



Water
Stewardship
Asia Pacific

Water Stewards Verification Programme

Disputes and Complaints 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 policy for disputes and complaints, providing organisations participating in the Programme a mechanism for raising concerns, complaints, or disputes regarding products or services provided by WSAP.

Water Stewardship Pty Ltd is committed to impartial, consistent, and diligent processes for receiving and responding to disputes and complaints. Water Stewardship Pty Ltd will accept disputes and complaints related to:

- governance, staff, policies, or procedures
- performance of a service provider
- verification decisions
- the outcome of a complaint process by a service provider

WSAP will not accept disputes and complaints related to contractual disputes between an accredited service provider and their client, or a decision on a dispute that was made by the WSAP Board.

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.

Channels for Dispute or Complaint

Please use the [Dispute and Complaints submission form](#) to fill in appropriate details and provide the necessary evidence. If you need assistance in completing the form please contact info@waterstewardship.org.au

Complaint Handling Procedures

1. Receipt of Complaint

All complaints should be submitted, in writing, on the [appropriate form](#) and receipt acknowledged within 10 working days.

2. Documentation and Acknowledgment

The details of the complaint, including the nature of the issue, contact information of the complainant, date, and time of receipt will be documented. If requested the complainant will remain anonymous and held only by the WSAP staff.

3. Assessment and Investigation

The complaint will be assigned to a designated person or the WSAP Board depending on the nature of the complaint. A thorough investigation into the complaint will be conducted, gathering relevant information, and interviewing involved parties if necessary. The validity and seriousness of the complaint will be assessed to determine the appropriate course of action.

4. Resolution

A resolution plan based on the findings of the investigation will be developed and communicated to the complainant, including any actions that will be taken to address the issue and an estimated timeline for resolution. An agreement will be sought from the complainant whenever possible.

5. Follow-Up and Closure

The progress of the resolution plan will be monitored and regular updates provided to the complainant as needed. Once the complaint has been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, WSAP will seek confirmation and close the complaint file. If the complaint cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, an explanation for the decision and any further steps that may be available for appeal or escalation will be provided.

6. Continuous Improvement

WSAP will review and analyse complaints regularly to identify trends, root causes, and opportunities for improvement.

Dispute Resolution Process

1. Identification of Dispute

A dispute in this context, whether they originate from customers, employees, vendors, or other stakeholders, may be;

- verification decisions
- the outcome of a complaint process by a service provider

Disputes should be identified and documented in the [Disputes and Complaints Submission form](#).

2. Initial Assessment

A designated person will be assigned and will be responsible for conducting an initial assessment of the dispute. The nature and severity of the dispute will be determined, and whether it falls within the scope of this dispute resolution process.

3. Communication and Negotiation

Communication will be initiated with all parties involved in the dispute to understand their perspectives and interests. WSAP will facilitate open and respectful dialogue to identify underlying issues and areas of disagreement. Encouraging parties to negotiate in good faith and explore potential solutions that address their respective needs and concerns.

4. Mediation (Optional)

If initial attempts at negotiation are unsuccessful, an impartial mediator will be engaged to facilitate discussions and help parties reach a mutually acceptable agreement. The mediator will be neutral, impartial, and skilled in conflict resolution techniques.

5. Resolution and Implementation

Once a resolution is reached, the terms of the agreement will be documented in writing and signatures obtained from all parties to confirm their acceptance. The agreed-upon actions or remedies will be implemented promptly and effectively.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained throughout the complaint and dispute resolution process to protect the client's sensitive information and interests.

For more information please refer to the WSAP [Privacy Policy](#).

Timeliness and Responsiveness

WSAP will acknowledge the receipt of your submission within 5-10 Business days depending on the nature of the submission and will respond with a proposed resolution within 90 calendar days