.2 (Gold Requirement): Costs, savings and value creation resulting from the water stewardship plan shall be evaluated annually. Costs and savings shall be quantified, and a description of the social, environmental and economic value generated through implementation of the site's water stewardship plan shall be documented.

Aim of the requirement

To understand the costs, savings and value creation associated with implementation of the water stewardship plan. By doing so, sites can clarify and demonstrate the business case for water stewardship within a company, and to investors and stakeholders. This requirement builds on the findings from Requirement 1.3.9.

How to implement the requirement

The site should quantify the annual costs associated with implementing the water stewardship plan (2.3). These should be costs that would not have been incurred in the absence of the plan, for example:

- **Capital expenditures:** Including infrastructure upgrades, additional water meters, and on-site landscaping.
- **Operations and maintenance:** Including staff time, training and chemicals for improved water treatment.
- **Management:** Including stakeholder engagement, assurance services and participation in collective action.

The site should also quantify financial savings or avoided costs resulting from implementation of the water stewardship plan. Examples include reduced water purchase or abstraction costs, reduced energy costs from water efficiency or treatment optimisation, and reduced downtime, disruption or emergency response costs linked to improved resilience. Where precise quantification is not possible, the site should explain why quantification is not feasible and provide reasonable estimates based on available evidence.

In addition to costs and savings, the site should document the broader value generated through implementation of the water stewardship plan. Monetisation of this value is not required; instead, a clear, credible narrative linked to actions taken is sufficient, for example describing:

- **Social value:** Including improved worker health, safety or wellbeing through enhanced WASH, strengthened relationships with communities, regulators or catchment partners, and reduced conflict or improved trust around water use and allocation.
- **Environmental value:** Including reduced pollutant loads or improved discharge quality, improved condition or protection of freshwater ecosystems, and reduced pressure on scarce or stressed water resources.
- **Economic value:** Including improved business continuity and operational resilience, reduced long-term exposure to water-related risks, and enhanced reputation, market access or investor confidence.

79 https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/MeasuringandEvaluatingtheImpactofCorporateWatershedProjects_Aug2021.pdf

Means of verification

- Records of quantified costs and savings, and qualitative description of value creation.

External references

- Ceres and Bluerisk (2023) 'Development of a Company Level Cost-Benefit Analysis Framework: Assessing the Full Value of Water Stewardship Investments to Business and Society'[80].

4.1.3 (Platinum Requirement): Stakeholder evaluation of the site's water stewardship performance, including efforts to address shared water challenges in the catchment, shall be conducted and *documented* annually through a consultation process. This process shall:

- **Demonstrate the site's efforts to consult all stakeholders engaged for 1.2.2;**
- **Consider factors that impede the ability of stakeholders to engage;**
- **Provide evidence of stakeholder consultation on the site's water stewardship performance.**

Aim of the requirement

Stakeholders are an important source of feedback and can often provide sites with advanced warning of concerns before they manifest as more serious risks. Stakeholder consultation on performance may lead to insights which support the enhancement of operations, as well as the identification of opportunities for collective action and mutual benefits. It also helps to build trust and relationships with stakeholders. The aim of this Platinum level requirement is to demonstrate a more rigorous and comprehensive evaluation of performance by incorporating and addressing feedback from stakeholders.

How to implement the requirement

The site should engage stakeholders to evaluate its water stewardship performance at least once every year, in line with its internal evaluation (4.1.1). This advanced requirement provides an opportunity for the site to assess how it is perceived in its efforts to address shared water challenges. The consultation should focus on shared water challenges since, by definition, these are of interest to all parties. However, it should not be restricted to this aspect. While proprietary and/or sensitive water-related data may be kept confidential, sites are asked to consult stakeholders on their water stewardship performance as a whole, in line with the summary shared for Requirement 5.2.1.

The consultation process may follow several different formats, such as face-to-face workshops, online webinars, or written surveys or feedback forms. Regardless of the format, the site should document the process and the feedback received. Similar to the stakeholder engagement process from 1.2.2, the site should consider factors that may impede the ability of stakeholders to engage in the consultation and apply reasonable mitigation measures. The site should demonstrate an effort to consult all stakeholders engaged from 1.2.2. Where stakeholders are not willing or available to provide feedback, the site should demonstrate that it has made a reasonable effort to engage, for instance, through documentation of correspondence.

Means of verification

- Records of stakeholder consultation process and feedback received.

[80] https://www.ceres.org/resources/reports/development-company-level-cost-benefit-analysis-framework

4.2 Review the occurrence and impacts of water-related incidents and evaluate the effectiveness of the site's incident response and climate change adaptation plans.

4.2.1 The site shall conduct an annual review of water-related incidents. The effectiveness of the site's incident response plan shall be *evaluated* and *documented*, and where necessary, the plan shall be updated to incorporate learning from the evaluation process.

Aim of the requirement

Ensuring that the site systematically reflects on water-related incidents and strengthens its response capability over time.

How to implement the requirement

This requirement embeds adaptive management into site operations. Rather than treating incidents as isolated events, the site must review patterns, impacts and response effectiveness to improve resilience, reduce recurrence and strengthen preparedness — particularly in the context of increasing climate variability and extreme events.

At least annually, the site should compile and review all water-related incidents that occurred during the reporting period. These may include spills, contamination events, exceedances of discharge limits, flooding, drought-related disruptions, infrastructure failures, water supply interruptions, or other events with environmental, social or regulatory consequences. It is recognised that some sites may not experience any water-related incidents during the reporting period. In such cases, the site should still conduct a review to confirm that incident records are complete

For each incident (or category of incident), the site should assess root causes, contribute factors and resulting impacts. Impacts may include environmental harm, operational downtime, financial cost, community effects, reputational damage or regulatory consequences. The site should look for trends or systemic weaknesses, rather than assessing events only in isolation.

The site should evaluate how effectively the incident response plan functioned in practice. This includes assessing whether roles and responsibilities were clear, response times were adequate, communication procedures worked, stakeholders were informed appropriately, and corrective actions were implemented as planned. The evaluation should identify both strengths and weaknesses in the response process.

Where gaps or weaknesses are identified, the incident response plan should be revised accordingly. Updates may include clearer escalation pathways, improved communication procedures, additional training, infrastructure improvements, revised monitoring triggers or stronger linkages with the site’s climate change adaptation plan. Changes should be documented and communicated to relevant personnel.

Means of verification

- Records of water-related incidents and results of the annual review.
- Updated site incident response plan, where applicable.

4.2.2 (Gold Requirement): The site's efforts to build resilience through the water stewardship plan (2.4.2), including progress on implementation and the effectiveness of actions, shall be *evaluated* annually. The results shall be *documented*, and the plan shall be updated where necessary to incorporate learning from the evaluation process.

Aim of the requirement

To understand the efficacy of the site's climate change adaptation efforts for building resilience and inform updates to the plan.

How to implement the requirement

In effect, this requirement is an extension of 4.1.1, with a focus on evaluating the site's efforts to build resilience through the water stewardship plan. The evaluation should consider the execution, effectiveness and impact of implementation. Ultimately, the site must assess to what extent its actions have contributed to improved resilience. The assessment should consider whether the targets and actions are sufficient relative to the water-related climate risks identified in 1.4.7.

The site should identify what worked well, what did not deliver expected results and where additional action is required (see 4.3.1). Where adaptation goals, targets and actions are not progressing as intended, root causes should be considered. Where gaps or improvement opportunities are identified, the water stewardship plan should be revised accordingly.

Means of verification

- Documented annual evaluation process and conclusions with attention to resilience.
- Updated version of the water stewardship plan.

4.3 Update the site's water stewardship plan to incorporate learning from the evaluation process in the context of continual improvement.

4.3.1 Where the annual review of site water stewardship performance (4.1.1) finds that targets have not been met or actions have not been *implemented*, an analysis of results shall be *documented*. The site shall develop and document modifications to the water stewardship plan for all targets that are not met.

Aim of the requirement

It is foreseeable that targets in the site's water stewardship plan may not be met in all cases, for reasons within and beyond the site's control. However, in these instances, the site is responsible for demonstrating how it will modify its plans to get back on track. The aim of this requirement is for the site to develop an understanding of why targets have not been met or actions have not been implemented, in order to inform modifications to the water stewardship plan under 4.3.2.

How to implement the requirement

If evaluation of the site's performance against the water stewardship plan (4.1.1) shows that targets have not been met or actions have not been implemented, the site should analyse the reasons behind the underperformance. The site may wish to perform a root cause analysis to determine the underlying causes of performance gaps. In each case, the analysis should inform modifications to the water stewardship plan for Requirement 4.3.2. Regardless of the approach taken, the site should document the analysis and the related modifications to the plan.

Means of verification

- Documented analysis of results and modifications to the water stewardship plan.

External references

- Harvard Business School Online (2024) 'Root Cause Analysis'[81]

4.3.2 The site's water stewardship plan shall be updated on an annual basis to incorporate learning from the evaluation process (4.1). The updates to the plan shall be *identified* and *documented*.

Aim of the requirement

Drawing on the evaluation of the site's performance relative to its water stewardship plan (4.1), the aim of this requirement is to ensure that the site's water stewardship plan (2.3) is up to date and that it reflects learning from the evaluation process, such that it evolves over time.

How to implement the requirement

The site's water stewardship plan (2.3) should be updated at least annually. Modifications may include amendments to actions, targets, timelines and resources, or the development of new targets and actions. Updates may be influenced from a range of findings from the evaluation process, such as:

- A target was achieved, so an action can be reduced or modified in scope or a new target can be set;
- A target was not achieved so new or modified actions may need to be implemented;
- Stakeholders objected to an action or its outcome;
- An action did not have the expected consequence or impact;
- An action caused an unexpected, unwanted impact;
- An action proved to be disproportionately costly;
- A change in regulation.

Updates to the plan should also reflect changes to the site and catchment context, and associated water risk, opportunities and shared water challenges. This information from Step 1 should be monitored or otherwise updated as required.

Means of verification

- Updated version of the water stewardship plan, with record of updates.

[81] https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/root-cause-analysis

Step 5: Communicate & Disclose

5.1 Communicate the site's water stewardship plan to all relevant stakeholders.

5.1.1 A summary of the water stewardship plan (2.3), including all targets and actions, and how it addresses shared water challenges, shall be communicated to all stakeholders from 1.2.2.

Aim of the requirement

Once shared water challenges and opportunities for action have been agreed, it is important that affected stakeholders remain engaged. The aim of this requirement is to ensure that stakeholders in the catchment are informed about the site's water stewardship plan and understand the targets and actions the site has committed to and how these address the shared water challenges identified.

How to implement the requirement

The site should prepare a clear and accessible summary of its water stewardship plan. This summary does not need to reproduce the full technical detail of the plan, but it must accurately reflect all targets and key actions. The summary should explain the shared water challenges that were prioritised, and how the selected targets and actions are intended to address them. Where collective actions are included in the plan, the site should describe its role clearly and identify the relevant partners involved. The summary should be communicated to stakeholders prior to implementation and after annual updates.

In practice, this means explaining not only what the site intends to do, but why it is doing it. For example, if a target relates to reducing withdrawals, the summary should explain how this contributes to addressing seasonal scarcity or catchment water stress. If actions focus on improving discharge quality, the link to identified water quality concerns in the receiving water body should be made explicit.

Communication should be tailored to the stakeholders engaged in 1.2.2. Not all stakeholders require the same level of detail or format, however, information on all targets should be provided to all stakeholders. Regulators may require a formal written briefing aligned to compliance requirements, while local communities may benefit from an in-person meeting or a simplified summary in the local language. Workers may be briefed through internal meetings or notice boards, and suppliers may receive communication through procurement channels. The site should consider language, literacy levels, cultural context and any factors that may limit understanding. The objective is not simply to circulate a document, but to ensure meaningful awareness of the plan.

Evidence of communication should be documented. Where stakeholders decline to engage, the site should document reasonable efforts made to communicate the plan. As recognised in the AWS Standard, a site cannot compel engagement, but it must demonstrate that it has made efforts to communicate transparently.

Means of verification

- Records and copies of communication with stakeholders (such as meeting minutes or emails).

5.1.2 (Gold Requirement): Stakeholder feedback on a summary of the site's water stewardship plan (2.3), including all targets and actions, shall be gathered and *documented* through a consultation process. This process shall:

- **Demonstrate the site's efforts to consult all stakeholders engaged for 1.2.2;**
- **Consider factors that impede the ability of stakeholders to engage;**
- **Provide evidence of stakeholder consultation on the site's water stewardship plan.**

Aim of the requirement

To demonstrate that the site has sought out and considered stakeholder feedback on its water stewardship plan, as a mean of validating its approach and identifying opportunities for improvement.

How to implement the requirement

The site should engage stakeholders to provide feedback on its water stewardship plan prior to its finalisation, and after successive annual updates (see Requirement 4.3.2). This advanced requirement provides an opportunity for the site to gather valuable external feedback on its plan and make any necessary adjustments prior to implementation. The consultation should be centred around the summary of the site's water stewardship plan prepared for Requirement 5.1.1.

The consultation process may follow several different formats, such as face-to-face workshops, online webinars, or written surveys or feedback forms. Regardless of the format, the site should document the process and the feedback received. Where cultural norms may discourage direct criticism or negative feedback, the site should design consultation processes that enable safe and anonymous input (for example, confidential surveys or third-party facilitation) and clearly communicate that constructive feedback is welcomed and will not result in adverse consequences.

Similar to the stakeholder engagement process from 1.2.2, the site should consider factors that may impede the ability of stakeholders to engage in the consultation and apply reasonable mitigation measures. The site should demonstrate an effort to consult all stakeholders engaged from 1.2.2. Where stakeholders are not willing or unavailable to provide feedback, the site should demonstrate that it has made a reasonable effort to engage, for instance, through documentation of correspondence.

Means of verification

- Records of stakeholder consultation process and feedback received.

5.2 Communicate and disclose an annual water stewardship summary, including performance against the site's targets and efforts to address shared water challenges.

5.2.1 A summary of the site's water stewardship performance, including performance against all targets in the water stewardship plan (2.3) and efforts to address shared water challenges, shall be communicated to stakeholders from 1.2.2 on an annual basis.

Note: This requirement comes into effect after one year of implementing the water stewardship plan.

Aim of the requirement

While Requirement 5.1.1 pertains to communication about the site's plan, the aim of this requirement is to ensure accountability to stakeholders through communication about the site's water stewardship performance. Stakeholders should be informed about what progress has been made, where targets have been met or not met, and how the site's actions are contributing to addressing shared water challenges.

How to implement the requirement

The site should prepare an annual water stewardship summary that reports on performance against all targets set in the water stewardship plan (2.3). For each target, the summary should clearly state the original target, the reporting year's performance, and progress relative to baseline or interim milestones. Where targets have not been met, the site should briefly explain why and reference the relevant modifications to the water stewardship plan developed for Criterion 4.3. While proprietary and/or sensitive water-related data may be kept confidential, the summary should cover the site's water stewardship performance as a whole.

The summary should also describe efforts to address shared water challenges. This includes collective actions, partnerships, governance participation, ecosystem restoration efforts, WASH initiatives or other collaborative activities. The emphasis should be on contribution and progress, recognising that catchment outcomes are shared.

The summary may be integrated into an existing sustainability report or prepared as a standalone summary. It should be communicated to stakeholders identified in 1.2.2 in a manner appropriate to their context. For the sake of efficiency, it is recommended that the summary be communicated along with the site's updated water stewardship plan (4.3.2) to satisfy Requirement 5.1.1. Evidence of communication should be documented.

Means of verification

- Records and copies of communication with stakeholders (for example, meeting minutes or emails).

5.2.2 (Gold Requirement): A summary of the site's water stewardship performance, including performance against all targets in the water stewardship plan (2.3) and efforts to address shared water challenges, shall be publicly *disclosed* on an annual basis.

Note: This requirement comes into effect after one year of implementing the water stewardship plan.

Aim of the requirement

The aim of Requirement 5.2.2 is to move from communication of the site's water stewardship performance to stakeholders (5.2.1) to public disclosure of performance. Public disclosure strengthens credibility, supports investor and customer confidence, and reinforces the principle that water stewardship is undertaken in the public's interest.

How to implement the requirement

The site should publicly disclose an annual summary of its water stewardship performance. The content of the disclosure should be consistent with 5.2.1 and it should include performance against all targets in the water stewardship plan (2.3), as well as efforts to address shared water challenges.

Public disclosure means the summary should be made available to the public. This may include one of, or a combination of, the options below:

- Publication on the organisation's website as a webpage or dashboard-style summary;
- Publication within an organisation's annual report and/or sustainability report;
- Disclosure via corporate reporting frameworks.

The format is at the discretion of the site but should be appropriate for interested parties. While proprietary and/or sensitive water-related data may be kept confidential, the summary should cover the site's water stewardship performance as a whole. Targets should be compared to baseline and interim milestones. Where targets are not achieved, the site should provide a brief explanation and indicate modifications to their water stewardship plan identified under Step 4. The information must be sufficiently detailed to allow an informed reader to understand progress, while remaining proportionate and accessible. Selective reporting of only positive results is not acceptable.

Corporate reporting frameworks

In the broader water stewardship community, disclosure through Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting frameworks is increasingly a priority for companies. The frameworks that are most relevant to water, and therefore AWS Standard implementers, are the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), CDP and the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TFND). Links and descriptions of these frameworks are provided in the references section.

Means of verification

- Summary of water stewardship performance and records of public disclosure.

External references

- EFRAG (2025) 'Draft ESRS E3 Water'[82].
- CDP (2025) 'Full Corporate Scoring Methodology 2025 – Water security'[83].
- Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)[84].

5.3 Maintain open and transparent communication about water stewardship with all relevant stakeholders.

5.3.1 A process for receiving and responding to stakeholder feedback on an ongoing basis shall be *implemented* and publicly *disclosed*. This process shall:

- **Provide a clear procedure for responding to feedback with an indicative timeframe;**
- **Be accessible to all stakeholder groups and consider factors that impede the ability of stakeholders to engage.**

Aim of the requirement

To ensure that the site maintains an open channel of communication to receive and respond to stakeholder feedback on matters relating to water stewardship. Beyond annual reporting and consultations, stakeholders should have access to a clear and reliable way to raise questions, concerns or suggestions at any time.

How to implement the requirement

The site should establish a documented procedure for receiving, reviewing and responding to stakeholder feedback related to water stewardship. This may form part of a broader grievance or stakeholder engagement mechanism, provided water-related issues are clearly included.

The process should clearly explain how stakeholders can submit feedback (for example, through an email address, online form, hotline, in-person contact, suggestion box or community liaison office). It should outline how submissions are logged, who is responsible for reviewing them and how responses are issued. An indicative timeline for responses should be defined (for example, acknowledgement within seven days; substantive response within 30 days), proportionate to the nature of the issue.

The procedure should be accessible for all stakeholder groups identified under 1.2.1. This may require providing multiple channels, translation into relevant languages, accommodation of literacy constraints or use of trusted intermediaries. It should also be publicly disclosed. Stakeholders should be able to easily find information on how to submit feedback, either on the organisation's website, on-site notice boards, community communication materials or other relevant platforms.

[82] https://www.efrag.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2025-12/November_2025_ESRS_E3.pdf

[83] https://assets.ctfassets.net/v7uy4j80khf8/3NYx1jozh8krIlbvYOiVZ3/86e7758942c3852c616c7f2c695777ef/CDP_Full_Corporate_Scoring_Methodology_2025_-_Water_security.pdf

[84] https://tnfd.global/

The site should maintain records of feedback received and responses provided. Patterns or recurring themes should be reviewed as part of annual evaluation (Step 4), and where necessary inform updates to the water stewardship plan.

Means of verification

- Copy of procedure and records of public disclosure.
- Records of any submissions received from stakeholders and responses provided by the site.

External references

- United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2011) 'Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights'[85].

5.3.2 Site water-related legal or regulatory compliance violations, where they occur, shall be immediately communicated to relevant government and regulatory agencies.

Aim of the requirement

To reinforce accountability and legal compliance in the event of non-conformance. Water stewardship is not only about performance improvement, but also about responsible conduct when things go wrong. Immediate communication of compliance violations demonstrates transparency, regulatory respect and good water governance. This requirement supports trust between the site and regulators and reduces the risk of escalation, reputational damage or prolonged environmental harm.

How to implement the requirement

The site should have a clear internal procedure for identifying, escalating and reporting water-related legal or regulatory compliance violations. This procedure should link directly to the site's legal compliance system under 2.2 and its incident response plan under 2.4.

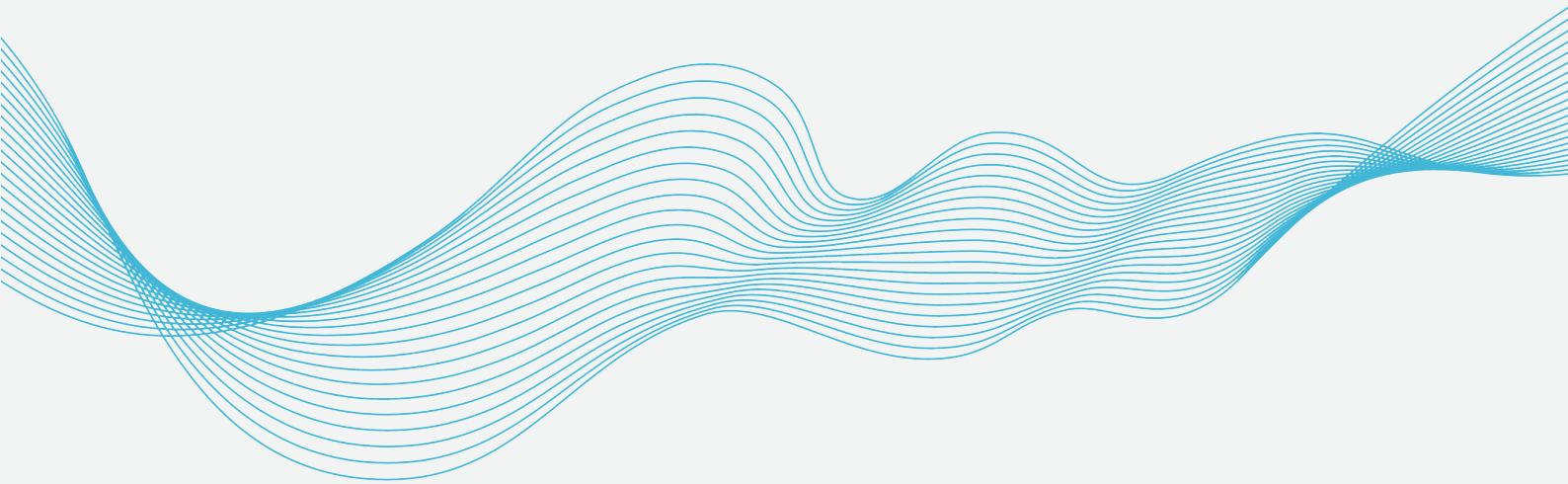
A compliance violation may include exceedance of permitted discharge limits, unauthorised abstraction, failure to meet reporting obligations or breaches of water-related license conditions. Once identified, the violation should be assessed promptly and reported to the relevant regulatory authority. 'Immediately' means without undue delay and within any legally prescribed notification timeframe.

The disclosure should be formal, documented and traceable. It should include sufficient detail for the authority to understand the nature of the violation, its cause (if known), corrective measures taken and steps to prevent recurrence. Internal records of the incident, investigation and corrective actions should be maintained and linked to Step 4 evaluation processes.

Means of verification

- Copy of the site's internal procedure.
- Records of communication for any legal or regulatory compliance violations.

[85] https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf



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