

# Case study: Development and early stage application of the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) International Water Stewardship Standard (the Standard)

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## Short summary

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This case study considers development and early stage application of the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) International Water Stewardship Standard (the Standard). AWS has been developing the concept of water stewardship in a way that it can be used in a variety of settings to deal with problems of water scarcity, poor water quality, threats to and loss of important ecosystems and cultural places and, unequal access to water. Water stewardship requires collaboration between business and industry, farmers, communities, governments (and their various agencies) and, civil society organisations. In this case study, the system has been applied in the supply chains of major retailers in Africa and Latin America and in the supply chain of food producers in Australia. Each case has involved the larger business (retailers or producers) engaging farmers in examining their water use in the context of the Standard. It adopts a six step process to achieve four outcomes; (1) sustainable water balance, (2) good water quality, (3) healthy important water related areas and, (4) good water governance. The larger businesses were motivated by a need to manage water related risks in their supply chain and/or enhance their brand or reputation. A universal outcome evident in all cases was the extent to which the system encouraged collaboration between stakeholders who may not have collaborated previously. Another important outcome was the extent to which implementers were required to look 'outside their gate' to the catchment in which they operated and the water challenges in that catchment. This fostered a common understanding of the issues and the role each participant could play in resolving those issues. This collaboration will continue to develop as new implementers are engaged within the catchments. As a critical mass of implementers is achieved catchment indicators will be provide evidence of improvement.

## Key words:

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*Universal and equitable access to drinking water ; Adequate and equitable access to sanitation for all ; Consider needs of women and girls in access to sanitation ; Consider vulnerable groups in access to sanitation ; Increase water use efficiency accross sectors ; Ensure sustainable withdrawals ; Ensure supply of freshwater to address water scarcity ; Implement IWRM ; Water cooperation ; Reducing pollution ; Eliminating dumping of hazardouse waste ; Minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials - achieve sound management of chemicals through their life cycle ; Reducing untreated wastewater ; Increasing recycling and safe reuse ; Protect, restore and sustainable use of inland freshwater related ecosystems ; Prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of alien species ; Reduce economic losses ; Protection of the poor and vulnerable*

## Issues addressed:

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### **WASH (inequalities, schools, health centers, refugee camps, women and girls)**

Inequities. Good water governance is one of four outcomes targeted by the Standard. Evidence of access and services is required.

### **Water resources management (water-use efficiency, integrated water resources management, transboundary cooperation, sustainable extraction and supply of freshwater)**

Sustainable extraction and supply of freshwater. Improved efficiency (within the context of food, energy, water nexus). Collaboration. A collaborative approach to sustainable water use within a catchment by understanding challenges, prioritizing and addressing them in a site water stewardship plan.

### **Water quality (pollution, dumping of toxic materials, wastewater management, recycling, reuse, restore ecosystems and aquifers)**

Good water quality is a key principle of good water stewardship. Includes pollution, recycling, reuse, ecosystems and aquifers. A collaborative approach to achieving good water quality in a catchment as well as healthy important related areas such as ecosystems and aquifers.

### **Risks (mortality, economic losses caused by natural and human-induced disasters)**

Risk reduction strategies are a requirement. The Standard requires the identification and mitigation of all potential risks including climate change.

## Tools for implementation:

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**Financing / economic instruments:** Market-based drivers for uptake of water stewardship

**Governance: Institutions / legal framework:** Multi-stakeholder governance is a key distinguishing fact

**Technology:** The system drives continuous improvement

**Capacity development:** Capacity development is an essential part of any stewardship system.

## Lessons Learned:

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**Triggers:** Participants will initially be motivated by water risks (physical, regulatory, reputation or financial) but will transition to embrace the opportunities of best practice performance.

**Drivers:** Risk management (physical, reputation, regulatory, financial). Reputation enhancement (first mover, good corporate citizen, enhanced license to operate)

**Barriers:** The system needs to continually be aware of keeping down costs and complexity particularly for SMEs and farmers while still maintaining integrity

Perceptions of certification standards

Building system infrastructure (systems, processes, brand), few willing to pay for infrastructure where there is not direct payback. Requires philanthropic or government contribution

**What has worked well?** The Standard has been well-received

Capacity-building – service companies familiar with stewardship systems and can see the value

Engagement with water leaders in industry

Engagement with natural resource managers

**What can be improved?** Further development of infrastructure through training, capacity building, templates, brand and demonstration projects will be helpful.

One the basis of experience the Standard will be reviewed

Verification system to be fully implemented

Ability to effectively reinforce the implementation of other sustainability standards and related initiatives.

**The way forward:** Verification system will be in place by 1 March 2015

Accredited consultants, auditors and trainers will be in place within the same time frame

Brand building needs to be stepped up

Constantly striving for low cost, low complexity while maintaining integrity so the system is worth having

**Links:** [www.allianceforwaterstewardship.org](http://www.allianceforwaterstewardship.org)  
[www.waterstewardship.org.au](http://www.waterstewardship.org.au)