



Introduction to Aquaculture Improvement Projects

THIS DOCUMENT introduces Sustainable Fisheries Partnership's (SFP) concept and model for aquaculture improvement projects (AIPs), which we recommend our partners to participate in and source from. It is presented along with the AIP Toolkit to support the development of AIPs. For consistency, our AIP concept is adapted from the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions guidelines for fishery improvement projects (FIPs), and guided by our *Framework for Sustainably Managed Aquaculture* and its associated FishSource aquaculture profiles, which measure the status of zonal aquaculture management worldwide.

We look forward to working with industry, certification schemes, and NGOs to further develop models of improvement for aquaculture that will become as widely recognized by industry as FIPs are in the wild-capture sector.

WHAT IS AN AQUACULTURE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT?

An aquaculture improvement project (AIP) is a multi-stakeholder process to address the cumulative impacts and shared disease risks affecting aquaculture through a zonal management approach. AIPs utilize the power of the private sector to encourage positive changes toward sustainability and ensure that these changes endure through improved policy and management strategies.



To be successful, an AIP should operate at a scale above the farm level and focus on the implementation of policies and management practices that drive broad-scale sustainability practices across whole production areas.

AN AIP SHOULD HAVE THE FOLLOWING PUBLICLY AVAILABLE COMPONENTS:

A commitment from all AIP participants

An aquaculture improvement project should draw upon market forces. Participants should include key supply chain actors such as producers, suppliers, importers, retailers, and food services. It is highly desirable for AIPs to include producer organizations as participants, or to have establishment of a producer organization as an early AIP goal, if none exists. All participants must commit publicly to supporting the AIP, including any financial support.

A scoping document

A scoping document identifies the industry's environmental performance within the aquaculture zone, as well as improvement recommendations and AIP stakeholders who can carry these recommendations forward.

No standard currently exists that covers all elements of zonal management, although Best Aquaculture Practices certification does include a Biosecurity Area Management standard. If the focus of the AIP is only disease risk management, a risk assessment against this standard could serve as a needs assessment in the scoping document. However, a wider needs assessment could be based on public industry and NGO reports, such as SFP's FishSource Aquaculture profiles, Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch reports, and Marine Conservation Society assessments. Government reports and aquaculture strategies should also be consulted.

A workplan

The AIP must develop a workplan that contains: 1) time-bound improvement objectives that address priority issues highlighted in the scoping document and 2) the supply chain actors who will lead these improvements.

Progress reports

The AIP must publicly report progress on activities and outcomes against the workplan, at least every six months. Regular public reporting helps give AIPs credibility throughout the seafood supply chain and shows buyers evidence of genuine progress.

A ZONAL MANAGEMENT APPROACH TO AQUACULTURE

Aquaculture depends on the use of shared resources, primarily water. Farms are interconnected in many ways (directly through water and indirectly through, e.g., common seed and feed sources), and a disease outbreak or unsound management practices in one farm can affect others. To date, markets have focused their attention and improvement of aquaculture almost exclusively on farm-level practices through third-party certification.

There are recognized benefits of current certifications, namely in addressing on-farm risks and providing buyers with a measurable target for corporate social responsibility programs and reporting. However, this approach fails to address shared disease risks and the cumulative impacts of the industry on receiving water bodies and other resource users. A broader management approach to aquaculture — i.e., a zonal or landscape approach — is critical for the industry to address the persistent challenges it currently faces.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) established the ecosystem approach to aquaculture (EAA) in 2008 as a framework for broader, integrated management of aquaculture. The zonal approach to aquaculture management and our Framework for Sustainably Managed Aquaculture are rooted in the EAA. At its core, the zonal approach aims to recognize the interconnectedness of farms and ensure that industry growth is

based on scientific evidence of carrying capacity and coordinated management actions. This approach includes three fundamental best management practices:



SPATIAL PLANNING AND ZONING the process through which public and private sectors aim to influence the spatial distribution of people and activities at differing geographic scales.



WATERBODY CARRYING CAPACITY LIMITS determining the level of resource use, by all resource users, that can be sustained over the long term without harming ecosystems or provision of ecosystem services.



AQUACULTURE MANAGEMENT AREAS waterbodies, or parts thereof, where certain management practices are coordinated across all aquaculture operators in the area, to minimize cumulative impacts and risks.



For more information, please contact aquaculture@sustainablefish.org

September 2019