



Water
Stewardship
Asia Pacific

Water Stewards Verification Programme

Annual Communication of Progress Policy

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Water Stewardship Australia Ltd (trading as Water Stewardship Asia Pacific, WSAP) is a member-based organisation with a mission to empower organisations and individuals to take collective action for a sustainable and equitable water future through water stewardship.

Introduction

Water stewardship means the responsible use of water that is:

- (a) **environmentally sustainable** - in that it maintains and improves biodiversity and ecological processes at the catchment level; and
- (b) **socially equitable** - in that it recognises basic human needs and ensures long-term benefits (including economic benefits) for local people and society at large; and
- (c) **culturally sensitive** – in that it recognises and provides for the importance of freshwater to local indigenous peoples and communities, and
- (d) **economically beneficial** - in that it minimises corporate risk while ensuring that water is available for a multitude of economic benefits and uses over the long-term.

The concept of water stewardship as an objective, measurable target or standard was developed in response to shared water challenges in Australia, which became critical and urgent during the Millennium Drought. Water Stewardship Australia Ltd, now trading as Water Stewardship Asia Pacific, was founded as an organisation as a means of increasing uptake of water stewardship activities and processes.

The work of Water Stewardship Australia was fundamental to the development of the International Water Stewardship Standard (“the Standard”). The Standard is overseen by the Alliance for Water Stewardship. It is a programme developed within the ISEAL framework (International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling) that allows water users to be audited against the Standard’s requirements to become accredited water stewards. It is a credible and robust foundation for the delivery of water stewardship outcomes.

The Programme utilises the Standard, but is designed to be scalable, affordable, flexible, and ambitious yet attainable – all whilst leading to quantitative improvements in outcomes for water dependent ecosystems and communities. Water stewards participating in the Programme move through five main stages of participation: Member, Commit, Implement, Verify, and Advanced Verify (Four-Star and Five-Star).

Scope

This document sets out the requirements for organisations participating in the Programme to provide an Annual Communication of Progress, outside of years where a Verification Audit or Maintenance Audit have been completed for the relevant site.

This document forms part of the Programme requirements. It should not be read in isolation of other WSAP policy documents or the Standard, which are available through the WSAP website.

This document applies only to those participating in the Programme as developed and delivered by WSAP. Membership of WSAP is a requirement for commencement and completion of the Programme.

Companies and organisations may make marketing and promotional statements and claims as to their progress through the Programme, depending on their level of attainment. Water Stewards’ Brand Marks are also available for use on- and off- products.

The rules around the use of statements, claims, and Water Stewardship logos are defined separately in the *WSAP Statements, Branding, and Labelling Policy* document

Annual Communication of Progress requirements

To meet the requirements of the Programme participants must complete and submit, to the satisfaction of WSAP, an Annual Communication of Progress (ACOP) document for any 12-month period in which a Maintenance Audit has not been completed.

Purpose

The ACOP is a requirement of the Programme to:

- Ensure each site/organisation discloses the key areas of water stewardship activity and progress.
- Provide an accountable record of progress for Programme stages that do not require an audit.
- Monitor activity in years where no Maintenance Audit is required.
- In relation to publicly available information contained in the ACOP (see Confidentiality section, below), provide transparency to other Programme Participants, partners, and stakeholders on the key areas of water stewardship activity and progress for each site and/or organisation, thereby increasing trust in the Programme and the participant.
- Assist WSAP and Authorised Auditors to identify areas of risk, including but not limited to:
 - Water risks to the site and/or organisation, stakeholders, partners, or ecosystems
 - Reputational risks to WSAP and/or the Programme
 - Emerging risks that may need to be considered in future programme design or reviews
- Assist WSAP and Authorised Auditors to determine areas of focus to address in future audits.
- Provide an opportunity for the site and/or organisation to provide confidential feedback to WSAP on the Programme.

Information required in ACOP

The minimum required to be submitted is set out in Appendix A to this document. Not all information is required for each Stage in the Programme. The information required for each Stage in the Programme is set out in the relevant section of Appendix A.

Method and timing of submission

The ACOP must be submitted through the Water Stewardship Asia Pacific Members' Platform. See the *Water Stewards Verification Programme Verification and Audit Requirements* document for information on submitting ACOPs for groups seeking joint verification.

Annual Communication of Progress forms must be submitted once every 12 months by the Programme Participant, in any 12-month period where an Audit (whether a Verification Audit or three-yearly Maintenance Audit) has not been completed.

The ACOP must be submitted no later than 12 months from the date of submission of the previous ACOP, or previous Audit date, whichever is the most recent.

Confidentiality

The information provided by organisations and sites through the ACOP and highlighted by an asterisks* is to be deemed *publicly available*. WSAP may make such information available on the website and may be used in promotional material produced by WSAP, including but not limited to membership newsletters, social and traditional media avenues, advertising copy, etc.

Should Programme Participants wish for any of this information to be kept confidential, this should be notified to WSAP in writing at the time of submission to ACOP, outlining the reasons such information should be kept confidential.

The information in the “feedback” section of the ACOP will be treated as confidential by WSAP and will not be publicly disclosed without the express permission of the participant organisation.

Acceptability

Upon receipt of the ACOP, WSAP will review the ACOP for completeness and clarity. WSAP may require further information be provided by the Programme Participant, particularly in relation to any identified risks. Further information must be provided to WSAP by the date advised by WSAP in its request for further information.

The information provided in the ACOP will also assist Auditors completing Maintenance audits and areas of risk which may require further investigation.

Should WSAP determine that an organisation has provided any false or misleading information (including through omission), or that further information requested by WSAP following submission of the ACOP has not been provided in a reasonable timeframe, this may lead to the participant organisation’s suspension or termination from the Programme, or a reduction in verification progress level.

Disputes

Please consult the Water Stewardship Pty Ltd *Disputes and Complaints Policy*.

Glossary and definitions

Alliance for Water Stewardship	Also known as AWS, a registered Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation that developed the International Water Stewardship Standard as a means of objectively determining water stewardship actions and indicators against which organisations can be assessed.
Annual Communication of Progress	A requirement of the Water Stewards Verification Programme that must be submitted to Water Stewardship Pty Ltd using the prescribed template, in any 12-month period that an Audit is not completed.
Approved Auditor	Auditors that have been approved by Water Stewardship Pty Ltd to complete audits of Water Stewards Verification Programme Participants and their actions.
Audit	The process of obtaining and checking records, systems, processes, and actions against specified standards or requirements. In this case, the process of doing so against the requirements of the Water Stewards Verification Programme.
Audited Self-Management	An established system whereby sites within a group are responsible for day-to-day implementation of water stewardship actions and planning, but which are subject to group-organised audit processes.
Auditor	Person who performs an audit.
Brand marks	Logos associated with Water Stewardship Australia membership and the Water Stewards Verification Programme that have been approved for use by Water Stewardship Pty Ltd.
Catchment	The physical zone around a Site which provides its water supply (upstream) and where its run-off and wastewater go (downstream). A surface water catchment is defined by the topography of the land. The boundary is the line of highest ground around a river basin, defined from topographical maps or satellite studies. Groundwater is stored in, and moves through, permeable geological layers known as aquifers via interconnected voids or pore spaces (its porosity). Some groundwater catchment boundaries are fixed (by a geological boundary) and some movable. A movable boundary is defined by a 'groundwater divide' whose position can move due to seasonal effects or the impact of water abstractions.
Corrective Action Plan	A planned course of action to eliminate the cause of a detected non-conformity or other undesirable situation.
Criteria/criterion	Criteria are the conditions that need to be met to achieve a water stewardship component.
Group Verification	The Water Stewards Verification Programme process by which an organised body of persons or enterprises that

	share similar characteristics, are part of a shared audited self-management system, and, for assessment purposes, are considered as a single entity (e.g., groups of farmers, of retail stores, of distributors).
Important Water-Related Area	The specific water-related areas of a catchment that, if impaired or lost, would adversely impact the environmental, social, cultural, or economic benefits derived from the catchment in a significant or disproportionate manner.
Indicator	A quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure the achievement of outcomes, to reflect the changes connected to a standards system or to help assess the performance of an organisation. Indicators used in the Water Stewards Verification Programme are those set out in the International Water Stewardship Standard.
International Water Stewardship Standard	The International Water Stewardship assessment standard developed by the Alliance for Water Stewardship.
Maintenance Audit	An Audit completed to demonstrate ongoing compliance with the requirements for a particular stage of the Water Stewards Verification Programme.
Major non-conformity	A serious non-conformity determined by an Auditor that meets the criteria for major non-conformities.
Minor non-conformity	A non-conformity determined by an Auditor as not meeting the criteria for major non-conformities.
Non-conformity	Failure of a Programme Participant to conform to any requirement of the Standard or the Water Stewards Verification Programme.
Participant	An organisation or company that has joined Water Stewardship Asia Pacific and has formally committed to participating in the Water Stewards Verification Programme.
Internal review	A form of internal audit completed internally by a Participant Organisation (this could be an employee or contractor engaged by the Participant Organisation) to determine compliance against the requirements of the Water Stewards Verification Programme and the International Water Stewardship Standard.
Second-party Audit	An external audit conducted by a relevant interested party outside of the organisation.
Site	A single location, including the building(s) and the property over which the Programme Participant has control, which is using or managing water.
Suspension report	A report setting out the reasons for a site's suspension from the Verification Programme.
Third-party Audit	An external audit done by independent organisations who have no vested interest in the organisation or company

	being audited. Third-party audits are usually conducted to demonstrate conformity with specific requirement and may result in registration, recognition or licensing if passed. Conversely, failing a third-party audit may result in a sanction or penalty being imposed.
Verification	Process by which a Programme Participant's water stewardship planning and actions are independently audited as achieving the requirements of the Water Stewards Verification Programme stages.
Verification Certificate	Certificate produced by WSAP and given to Programme Participants to signify that the Participant has reached a particular stage within the Water Stewards Verification Programme.
WASH	Water for sanitation and hygiene. Includes safe drinking water, private toilets, and wastewater treatment. Safe WASH is a prerequisite to health, and contributes to improved livelihoods, school attendance and dignity and helps to create resilient communities living in healthy environments.
Water Roadmap	A strategic diagnostic process and tool delivered by Water Stewardship Asia Pacific which assists organisations and companies to identify and implement effective water and wastewater management practices.
Water Stewards Verification Programme	A stepwise programme owned and operated by WSAP that utilises the International Water Stewardship Standard
Water Stewardship	The responsible use of freshwater that is socially beneficial and environmentally sustainable, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) water use that is <i>environmentally sustainable</i> - in that it maintains and improves biodiversity and ecological processes at the watershed level; and (b) water use that is <i>socially beneficial</i> - in that it recognises basic human needs and ensures long-term benefits (including economic benefits) for local people and society at large; and (c) water use that is <i>economically sustainable</i> - in that it minimises corporate risk while ensuring that water is available for a multitude of economic benefits and uses over the long-term. (d) water use that is <i>culturally sensitive</i> – in that it recognises and provides for the importance of freshwater to local indigenous peoples and communities.
Water Stewardship Asia Pacific	The trading name of Water Stewardship Australia Limited.
Water Stewardship Australia Limited	Water Stewardship Australia Ltd is a member-based organisation with a mission to work with companies, water users, governments, and communities to protect and



	enhance the sustainability of water resources through water stewardship.
Water Stewardship Plan	A Plan developed by a Programme Participant to set out actions the site will take to address identified water challenges as a requirement of the Water Stewards Verification Programme.
Water Stewardship Strategy	A water-focused strategy developed by a Programme Participant that addresses water-related social, environmental, cultural, and financial issues and which connects to the Participant's broader business strategy.

Appendix A: Content requirements for Annual Communication of Progress

Sections marked with * denote information that will be publicly available. Note that not all sections apply to all Stages of the Water Stewards Verification Programme – the applicable stages for each section are noted. Refer to the Water Stewardship Verification Programme Annual Communication of Progress Policy document for further information.

1. Participating organisation information – required for Commit, Implement, and all levels of Verify

Name of participating organisation*	
Name of Site*	
Postal address of participating organisation*	
Public email address of participating organisation*	
Contact email for use by WSAP (if different from above)	
Participating organisation public phone number*	
Website*	
Social media handles (where applicable*)	

2. Site information (if different from above) – required for Commit, Implement, and all levels of Verify

Physical address of site	
Site representative name	
Site representative email address	
Site representative contact phone	

3. Commitment – required for Commit, Implement, and all levels of Verify

Date of Commitment Statement	
Public availability of Commitment Statement (e.g., website link)	

Outline any changes made to Commitment Statement in previous 12 months	
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4. Water Stewardship Strategy and Plan – required for Commit, Implement, and all levels of Verify

Date of Water Stewardship Strategy	
Outline any changes made to Water Stewardship Strategy in previous 12 months	
Date of Water Stewardship Plan ¹	
Upload or provide link to current Water Stewardship Plan ²	
Please note any changes to positions responsible for implementing Water Stewardship Plan or related financial/budgetary changes in the previous 12 months and reason(s) for change(s)	

5. Water Stewardship Performance (over previous 12 months) – required for Implement and all levels of Verify

Provide summary of Site's performance against water stewardship targets (where applicable)	Water quality	
	Effluent	
	Important Water-Related Areas	
	Access to Water for Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) for workers	
	Access to WASH for community members	
	Indirect water use	

¹ This could be the date the Plan received final management signoff/approval or completion date.

² As per the requirements of the Water Stewards Verification Programme, Water Stewardship Plans should be regularly reviewed and updated. This should be done at an interval no great than every three years, however ideally it should be completed annually.

	Water balance	
	Shared water challenges	
Outline participation in catchment governance and note any changes to catchment governance		
Outline any water-related emergency events, actions taken to identify cause(s) and corrective actions taken		
Outline engagement/communication with stakeholders and public agencies identified in Water Stewardship Plan		
Outline any legal or regulatory compliance violations and corrective action(s) being taken		
Outline any significant risks to human or ecosystem health resulting from site performance or activities, and corrective action(s) being taken.		

6. Emerging risks – required for Implement and all levels of Verify

Outline any emerging threats to Important Water-Related Areas and planned site response	
Outline any emerging threats to WASH for workers or the community and planned site response	
Outline any emerging threats identified by traditional owners, kaitiaki, indigenous communities and planned site response	
Outline any adverse stakeholder feedback (including media) and planned site response	
Outline any new shared water risks that have been identified (if not outlined above)	



Outline any other risks relevant to water stewardship not noted above	
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7. Governance and disclosure – required for all levels of Verify

Outline any changes to organisational governance of relevance to water stewardship performance or implementation	
Outline information that is publicly disclosed in relation to water stewardship performance and where it is available. Provide link if available.	
Outline any Environmental, Social, or Governance reporting, or other sustainability reporting. Provide link to copies of these reports.	

8. Further information – required for Commit, Implement, and all levels of Verify

Provide any further information in relation to the Participant or Site’s water stewardship activities not addressed above.

9. Feedback – required for Commit, Implement, and all levels of Verify

WSAP has implemented the Water Stewards Verification Programme to help organisations, companies, water users, governments, and communities protect and enhance the sustainability of water resources. WSAP is committed to continually improving the Programme’s design, implementation, and oversight.

Please provide your feedback on the Water Stewards Verification Programme below. All feedback provided will be treated in the strictest confidence by WSAP and will not be publicly disclosed unless agreed to by the person or entity providing the information.



10. Declaration – required for Commit, Implement, and all levels of Verify

I <insert name>,

- a) Declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the information provided above is true and correct and that all reasonable steps have been taken to ensure accuracy;
- b) Acknowledge that an Auditor approved by WSAP may require documentation or evidence to support any of the information or assertions made above at a future Audit;
- c) Acknowledge that I have read and understood the requirements for the Water Stewards Verification Programme and that providing WSAP any false or misleading information (including through omission) in this or any other Annual Communication of Progress report may lead to my organisation or company's suspension or termination from the Programme; and
- d) Declare that I am authorised to sign and complete this document on behalf of the stated site/organisation.

Signed:

Position:

Date: