

S1: BIM CQA STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND PROCEDURE

Introduction

In 1997 BIM decided to address the value chain's need to produce world-class farmed seafood and differentiate these products in the marketplace through quality assurance programs. This intent has resulted in the development of the Certified Quality Aquaculture standards for farms and processors that cover quality, organic and ecological requirements. In the past 20 years, Technical Advisory Committees (TAC) has been tasked with the development and revision of the standards evolving to the current CQA set of standards. The TAC included representation by BIM, industry, research, management authorities, eNGO and certification and standards expertise.

Recognizing the need to provide for a high level and regional assurance mechanism, BIM structured the standards for the quantitative evaluation of production and management practices throughout the aquaculture production and distribution process in Ireland. The CQA standards is intended for assurance of farms and processing plants involved in farming and processing of finfish and mussels and its main objectives are to ensure food safety, quality, organic nature and environmental responsibility, via verification testing and traceability criteria required to be in place within the type of operation each standard covers.

From January 2022 a new Standard for Organic Food and Farming transposing the new EU Organic Regulation 848/2018. (the Organic Food and Farming Standards in Ireland (OFFSI Ed 2.) and replaces all previous organic standards in operation in Ireland including, CQA Standard Organic Sub-scope.

The CQA Programme will no longer preside over the development and implementation of organic standards for aquaculture but will offer guidance to CQA Applicants who wish to adopt the new OFFSI Ed. 2 Organic Standards from January 1, 2022.

The new revisions of the CQA Farm and Processing Standards (Issue 2) have been amended to reflect these changes.

Additionally, a survey of certified entities was also carried out in March 2021 to establish the areas of interest from the various aquaculture sectors and help inform the Standard review process. Areas that continue to remain of significant importance to the Certification Programme are seafood safety, seafood quality, traceability to origin and the sustainability of Irish aquaculture. The Sub-scope for Additional Eco Requirements already provides a comprehensive set of criteria for applicants that wish to demonstrate 'Eco' credentials. Components of this Subscope have been transferred and incorporated within the main Certification Requirements. These are criteria that demonstrate good environmental status and are considered of increasing importance to the Programme. The technical review has led to the addition of a new Section on Sustainable Management and Nature Conservation

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and modifications of other sections including efficient resource utilisation, minimisation of waste and the mitigation of impact from alien invasive species.

The CQA standards are performance based and can be defined as defining objectives (e.g., food safety, product traceability, biosecurity management, integrated pest management, nutrient impact reduction, sustainability of raw materials, nature and conservation, environmental management, feed specification, etc...) with confirmation that the thresholds and the documented evidence have been in place via the audits.

The CQA standards and certification procedures strive to be consistent with relevant national EU, Irish and Internationally Agreed regulations, Conventions and Guidelines (see current Master BIM CQA QMS Governance & Control Manual for details - <https://bim.ie/aquaculture/sustainability-and-certification/certified-quality-aquaculture-cqa-programme/#certified-quality-aquaculture-programme-integrity>). Compliance with the CQA standards is determined by auditors managed by independent Certification Bodies with specific training in the standards. The auditors must have relevant knowledge, experience and credentials in the aquaculture industry. Copies of the CQA standards and guidelines, copyrighted by BIM, are currently available free of charge in electronic format on the BIM website.

During standard revision, BIM will make an announcement on the website and send an email blast to all the stakeholders signed up to its mailing list and also announcing the start of any 60-day public comment period. All relevant stakeholder comments that are in line with the Standard Development Terms of Reference are taken into consideration towards the standard development/revision process. Responses to each relevant comment will be made available on the website after the 60-day public comment period, following TAC’s review, consideration or relevance and application. Comments received will be non-attributable to the party of origin to ensure confidentiality.

CQA Oversight Committee

To promote stakeholder involvement within Ireland and abroad, the CQA Oversight Committee is composed of members from BIM, industry, management, eNGO and research agencies. The Oversight Committee offers guidance and oversight for the standard development process that the Technical Advisory Committee carries out. The CQA OC oversees the drafting of all standards by the TAC. The CQA OC can recommend adjustments in the standards development process and set overarching goals for CQA standards and certification, such as including more performance metrics or clearer specifications for the Irish industry, for consideration by the TAC.

Individuals are appointed to the Oversight Committee as representatives of BIM, companies, organizations, or other entities based on their experience. They serve until the completion of their appointed terms (2 years) and may only be replaced upon mutual agreement between the BIM Seafood Technical Services Director and the organizations they represent. Companies or organizations can be represented in successive terms but may not have more than one representative on the oversight committee at any given time. Participation can be requested by contacting the BIM Seafood Technical Services Director. Potential participants are then evaluated based on their motivation to join and experience in the industry segment they represent. The opportunity to join is then communicated

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every two years from the start of the term or when new members are required in the oversight committee.

Members of the Oversight Committee shall carry themselves professionally, act objectively on behalf of the industry they represent and disclose any potential conflict of interest that they may have when taking part in this group, as instructed by the Chair.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The CQA Technical Advisory Committee assists to develop standards for specific species and reflects the development and need in the Irish aquaculture industry. Each set of CQA standards is reviewed, revised, and voted upon by a Technical Advisory Committee composed of technical experts and representatives of those groups interested in or affected by the standards. The CQA standards drafted by the TAC committee are forwarded to the Oversight Committee for review and final approval. The Oversight Committee also approves TAC committee membership, ensuring that the TAC represents a balance of stakeholders (e.g., industry, research, management, oversight, NGO). Chairpersons are required to act impartially in maintaining the orderly conduct of committee meetings and processing committee input. TAC members shall disclose any potential conflict of interest that they may have when taking part in this group.

The CQA Programme Lead works with the TAC Chairpersons in recruiting TAC members to participate in the standards development process. Nominations from the Oversight Committee are also welcome. TAC members serve an initial term of three years or until the work of the TAC is completed, as determined by the CQA Programme Lead in concert with the Oversight Committee. TAC members may be re-appointed for two additional terms. Participation can be requested by contacting the CQA Programme Lead. Potential participants are then evaluated based on their motivation to join and experience in the industry segment they represent. The opportunity to join is then communicated every three years from the start of the term or when new members are required in the TAC.

CQA Programme Lead

The CQA Programme Lead reports to the CQA Oversight Committee and Technical Advisory Committee chairpersons to carry out the general administration of the CQA scheme. The Lead who is a BIM employee guides the TAC Process, advises on general standards policies, and coordinates scheme activities. The Program Lead also helps prepare draft standards and related documents as needed and is responsible for assuring that all records remain on file for at least one full standards revision period.

CQA Programme Support Team

The CQA Programme Lead and Programme Team Support will constitute the QMS Review Committee. This committee will conduct an annual QMS review to ensure the continuing suitability, adequacy,

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and effectiveness of the organization. This includes the Quality Policy, annual quality objectives, performance and the need for any changes to the QMS or related documents. The CQA Support Team also supports the organisation and facilitating of TAC meetings.

CQA Scheme Standard Development Process

- a. The CQA Oversight Committee requests standard changes from the TAC. This may occur from the 5-year planned review, following the program of work or as prompted by out of plan events.
 - 1. The CQA Programme Lead coordinates with the Oversight Committee Chairperson to call upon the TAC for setting, reviewing, revising and assessing standards.
 - 2. The TAC meets in person or through conference meetings across the year and carries out standard development work according to an agreed Program of Work, prior to returning a revised standard draft to the Oversight Committee for initial review and public comment approval.
 - 3. Following this initial review, the CQA Programme Lead formalises the draft Standard/s and releases any new Issue document for a 60-day Public Comment and Review period.
 - 4. The comments and input received are considered and addressed by the TAC based on their Terms of Reference and based on the applicability to wider standard development objectives and remit (e.g., all objective and within scope input will be considered).
 - 5. The TAC revises the standard/s draft and completes the final draft through either face-to-face meeting or conference meetings and email communications as required.
 - 6. The final Standard draft is forwarded to the Oversight Committee for review, voting and acceptance. At least 75% of the Oversight Committee must vote and agree on the proposed standard to confirm acceptance.
 - 7. If changes or revisions are needed the Oversight Committee can revert back to the TAC for another round of revision and step 6 is repeated again.
 - 8. The Standard is approved by the Oversight Committee and the changes are communicated via the BIM website.
 - 9. The CQA Oversight Committee forwards the Standard/s to CQA Program Lead for implementation.
 - 10. The Standard will then be submitted to the Accreditation Boards and Certification Bodies for adaptation and implementation.
 - 11. The Certification body notifies all the certified parties of the changes in standard's requirements and that they are given 1 year to become compliant with the most current standard requirements.

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Modification to the Standard

The Standard can be prompted for revision in a number of ways. Firstly, the standard will be reviewed for update every 5 years to ensure it remains relevant with the most current regulations, guidelines and in terms of technical requirements reflecting the state of the industry. The Committees can also activate a revision of the Standard as a result of:

- Request by stakeholders, markets or by members of the public as long as they have an objective and valid basis for the request. This will be reviewed by the Oversight Committee for appropriate decisions.
- Significant and sudden changes in industry practices or sudden emergence of new diseases that need to be accounted for their management in the standard. This will be reviewed by the Oversight Committee for appropriate decisions.
- Significant and sudden changes in national or EU regulations or international requirements that may require to be reflected in the standard before the planned 5-year review. This will be reviewed by the Oversight Committee for appropriate decisions.

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AMENDMENT LOG

DATE	ISSUE	AMENDMENT	AMENDED BY
April 2018	1.1	Information on out of plan modification(s) to the standard was added	Vera Flynn
Oct 2021	1.2	Updated references to the role of the Aquaculture Development Director to Seafood Services Technical Director. Included URL link for current Master BIM CQA QMS.	Vera Flynn
October 2022	2.0	Updated to incorporate changes due to the introduction of the Organic Food & Farming Standards for Ireland Jan 2022 transposing EU Regulation 848/2018.	Vera Flynn

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