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SUB-COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE

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TECHNICAL GUIDELINES EVALUATION FRAMEWORK, GSSI GLOBAL BENCHMARK TOOL AND THEIR INTERACTIONS

Executive Summary

“Progress reporting on the implementation of technical guidelines on aquaculture certification and the Evaluation Framework to assess conformity of aquaculture certification schemes with the guidelines” was an agenda item of the 8th Session of the Committee on Fisheries Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, held in Brasilia, Brazil in October 2015, where the Working Document COFI/AQ/VIII/2015/6 with the same title¹, was presented and discussed. While supporting the efforts of FAO in developing the Technical Guidelines, the Evaluation Framework and the partnership with Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI), the Sub-Committee requested additional information on the interaction between the Technical Guidelines, the Evaluation Framework and the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool, including more specific details on the GSSI partnership. The Secretariat clarified that a more comprehensive document along with detailed information on the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool, as well as a finalized Evaluation Framework, would be submitted to the 9th Session of the Sub-Committee. This document, COFI/AQ/IX/2017/Inf.12, provides the above-mentioned information to the Sub-Committee.

BACKGROUND

1. Aquaculture certification has been a subject of discussion in the Committee on Fisheries Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (COFI-SCA) since its Third Session held in India in September 2006. Over the past decade, FAO responded to the relevant requests made by the Members by developing two major documents; (a) Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification¹, which were approved by the 5th Session of the COFI-SCA and subsequently endorsed by the 29th Session of the COFI, and (b) an Evaluation Framework for assessing the conformity of public and private certification schemes with the

¹ FAO. Technical guidelines on aquaculture certification/Directives techniques relatives à la certification en aquaculture/Directrices técnicas para la certificación en la acuicultura. Rome/Roma, FAO. 2011. 122 pp.
Link to the full document: www.fao.org/docrep/015/i2296t/i2296t00.htm

FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification (Evaluation Framework), which was approved by the 7th Session of COFI-SCA and subsequently endorsed by the 31st Session of COFI.

2. While approving the Evaluation Framework, some Members attending the 7th Session of COFI-SCA expressed the following concerns: (a) the implementation of the Evaluation Framework should not create technical barriers to trade, should be gradual in implementation with pilot phases at national and regional levels and should not affect resource limited smallholders; (b) adequate capacity development for implementation of the FAO Guidelines for Aquaculture certification should be ensured through FAO technical assistance mechanisms; (c) open-ended questions in the Evaluation Framework should be linked to relevant international standards mentioned in the Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification; (d) the Evaluation Framework should be amended and revised as necessary, taking into consideration the knowledge gained during the implementation phase.

3. Many stakeholders of the global seafood supply chain have been echoing their concerns about the potential impacts that aquaculture production can have on the environment. There has been increasing consensus that seafood certification may provide some assurances of more sustainable practices in both aquaculture production and wild capture fisheries. Consequently, many seafood certification schemes have come into operation worldwide, leading to claims of confusion among producers, retailers and consumers over how to recognize a credible certification scheme. This perceived confusion has made decision-making more difficult, and seafood costlier, for everyone.

4. To address such concerns, seafood companies, NGOs, experts, governmental and intergovernmental organizations have created the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI) (www.ourGSSI.org), a global platform and partnership working towards sustainable seafood supply. FAO is a Member of the Steering Board of the GSSI.

5. Through a robust consultative process extended for nearly three years, GSSI developed a Global Benchmark Tool for seafood certification schemes, which was launched in 2015. The GSSI Benchmarking Tool uses the FAO Evaluation Frameworks (capture fisheries and aquaculture) to assess the conformity of public and private fisheries ecolabelling and aquaculture certification schemes with the FAO Guidelines for Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine/Inland Capture Fisheries, and the FAO Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification.

6. At the 8th Session of COFI-SCA, held in Brasilia, Brazil in October 2015, the Secretariat presented a working document² which introduced the GSSI and its Benchmarking Tool to the COFI-SCA. Responding to the comments made by the Members on the Working Document, the Secretariat agreed to submit a more comprehensive Working Document that included detailed information on; (a) the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool, (b) the interaction between the Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification, the Evaluation Framework and the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool, and (c) details on the GSSI partnership, along with the finalized Evaluation Framework, to the 9th Session of the COFI-SCA.

² COFI/AQ/VIII/2015/6, Progress reporting on the implementation of technical guidelines on aquaculture certification and the evaluation framework to assess conformity of aquaculture certification schemes with the guidelines. Link to the full document: www.fao.org/cofi/43696-0c90de3b64f6200c08041e479255c9bcf.pdf

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

7. With further financial assistance from the European Commission and organized in partnership between FAO, GSSI (Global Seafood Sustainability Initiative) and national competent authorities, three regional workshops were held in Africa, Asia and Latin America between August and October 2015. Among others, the purpose of the workshops was also to address the concerns raised by the FAO Members on the Evaluation Framework, in finalizing the Evaluation Framework. The report of the regional workshops³ is available at Session Background Document COFI:AQ/IX/2017/SBD.9.

8. The regional workshops concluded that Evaluation Framework does not create technical barriers to trade; rather, the Evaluation Framework and initiatives such as the GSSI Benchmarking Tool, bring more clarity to the aquaculture certification process, providing opportunities for certification bodies to develop and implement their certification schemes in conformity with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification, helping harmonize certification schemes and improving the robustness of the aquaculture certification process. Workshop attendees agreed that the implementation should be gradual, with pilot phases implemented at national and regional levels. They also agreed that the Evaluation Framework, when implemented properly, will not affect resource limited smallholders in finding better markets.

9. The regional workshops unanimously agreed that capacity development for implementation of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification is paramount and all efforts should be made to bring relevant technical assistance to Member States using appropriate mechanisms.

10. During and after the regional workshops, the Evaluation Framework has been reviewed, revised and to the extent possible the open-ended questions in the Evaluation Framework have been linked to relevant international standards mentioned in the Certification Guidelines. It was noted that the questions asked in the Evaluation Framework are aimed at confirming whether the Certification Scheme has adequately considered certain requirements and criteria, using appropriate standards for conformity. It is the responsibility of the evaluator to check and decide if the respective standards adequately address the issue in conformity with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification. It was also noted that this issue has already been addressed in the Certification Guidelines: paragraph 13 of the Certification Guidelines reads as “These guidelines for voluntary certification schemes are to be interpreted and applied in their entirety in a manner consistent with national laws and regulations and, where they exist, international agreements”.

11. Annex 1 of this document is the revised and finalized version of the Evaluation Framework, after addressing the concerns expressed by some Members during the 7th Session of the COFI-SCA.

12. Aquaculture certification schemes that meet the requirements set out in the Evaluation Framework are considered as being in compliance with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification. FAO will not undertake the conformity assessment of certification schemes per se but provide the evaluation framework for assessing conformity with which others may undertake the assessment. The evaluation process is expected to be used as a self-assessment tool by the certification scheme holder. It can also be used by parties with an interest in assessing the conformity of certification schemes with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification. These might include

³ FAO. 2017. Report of the regional workshops on awareness building on fisheries ecolabelling, aquaculture certification, conformity assessment and benchmarking held in Cape Town, South Africa, 5–6 August 2015; Bangkok, Thailand, 31 August – 1 September 2015, and Santiago, Chile, 1–2 October 2015. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report No. R1202. Rome. FAO, 42 pp. www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ee6c658d-82a9-4928-885d-cbcd5724e17d/

governments, consumers, retailers, processors and harvesters and any other relevant civil society organizations that are seeking to make assessments against the agreed criteria.

13. The Evaluation Framework is available for stakeholders to use as appropriate and necessary to evaluate aquaculture certification schemes against the minimum substantive criteria of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification.

GSSI PARTNERSHIP

14. The Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI) (www.ourGSSI.org), is a global platform and partnership working towards sustainable seafood supply. Partners of GSSI have come up with this collective, non-competitive approach to provide clarity on seafood certification and ecolabelling, while ensuring confidence in certified seafood. The GSSI is backed by 37 major private sector companies (funding partners) worldwide from across the seafood industry, including from harvesting, aquaculture, farming, processing, food service, retail and brand manufacturing, as funding partners. The GSSI also consists of seven non-profit affiliated partners, which includes FAO.

15. GSSI started in 2013 as a strategic alliance between leading actors in the seafood industry and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. It is implemented by GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and co-funded through its [develoPPP.de](http://www.developpp.de) program (www.developpp.de/en).

16. The overall objectives of GSSI are to; (a) provide an international multi-stakeholder platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange in seafood sustainability; (b) develop an internationally agreed set of GSSI Components to measure and compare the performance of seafood certification schemes in order to facilitate their implementation and use; (c) build, operate and maintain a common, consistent and global benchmark tool for seafood certification schemes; and (d) reduce cost by eliminating redundancy and improving operational efficiency of seafood certification schemes thereby increasing affordability and flexibility within the supply chain.

17. GSSI sets does (a) drive change towards sustainability through a multi-stakeholder process; (b) deliver recognition of seafood certification schemes aligned with the FAO Guidelines; (c) increase comparability and transparency in seafood certification; and (d) enable informed choice for procurement of certified seafood.

18. However, GSSI does not; (a) undertake any accreditation or certification; (b) develop or own any standards; (c) rank certification schemes; (d) define sustainable or responsible seafood; and (e) permit any consumer facing labelling about its recognition or make policy for any business or scheme.

19. FAO has been a member of the GSSI Steering Board as an observer since its inception and also contributes technically to the three GSSI Expert Working Groups; fisheries ecolabelling, aquaculture certification and, certification processes and governance.

20. GSSI collaborates and communicates regularly with FAO on technical matters and supports capacity development in aquaculture certification and fisheries ecolabelling. FAO believes that such a partnership is vital and of strategic importance to ensure that the GSSI process is properly guided according to the principles and provisions of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF)⁴

⁴ FAO. Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. Rome, FAO. 1995. 41 p.

and is strongly technically supported and vetted by the interests of FAO Members, including those of the developing countries, small-scale aquaculture producers and fishers. FAO so far has been able ensure that GSSI fully respects and keeps within the remits of relevant FAO instruments or those of other international organizations/other internationally agreed instruments or guidelines. FAO members are regularly updated on the status of the relationship and on certification issues at the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI-FT).

21. Since its inception, GSSI partners have committed time and expertise to develop a collective approach to provide clarity on fish and seafood certification and ensure consumers and companies can be confident in the certified seafood on offer. GSSI partners have been working to drive forward strategy at high-level Steering Board Meetings, drilled down on priority sector issues through the Expert Working Groups, reached out to seafood sector stakeholders at public updates, brought on board leading experts and collaborated closely with FAO to organize many meetings, consultations and workshops.

22. During 2015, GSSI partnered with FAO and national competent authorities to organise and conduct three regional workshops in Africa, Asia and Latin America to enhance awareness and capacity on aquaculture certification, conformity assessment and benchmarking. The three workshops involved participants from 28 Member countries on the subject. This collaborative strategic partnership has proven merit, both by saving and sharing costs and reaching to a wider audience.

23. Using the FAO Evaluation Frameworks to assess the conformity of public and private fisheries ecolabelling and aquaculture certification schemes with the FAO Guidelines for Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine/Inland Capture Fisheries, and the FAO Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification, GSSI has created a Global Benchmark Tool for seafood certification schemes.

24. In developing the GSSI's Global Benchmark Tool for aquaculture, the Evaluation Framework and the FAO Aquaculture Guidelines have been used as the background and reference material. The current Benchmark Tool only addresses the minimum substantive criteria on Environmental Integrity. The Benchmark Tool has been piloted in several countries and assessed against several aquaculture certification schemes. As a global public-private partnership and platform, GSSI offers partners from across the seafood industry, NGOs, inter/governmental agencies and experts, the opportunity to work on this leading knowledge-exchange initiative and to collaborate on topics that are shaping the fish and seafood sector's future.

25. GSSI is committed to promoting improvement in seafood certification schemes. As such, GSSI will review the Global Benchmark Tool on a regular basis.

26. Guiding a long-term change in seafood sustainability, GSSI follows a set of principles; (a) improvement of seafood sustainability shall be at the heart of the work for all GSSI participants; (b) the benchmarking process shall be self-financing with agreed and fair contributions for benchmarking services and membership; (c) financing of activities on the neutral platform may include contributions from funders; and (d) the partnership shall aspire to engaging with small and less developed schemes to provide them with a pathway towards recognition by GSSI.

27. Through partnership with GSSI, FAO has facilitated the implementation of the Evaluation Framework, directly through cooperation with GSSI on the development of the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool. The Benchmarking Tool will provide more options to aquaculture producers to choose a scheme that is right for them and reduce the need for multiple audits to respond to customer requirements. For seafood buyers, it means simpler, more consistent data to guide their purchasing decisions. For NGOs it means more transparent, verifiable and reliable information to support further efforts to preserve the environment.

INTERACTION BETWEEN TECHNICAL GUIDELINES, EVALUATION FRAMEWORK AND THE GSSI BENCHMARKING TOOL

Technical Guidelines

28. Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification (Guidelines) provide guidance for the development, organization and implementation of credible aquaculture certification schemes. The Guidelines consider a range of issues which should be considered relevant for the certification in aquaculture, including: a) animal health and welfare; b) food safety; c) environmental integrity; and d) socio-economic aspects associated with aquaculture. Guidelines recognise the existence of an extensive national and international legal framework governing various aspects of aquaculture and its value chain, covering such issues as aquatic animal disease control, food safety and conservation of biodiversity and that legislation is particularly strong for processing, export and import of aquatic products. It also recognizes that competent authorities are normally empowered to verify compliance with mandatory national and international legislation. However, other issues such as environmental sustainability and socio-economic aspects may not be covered in such a binding manner and open the opportunity for voluntary certification as a means to demonstrate that a particular aquaculture system is managed responsibly.

29. According to the Guidelines, credible aquaculture certification schemes should consist of three main components; standards, accreditation, and certification. The Guidelines therefore cover; standard setting processes required to develop and review certification standards, accreditation systems needed to provide formal recognition to a qualified body to carry out certification, and certification bodies which required to verify compliance with certification standards.

30. Developing and implementing a certification scheme may be undertaken by any entity qualified to do so, in accordance with the requirements of these Guidelines. Such an entity can include, inter alia, a government, an intergovernmental organization, a non-governmental organization, private sector group (e.g. a producer or trade association), a civil society arrangement, or consortium comprising some or all of these different stakeholder groups, as direct users of the guidelines. Guidelines provide information on the institutional and organizational arrangements for aquaculture certification, including governance requirements, particularly to ensure that conflicts of interest are avoided.

31. Guidelines recognise that voluntary certification schemes must be interpreted and applied in their entirety in a manner consistent with national laws and regulations and, where they exist, international agreements.

32. Guidelines comprise 176 numbered paragraphs and technical information are backed by a number of normative references covering relevant international agreements, treaties, legal instruments and guidelines.

33. Guidelines include 13 principles, four minimum substantive criteria: a) animal health and welfare; b) food safety; c) environmental integrity; and d) socio-economic aspects, institutional and procedural requirements for establishing and implementing credible aquaculture certification schemes. The institutional and procedural requirements consist of four components; (a) governance, (b) standard setting, (c) accreditation, and (d) certification, covering the purpose, scope, normative references, functions and structure, and requirements for developing the above.

34. Guidelines call for special considerations with regard to implementation, to recognise the special circumstances and requirements of aquaculture producers and other stakeholders in developing countries, especially those in least-developed countries and small island developing states, to support the effective and progressive implementation of these guidelines. States, relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, buyers and traders, and financial institutions should work to

address these implementation needs, especially in the areas of financial and technical assistance, technology transfer, capacity building and training. Such assistance should also consider direct support towards the possible high costs of accreditation and certification.

Evaluation Framework

35. The primary purpose of this Evaluation Framework is to assess the conformity of a certification scheme with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification. The users of the Evaluation Framework are certification scheme owners, governments, consumers, producers and stakeholders that may have an interest in the field of conformity assessment.

36. Evaluation Framework directly refers to the Guidelines by stating that the evaluation to assess the conformity of a certification scheme with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification must consider; (a) the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification; (b) all components of the certification scheme; and (c) the Evaluation Framework.

37. The Evaluation Framework is presented in two parts. Part 1 deals with principles and minimum substantive criteria. In this section, the evaluation of conformity is assessed by answering a series of questions directly relevant to specific paragraphs of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification. The expected answers are either YES or NO. The evaluator is expected to provide evidence if the assessment is positive, and explain why if the assessment is negative.

38. Part 2 of the Evaluation Framework deals with institutional and procedural requirements. The guidance provided in the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification under the Institutional and Procedural Requirements is divided into seven categories: (a) Governance; (b) Standard Setting; (c) Accreditation; (d) Certification; (e) Chain of Custody; (f) Use of Certification Claim, Symbol, Label or Logo; and (g) Resolution for Complaints and Appeals. Each category refers to specific paragraphs in the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification and a set of criteria is provided for the evaluator to confirm if the certification scheme complies with the specific guidelines outlined in those paragraphs/sections. The evaluator is required to carefully review and ensure that all documentation adequately reflects the conformity of the scheme, under the above seven categories, with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification. The criteria provided in the Evaluation Framework are considered adequate to establish conformity or non-conformity.

39. Evaluation Framework also provides necessary requirements for making a statement of conformity and directly denotes to specific paragraph numbers of the Guidelines for easy reference and better clarity.

GSSI Benchmarking Tool

40. GSSI's Global Benchmark Tool will help to provide clarity on seafood certification and make purchasing decisions more cost efficient by providing greater choice, driving down costs, and promoting environmental sustainability. It operates with the FAO Guidelines at its core, which means that for the first time the FAO Guidelines is used to establish what is happening on the ground as seafood certification schemes sign up to be benchmarked. When a seafood certification scheme meets GSSI's Essential Components, grounded in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and the FAO Guidelines, GSSI will publicly recognize the scheme.

41. The Benchmark Tool has four Sections; (A) Governance; (B) Operational management; (C) Aquaculture certification standards; and (D) Fisheries certification standards. Each section consists of a number of Performance Areas, each of which includes elements organised by topic. Each Section of the Benchmark Tool is summarized by an introduction which includes GSSI Essential Components

and GSSI Supplementary Components organized by Topics and Elements with corresponding page numbers. In this document, components of the Section D, Fisheries certification standards, are not considered.

41. The GSSI Supplementary Components⁵, allow schemes to show their diverse approach and help stakeholders understand where differences exist. These are grounded in the CCRF and related FAO documents, ISO normative standards and ISEAL codes. Meeting GSSI Supplementary Components is not required for GSSI recognition.

42. All components of the Benchmarking Tool are clearly referred and linked to relevant sections/paragraphs of the Certification Guidelines, CCRF Technical Guidelines, Evaluation Framework and other relevant documents of FAO and other international authorities (e.g. OIE), quoting paragraph and/or chapter numbers, making the linkage between the Guidelines, CCRF Guidelines, Evaluation Framework, International reference points and the Benchmarking Tool, is clearly visible and understandable.

43. Although the Benchmarking Tool only deals with one minimum substantive criteria of the Guidelines; that is environmental integrity, relevant aspects of feeds and health considered under the environmental integrity have been addressed in the Benchmarking Tool.

44. Once a seafood certification scheme has gone through the Benchmark Process and is found in alignment with all GSSI Essential Components it will be publicly recognized by GSSI and a statement and a Benchmark Report will then be published on the GSSI website - www.ourgssi.org

45. The linkages and interactions between the Guidelines, Evaluation Framework and the Benchmarking Tool are clear and visible in the Benchmarking Tool. Annex 2 presents a figure depicting the relationships between the three documents.

⁵ The GSSI Supplementary Components are defined by the GSSI Expert Working Groups and grounded in the CCRF and related FAO documents, ISO normative standards and ISEAL codes. Their purpose is to outline the status of existing practices in seafood certification and they can be built on going forward. A rationale for each GSSI Supplementary Component explains its value to both schemes and stakeholders. The Benchmark Process will verify if a seafood certification scheme meets GSSI Supplementary Components. Meeting GSSI Supplementary Components is not required for GSSI Recognition.

ANNEX 1**EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING CONFORMITY OF
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CERTIFICATION SCHEMES WITH THE FAO
TECHNICAL GUIDELINES ON AQUACULTURE CERTIFICATION****PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK**

The primary purpose of the Evaluation Framework is to assess the conformity of a certification scheme with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification.

USERS OF THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The users of the Evaluation Framework are certification scheme owners, governments, consumers, producers and stakeholders that may have an interest in the field of conformity assessment.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation to assess the conformity of a certification scheme with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification must consider the following in their entirety:

- 1) The FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification;
- 2) All components of the certification scheme;
- 3) The Evaluation Framework.

To begin the evaluation process, the certification scheme must make a clear, unambiguous statement of its goal and scope relative to the Principles, Institutional and Procedural Requirements Components, and Minimum Substantive Criteria components of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification. That is, this statement must describe which Minimum Substantive Criteria issue areas the scheme intends to cover, and which issue areas it does not intend to cover.

The evaluation team needs to be defined and records of their meetings and decisions should be retained on file to provide transparency of process. The qualifications of each team member should be noted, along with a declaration that there is no conflict of interest arising.

The certification scheme must be subject to evaluation against the Principles and Institutional and Procedural Requirements components of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification, including all of the requirements of these components as described in this Evaluation Framework.

Should the scheme meet all the Principles and Institutional and Procedural components requirements as expressed in the Evaluation Framework (Evaluation Framework – Part 2 – Institutional and Procedural Requirements), the evaluation can then proceed to the components on Minimum Substantive Criteria, according to the issue areas identified in the scheme goal, and according to all of the requirements for the issue areas as described in this evaluation framework.

Only if the evaluation against the Minimum Substantive Criteria fulfills all the requirements of at least one of the issue areas (Animal Health and Welfare, Food Safety, Environmental Integrity, Socio-economic aspects) can the evaluation begin to make a statement of conformance.

At this point, the evaluation must make an evaluation of the Special Considerations for Implementation as described in the Evaluation Framework. In evaluating conformance of a certification scheme with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification, the assessor should use the Guidelines for guidance.

The Evaluation Framework is presented in two parts. Part 1 deals with principles and minimum substantive criteria. In this section, the evaluation of conformity is assessed by answering a series of questions directly relevant to a specific paragraph of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification. The expected answers are either YES or NO. The evaluator is expected to provide evidence if the assessment is positive, and explain why if the assessment is negative.

Part 2 of the Evaluation Framework deals with institutional and procedural requirements. The guidance provided in the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification under the Institutional and Procedural Requirements is divided into seven categories: (a) Governance; (b) Standard Setting; (c) Accreditation; (d) Certification; (e) Chain of Custody; (f) Use of Certification Claim, Symbol, Label or Logo; and (g) Resolution for Complaints and Appeals. Each category refers to a certain number of paragraphs in the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification and a set of criteria is provided for the evaluator to confirm if the certification scheme complies with the specific guidelines outlined in those paragraphs/sections. The evaluator is required to carefully review and ensure that all documentation adequately reflects the conformity of the scheme, under the above seven categories, with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification. The criteria provided in the Evaluation Framework are considered adequate to establish conformity or non-conformity.

If the assessment does not determine conformance with any of the issue areas, no statement of conformity of any sort with the Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification can be made.

STATEMENTS OF CONFORMITY

Subject to the assessment process as described above, the following Statement of Conformity may be used to express conformance with the Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification:

This aquaculture certification scheme conforms with all of the requirements of the Principles and Institutional and Procedural Requirements components of FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification (paragraphs 17, 58-171), as well as all of the requirements of the Minimum Substantive Criteria components of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification for the following issue areas:

- Animal health and welfare (paragraphs 19–26)
- Food safety (paragraphs 27–36)
- Environmental integrity (paragraphs 37–52)
- Socio-economic aspects (paragraphs 53–57)

This statement must be accompanied with a statement of the scheme's goal and scope, as noted above. Moreover, the name of the individual/organization who conducted the assessment must be provided.

These statements must be accompanied by comments on the Special Considerations for Implementation (paragraphs 172–176).

The conformity statement should describe as follows: "According to the evaluation conducted by Body X on (date), Certification Scheme Y, standard(s) Z, conforms with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification for the following Issue Areas: a, b, c, d."

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK – PART 1 – PRINCIPLES AND MINIMUM SUBSTANTIVE CRITERIA

PRINCIPLES AND MINIMUM SUBSTANTIVE CRITERIA				
PARAGRAPH NUMBER	GUIDANCE QUESTION	CONFOR- MATION YES/NO	EVIDENCE IF YES and EXPLAIN IF NO	NOTES/ REMARKS
Principles				
17	Does the scheme adequately address the principles of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification?			
MINIMUM SUBSTANTIVE CRITERIA				
Animal health and welfare				
19	Is animal health and welfare included in the scheme?			
20	Does the scheme use relevant OIE standards (Aquatic Animal Code and Diagnostic Manual) and FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) as normative basis and does it respect national legislation and regulations?			
20-26	If the scheme requires an aquatic animal health management programme that is risk-based, specific to the unit of certification and production system and includes elements outlined in 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 below, please answer accordingly.			
21	4.1. Element on movement (introduction and transfer) of aquatic animals, genetic materials and products?			
22, 25	4.2. Element on maintenance of culture environment? Water quality and temperature Appropriate quarantine measures and facilities Routine monitoring of stocks and environment for early detection of aquatic animal health problems Management practices to reduce stress and disease transmission			

	within and between aquaculture facilities and natural fauna			
23	4.3. Element on responsible use of veterinary medicines that ensures effectiveness, safety of public and animal health and protection of the environment?			
24	4.4. If polyculture or Integrated Multi-trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) is used, does scheme have consideration for species selection for minimizing the potential disease transmission?			
26	4.5. Does the scheme have training requirements included on all aspects related to animal health and welfare covered in 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 above?			
Food safety				
27	5. Is food safety included in the scheme?			
	6. Does the scheme refer to national or international standards and regulations including the food safety aspects of the Codex Alimentarius?			
28	7. Does the scheme address the location of aquaculture facilities with respect to food safety risk?			
29	8. Does the scheme require procedures to address food safety risks associated with feed?			
30	9. Does the scheme address the correct use and relevant controls of veterinary drugs as prescribed in national regulations and international guidelines?			
31	10. Does the scheme take into account the quality of water in the aquaculture production of food intended for human consumption?			
32	11. Does the scheme ensure minimizing the risks of potential			

	human health hazards in the sourcing of broodstock and seed?			
33	12. Does the scheme have a requirement for detailed records of activities and inputs that represent a potential source of risk with particular emphasis on the use of chemicals and veterinary drugs?			
34	13. Does the scheme require a comprehensive hygiene plan covering the following? The culture unit The farm area Pest control Management and handling of aquaculture products			
35	14. In the case that the scheme covers bivalves, does the scheme require a hazard analysis and management plan to prevent food safety risks?			
36	15. Does the scheme include worker training in good hygienic practices to ensure they are aware of their roles and responsibilities for protecting aquaculture products from contamination and deterioration?			
Environmental integrity				
37	16. Is environmental integrity included in the scheme:			
	17. Does the scheme require aquaculture planning and practice in accordance with appropriate local, national and international laws and regulations?			
38	18. Does the scheme have provision to encourage environmental restoration?			
39	Covered under Min. Sub. Criteria 44 and 46			
40	19. Does the scheme set measurable benchmarks that encourage improvement and innovation in environmental performance without being overly prescriptive?			
41	20. Does the scheme consider application of “precautionary			

	approach” in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries?			
42	Covered under Minimum Substantive Criteria 44, 46, 49 and 50			
43	20. Does the scheme create awareness of external environmental costs associated with environmental impacts?			
44	21. Does the scheme require an environmental impact assessment in accordance with national law?			
45	22. Does the scheme require a regular monitoring and record keeping system of environmental quality on the farm and its immediate area of influence, using appropriate methodologies?			
	23. Does the scheme describe the methodologies required, taking into account the scale of operation?			
46	24. Does the scheme require an evaluation of the adverse impacts on the surrounding natural ecosystem, including fauna, flora, and habitat?			
	25. Does the scheme require appropriate mitigation measures for the identified adverse impacts on the surrounding natural ecosystem?			
47	26. Does the scheme include provisions to promote efficient water use?			
	27. Does the scheme require management of the quality of the effluent?			
	28. Has the scheme made provision for the farmers to address efficient use and effluent management?			
48	29. Does the scheme encourage the use of hatchery produced seed as the primary source?			

	30. If hatchery produced seed are not used, does the scheme require wild seed to be collected in a responsible manner?			
49	31. Does the scheme accept the use of exotic species? If yes, does the scheme have a methodology to ensure that the level of risk to natural environment and ecosystem health is acceptable?			
50	32. Does the scheme have a methodology to ensure that the level of risk from genetically altered aquatic organisms has been assessed and managed?			
51	33. Does the scheme have provisions to ensure responsible infrastructure construction and waste disposal?			
52	34. Does the scheme have provisions to ensure responsible use of feeds, feed additives, chemicals, veterinary drugs, including antimicrobials, manure and fertilizer to avoid their adverse impacts on the environment meanwhile promoting economic viability?			

Socio-economic aspects				
53	35. Are socio-economic aspects included in the scheme?			
	36. Does the scheme indicate that aquaculture be conducted in a socially responsible manner within national laws and regulations?			
	37. Does the scheme encourage aquaculture's contribution to socio-economic development?			
	38. Does the scheme require aquaculture to safeguard the			
	livelihoods of aquaculture workers and local communities?			
54	39. Does the scheme recognize (encourage) corporate social responsibility with local communities?			
55	40. Does the scheme require responsible treatment of workers in accordance with national labour laws and regulations and relevant ILO conventions?			
56	41. Does the scheme require paying wages and providing benefits and working conditions in accordance with the national laws and regulations?			
57	42. Does the scheme address the issue of child labour?			
	42.1. If YES to 42, are provisions consistent with ILO conventions and international standards?			

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK – PART 2 – INSTITUTIONAL AND PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS

Institutional and Procedural Requirements		
KEY ELEMENT	PARAGRAPH NUMBER	PROPOSED CONFORMANCE CRITERIA
Governance	61 – 65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A certification scheme in conformance with the key elements for: standard setting; Accreditation; Certification; Chain of Custody; Use of Certification claim, symbol, label or logo; and Resolution for Complaints and Appeals. • The owner or developer of a certification scheme should be transparent on the scheme's governance structure, ownership, standards, and their respective responsibilities; • The owner or developer of a certification scheme should have clear written procedures to guide the scheme's internal decision-making processes; • The scheme owner should have a clear policy with regard to monitoring and prevent any conflict of interest between Standard Setting Body, Accreditation Body and Certification Body.
Standard Setting	66 – 85	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards are developed in conformance with WTO TBT Annex 3 <i>Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standard</i>; ISO Guide 59 or the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Standard Setting; • The owner of a certification scheme shall be transparent on the procedures for the development of its standard for certification, including a clear policy to include and monitor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adequate stakeholder representation; • best available scientific evidence, taking into account traditional knowledge provided it can be objectively verified; • in conformance with the Minimum Substantive Criteria as laid out in the guidelines taking into account the defined scope of the scheme; and • compliance with national and international laws and regulations • Information on the members of the standard setting body and work program are publically available in appropriate languages; and • Standards and subsequent revisions are made available for public comments and consultation before adoption;
Accreditation	86 – 123	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A scheme owner shall assign one or more independent National Accreditation Body that signed the Memorandum of Understanding of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) for ISO-65 Accreditation for the accreditation of its certification bodies conducting conformity assessments; • If a scheme assigns one or more independent accreditation body or entity which is not a member of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) to accredit certification bodies conducting conformity assessments for the scheme, the accreditation body or entity shall

		<p>have a clear policy to implement and monitor conformance with the ISO-17011 standard for accreditation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scheme owner shall demonstrate that the accreditation process is open to all interested certification bodies irrespective of the number of certification bodies already accredited, or on the location, size, or membership of any association or group (Para 89); and • If a scheme can demonstrate conformance with the ISO 17011 it is considered conformant with paragraphs 86 - 123 in the Guidelines, if not schemes shall demonstrate conformity with the individual paragraphs 86 – 123.
Certification	124 – 154	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conformity assessments of aquaculture operations and facilities against the certification standard of the program are conducted by an accredited independent certification body. • The scheme owner shall demonstrate its certification bodies are accredited in conformance with the ISO-65 guide by an independent accreditation body or entity for the scope of the schemes standard (<i>formal ISO-65 accreditations can only be conducted by a National Accreditation Body that signed the Memorandum of Understanding of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) for ISO-65 Accreditation</i>). • If a scheme can demonstrate conformance with the ISO 65 it is considered conformant with paragraphs 124 - 154 in the Guidelines; if not, schemes shall demonstrate conformity with the individual paragraphs 124 - 154.
Chain of Custody	126, 127 & 155 – 160	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scheme owner requires a chain of custody assessment is in place requiring all certified aquaculture products to be identified and differentiated from non-certified aquaculture products at the key points of transfer; • The scheme owner requires assessments against the chain of custody requirements to be conducted by an accredited independent certification body, for all product carrying the label; • The certification body is ISO-65 (or equivalent) accredited by an independent accreditation body or entity for the relevant scope for the chain of custody requirements.
Use of certification claim, symbol, label or logo	161 – 166	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The owner of the certification scheme has documented procedures describing the requirements, restrictions or limitations on the use of symbols, labels or logos indicating that an aquaculture product comes from a certified aquaculture operation. Such procedures comply with the following: • The scheme owner has a written procedure regarding the use of the symbol or logo; • The scheme demonstrates that symbols, logos and claims are clearly defined and in conformance with the scope of the scheme and do not cause barriers of trade or mislead the consumer; and • The scheme owner and/or certification body, as appropriate, issue written authorizations and/or licenses to affix the scheme's mark/claim/logo only when the aquaculture operations or products and chain of custody have been certified as being in conformity with the scheme. (162 and 164)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The certification body, accreditation body, or owner of the certification scheme has mechanisms in place to ensure that no fraudulent or misleading use is made (with the use and display) of its certification mark and logos. • The certification body, accreditation body, or owner of the certification scheme takes suitable action to deal with incorrect references to the certification system or misleading use of symbols and logos found in advertisements, catalogues, etc. • Certificates for use of the scheme's mark/claim/logo include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the name and address of the accreditation body or the certification scheme owner; • the name and address of the certification body; • the name and address of the certification holder; • the effective date of issue of the certificate; • the substance of the certificate; • the term for which the certification is valid; • signature of the issuing officer.
Resolution for Complaints and Appeals	167 – 171	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accreditation body or entity or owner of the certification scheme shall demonstrate written policy and procedures, applicable to accredited certification bodies, for dealing with any complaints and appeals from involved parties in relation to any aspect of the certification or de-certification. Such procedures comply with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The complaints procedure is timely and clearly defines the scope and nature of appeals that will be considered; • Costs of appeals are borne by the appellant; • An independent and impartial committee is established by the scheme owner or the AB to respond to any complaint. If discussion and/or conciliation fail, the committee provides a written finding to the CB, AB or scheme owner which transmits it to the other party or parties involved (168 and 169); • The certification body, accreditation body, or owner of the certification scheme, as appropriate, takes appropriate corrective and preventive action following the determination of the committee but this does not exclude recourse to other forms of legal and administrative processes as provided for in national legislation or international law; • The certification body, accreditation body, or promoter/owner of the certification scheme (as appropriate) keeps a record of all complaints, remedial actions relative to certification and assesses the effectiveness of remedial actions; and • The certification body, accreditation body, or promoter/owner of the certification scheme (as appropriate) safeguards the confidentiality of information obtained during the investigation and resolution of complaints.

ANNEX 2

LINKAGES AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE GUIDELINES, EVALUATION FRAMEWORK AND THE BENCHMARKING TOOL

	FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification	Evaluation Framework for assessing conformity of public and private certification schemes with the FAO technical guidelines on aquaculture certification	Global Benchmarking Tool
Published	February 2011	October 2013	October 2015
Page	122p (trilingual)	18p	321p
Preparation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requested by COFI-SCA III in India 2006 to develop the guidelines. • Went through number of consultative process. • Approved by COFI (29th) in Rome 2011. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommended by COFI-SCA V in Thailand 2010 to develop evaluation framework. • Reiterated the need by COFI (29th and 30th) in Rome 2011 and 2012. • Conducted an expert workshop in Rome, 2012. • Endorsed by COFI-SCA VII in Russia 2013. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI) together with members of supply chain, NGOs, GOs, IGOs including FAO collectively developed the document. • COFI-SCA IV in Brazil 2015 supported the efforts of FAO and partnership with GSSI.
Aim	Provide guidance for the development, organization and implementation of credible aquaculture certification schemes.	Assess the conformity of a certification scheme with the FAO technical guidelines on aquaculture certification.	Provide benchmarking tool to measure and compare the performance of seafood certification schemes (both capture and aquaculture) in order to facilitate their implementation and use.

Contents	<p>Terms and definitions Application Principles</p> <p>Minimum substantive criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal health and welfare • Food safety • Environmental integrity • Socio-economic aspects <p>Institutional and procedural requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance • Standard setting • Accreditation • Certification <p>Special considerations for implementation</p>	<p>Checklists on minimum substantive criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal health and welfare • Food safety • Environmental integrity • Socio economic aspects <p>Checklists on Institutional and procedural requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance • Standard setting • Accreditation • Certification (Chain of custody, use of certification claim , symbol and logo) 	<p>A. Governance of seafood certification schemes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance, scheme management, standard setting and management <p>B. Operational Management of seafood certification schemes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation • Certification • Chain of custody <p>C. Aquaculture certification standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquatic animal health • Chemical and veterinary drug use • Feed use • Responsible construction, waste disposal, storage • Impact on habitat and biodiversity • Seed • Impact on water resources • Species selection and escape <p>D. Fisheries certification standards</p>
	<p>Provides background context, principles, and minimum substantive criteria on 4 key areas in broad term, with reference to internationally agreed norms (e.g. FAO CCRF, ISO, Codex Alimentarius, OIE Aquatic animal health code, WTO agreement technical burrier to trade, ISEAL code).</p>	<p>Provides evaluation frame work (checklist format) for all 4 key areas of minimum substantive criteria defined in FAO guidelines (every paragraph 19-57) in broad term. Institutional and procedural requirements are organised into conformance criteria and cover most of the paragraphs except para156-159 on chain of custody and audit.</p>	<p>Provide benchmarking tool on 3 key area of minimum substantive criteria (excluding social economic aspects) and institutional and procedural aspects defined in FAO guideline, in detail with guidance notes. Reference to CCRF, FAO Guidelines on aquaculture certification and ecolabelling, ISO, ISEAL code, OIE, FAO technical guidelines for responsible fisheries supplement series.</p>
Example of cross-referenced components	<p>Governance (Paragraph 61,63,64, p16-17)</p>	<p>Governance (Part 2, First key Element, p16)</p>	<p>Scheme Governance - Operating Procedure (A1-03, p22)</p>
	<p>Certification scope (Paragraph 125, 126, 127)</p>	<p>Certification & Chain of custody (Part 2, Fourth and fifth key elements, p17)</p>	<p>Scheme Governance – scheme scope (A1-07, p24)</p>