IN IT TOGETHER

How the AWS Standard and NPWI ambition support your corporate water stewardship journey

ALLIANCE FOR WATER STEWARDSHIP

UN GLOBAL COMPACT

CEO WATER MANDATE

Contents

Introduction 2
About 3
AWS and the CEO Water Mandate 4
What is the AWS Standard? 7
What is Net Positive Water Impact (NPWI) ambition? 8
A corporate water stewardship journey 9

How do NPWI ambition and the AWS Standard interact? 10

How can the AWS Standard support an NPWI ambition? 12
A detailed crosswalk between NPWI and the AWS Standard 13

How does the NPWI ambition relate to the AWS Standard? 15

In it together: Collective action on water 16

How AWS and the CEO Water Mandate can help you 18

Footnotes 19

Authors
Hannah Baleta, Gregg Brill, Scott McCready and Klaudia Schachtschneider

Suggested citation
Baleta, H., G. Brill, S. McCready, K. Schachtschneider (2024). In It Together: How the AWS Standard and NPWI Ambition Support your Corporate Water Stewardship Journey. Alliance for Water Stewardship and CEO Water Mandate.

Cover image credit
Max Topchii

Introduction

This paper provides information for corporations about the links and interoperability of the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) Standard V2.0 and the CEO Water Mandate Net Positive Water Impact (NPWI) ambition.

It is intended to support practitioners with an NPWI ambition who may be wondering how AWS can support them. It will also be useful for those who use the AWS Standard and would like to know how the NPWI ambition relates to them.

About

Alliance for Water Stewardship

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) is a global, multi-stakeholder membership collaboration comprising businesses, NGOs and the public sector.[1] The 200+ members of AWS contribute to the sustainability of local water resources through their adoption and promotion of a universal framework for the sustainable use of water – the International Water Stewardship Standard, or AWS Standard – that drives, recognises and rewards good water stewardship performance.

AWS's vision is of a water-secure world that enables people, cultures, business and nature to prosper, both now and in the future. To achieve this, the AWS mission is to ignite and nurture global and local leadership in credible water stewardship that recognises and secures the social, cultural, environmental and economic value of freshwater.

The AWS Standard guides water-using sites, be they farms, factories, data centres or any other production unit, to understand and act on their water use at two scales – internally, within their own fence line, and externally, within their catchments.

To advance water stewardship by facilities and the companies that either own them or influence them through brand-to-supplier-based dynamics, AWS convenes a multi-stakeholder alliance of practitioners and thematic experts. The aim is to promote adoption of the AWS Standard System through shared learning, problem-solving and constructive dialogue.

CEO Water Mandate

The CEO Water Mandate is a partnership between the UN Global Compact and the Pacific Institute that mobilizes business leaders on water, sanitation, and the Sustainable Development Goals for corporate water stewardship.

Mandate endorsers commit to continuous progress against six core elements (direct operations, supply chain and watershed management, collective action, public policy, community engagement, and transparency) and in so doing understand and manage their own water risks.

Established in 2007, the CEO Water Mandate was created out of the acknowledgement that global water challenges create risk for a wide range of industry sectors, the public sector, local communities, and ecosystems alike.[2]

Figure 1

Within the CEO Water Mandate, two initiatives allow companies to engage more deeply with specific elements of water stewardship and resilience. Endorsers of the CEO Water Mandate can join these groups to further accelerate their water action:

The **Water Resilience Coalition (WRC)** is a CEO-led collective action and leadership group elevating action on mounting water stress to the top of the global corporate agenda. WRC members work to preserve the world's freshwater resources through collective action in water-stressed basins and through ambitious, quantifiable goals.[3] Members commit to the 2030 ambitions and 2050 pledges set out below (Figure 1). NPWI forms part of the 2050 pledge.

WASH4Work is a multi-stakeholder initiative to mobilise business action on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in workplace operations, in communities where companies operate and across supply chains.

The Water Resilience Coalition

2030 Ambition

- Achieve positive water impact in over 100 water-stressed basins that support over 3 billion people
- Enable equitable and resilient water access, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) for over 3 million people

2030 Roadmap

The WRC employs strategies related to four approaches:
- Scaling Proven Solutions
- Advancing Innovation
- Leveraging Finance
- Measuring Impact

2050 Pledge

- Achieve Net Positive Water Impact in 150 water-stressed basins worldwide
- Develop, implement and enable strategies for water-resilient value chains
- Raise the global ambition on water

AWS and the CEO Water Mandate

Similarities

AWS and the CEO Water Mandate hold similar spaces within the water stewardship ecosystem – both aiming to address water sustainability challenges and promote responsible water management practices. AWS and the CEO Water Mandate are similar in their:

- **Focus on water stewardship:** Both target corporations and businesses, encouraging them to take proactive measures to manage their water use responsibly.
- **Multi-stakeholder engagement:** Both promote collaboration among stakeholders, including businesses, governments, NGOs and other organisations to develop and implement water stewardship strategies.
- **Guiding principles and frameworks:** Both provide guiding principles, frameworks and tools to help companies assess, manage and report on water-related risks and their impacts.
- **Global scope:** Both have global scope, engaging companies and stakeholders from around the world to address water challenges on local, regional and global levels.
- **Promotion of best practices:** Both promote the adoption of best practices in water management, including water conservation, efficiency improvements, pollution prevention and community engagement.
- **Advocacy and policy engagement:** Both advocate for water sustainability and collaborate with policymakers to encourage the development of supportive policies and regulations.

Differences

However, AWS and the CEO Water Mandate differ in their:

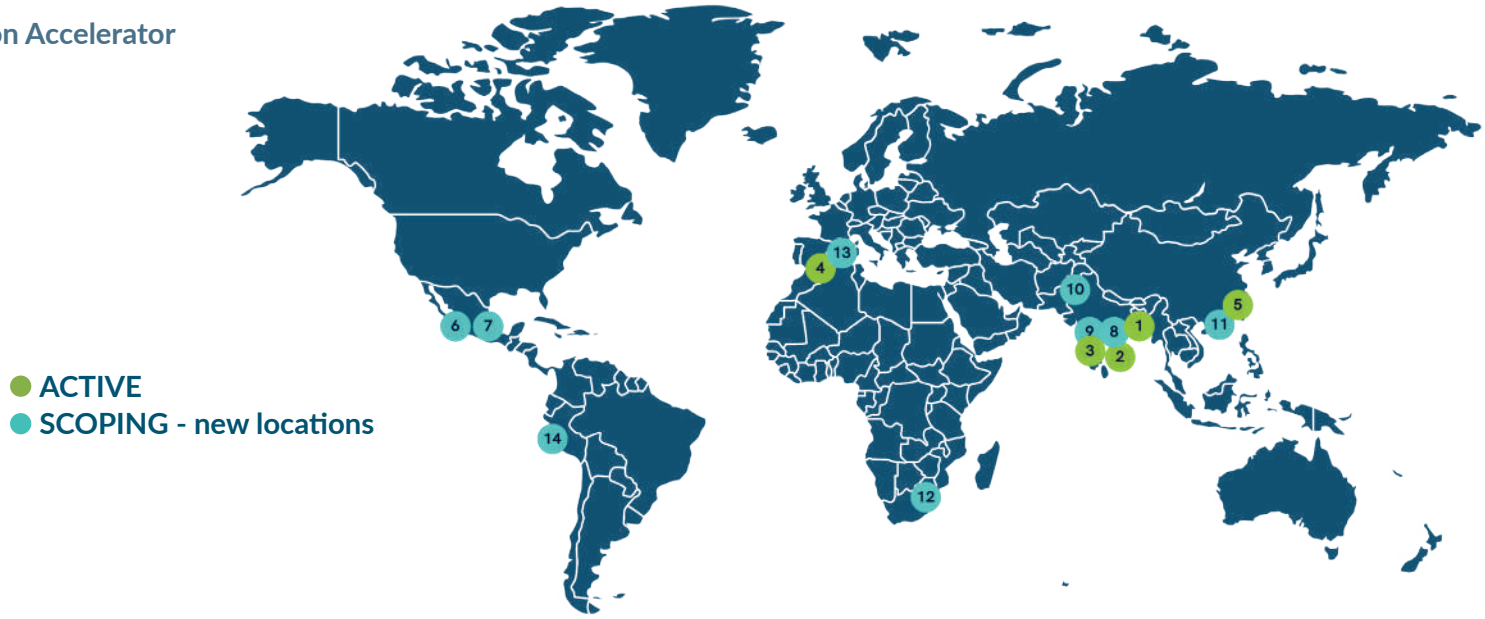
- **Membership:** AWS membership is open to organisations of any type – civil society, private or public. The UN Global Compact is a corporate membership body, so the CEO Water Mandate endorser members are all businesses.
- **Scope:** The CEO Water Mandate focuses specifically on commitments made by business leaders to advance water stewardship goals. As such, their first area of focus is on businesses as a whole, providing support and guidance on the development and implementation of water-related strategies and best practices and an opportunity to align with ambitious commitments. AWS's primary focus is on operational facilities. It manages a standard system consistent with ISEAL that codifies the requirements of water stewardship practice within the AWS Standard. It also incorporates a certification programme that allows companies to make independently verified claims about their water stewardship.
- **Institutional form:** The CEO Water Mandate is a special initiative of the United Nations, established in 2007 by the UN Secretary-General and the UN Global Compact in partnership with the Pacific Institute, who serve as the Secretariat. AWS is a registered not-for-profit global membership collaboration comprising businesses, NGOs and the public sector. It is led by the AWS Secretariat and overseen by the member-elected AWS Board.

In it together

AWS and the CEO Water Mandate work closely with each other and their respective memberships, including where they overlap. For example:

- AWS is part of the CEO Water Mandate convened WASH4Work Initiative, with an AWS representative currently serving as Co-Chair.
- AWS and the CEO Water Mandate both have collective action implementation arms in the form of the AWS Collective Action Accelerator (a4ws.org/collective-action-accelerator) and the CEO Water Mandate Water Resilience Coalition (WRC) and the 100 Priority Basins (wateractionhub.org/100basins). Both of these arms align to advance common goals at global and local levels, as shown on the next page.
- AWS and the CEO Water Mandate collaborated to build awareness of and commitment to water stewardship through the 'Business leaders open call to action on water', signed at the 2023 UN Water conference.

AWS Collective Action Accelerator



Source: a4ws.org, 2024

100 Priority Basins

Source: wateractionhub.org, 2024

Although AWS and the CEO Water Mandate have different memberships, scopes and institutional forms, they are complementary initiatives whose missions and goals are aligned (Table 1).

Table 1: AWS and the CEO Water Mandate alignment

CATEGORY	AWS	CEO WATER MANDATE
INSTITUTIONAL FORM	Multi-stakeholder, membership-based alliance of civil, private and public organisations.	Business membership body of the United Nations Global Compact.
MISSION	Ignite and nurture global and local leadership in credible water stewardship that recognises and secures the social, cultural, environmental and economic value of freshwater.	Mobilise a critical mass of business leaders to address global water challenges through corporate water stewardship in partnership with the United Nations, governments, civil society and other stakeholders.
GOALS	1. Influence: AWS, its members and partners are a powerful driving force for change and scale in the adoption of water stewardship. 2. Inclusion: AWS water stewardship and its benefits are accessible for all. 3. Impact: AWS water stewardship drives and supports positive change in water-stressed catchments.	1. Facilitating innovation and leading-edge thinking. 2. Scaling leading practice and driving basin resilience. 3. Raising the profile of water and shaping an enabling environment.
SCOPE	Primary area of focus is guiding operational facilities and the local catchments they reside in through the AWS Standard. Parallel area of focus is fostering a multi-stakeholder network of practice that strengthens the AWS System, of which the AWS Standard forms a core part.	Primary area of focus is businesses (at both the enterprise and site levels) and fostering commitments to action in direct operations. Parallel area of focus is supporting businesses' commitments to action in their value chains and the water-stressed basins with which they connect.
SCALE	Primary: Operational facilities Catchments Parallel: Companies as a whole	Primary: Companies as a whole Basins Parallel: Companies as a whole

What is the AWS Standard?

The International Water Stewardship Standard, or the 'AWS Standard', was launched at a meeting of the CEO Water Mandate in Lima, Peru in 2014. The Secretariat of the CEO Water Mandate, the Pacific Institute, was one of the founders of AWS, and the idea of the standard system was developed in large part through dialogues in the early stages of convening the CEO Water Mandate.

The AWS Standard offers a credible, globally applicable framework for major water users to understand their water use and impacts, and to work collaboratively and transparently with others for sustainable water management within the wider water catchment context. Implementers follow the steps and guidance in the AWS Standard to achieve good water stewardship practices that improve site water performance and contribute to wider sustainability goals. As an ISEAL Community Member, AWS serves as the custodian of the only water-focused framework that is ISEAL Code Compliant.

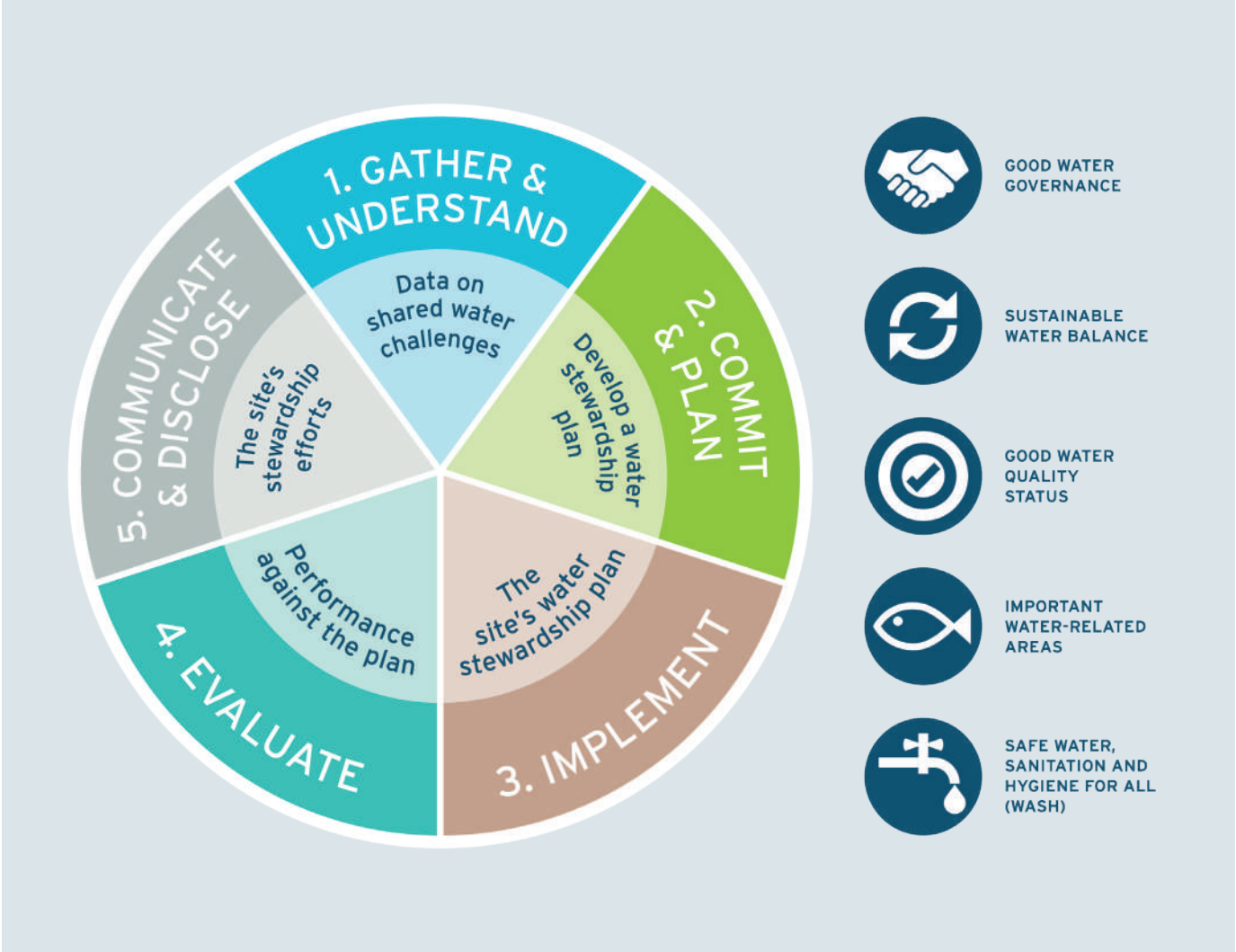
The AWS Standard enables best practice in water stewardship through five key outcomes:

- Sustainable water balance (freshwater quantity)
- Good water quality status (freshwater quality)
- Health of important water-related areas (nature and freshwater)
- Safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all (WASH)
- Good water governance

The AWS Standard is built around five steps, each with its own set of criteria and indicators (Figure 2). Certification against the AWS Standard through third-party verification enables certified sites to make credible claims about their water stewardship activity.

In line with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice, the AWS Standard was updated in 2019 to V2.0.[4] Revisions were based on learning and feedback from its adoption at hundreds of sites around the world. At the time of writing, a third version of the AWS Standard is in the development and consultation stage, with an anticipated launch in 2025.

Figure 2: The five steps and outcomes of the AWS Standard V2.0



What is the Net Positive Water Impact (NPWI) ambition?

NPWI[5] is a leadership ambition set at the enterprise level and is available to any company, across any sector, industry or geography. It aims to ensure that the water user's contributions towards a healthy basin exceed their impacts, especially in water-stressed basins. It requires long-term commitment and input (by 2050) towards quantifiable outcomes.

As part of NPWI, there are **three dimensions of water stress** to address, namely:

Water availability:
The objective of this dimension is for companies to reduce the volume of water withdrawn within the basin over time (volume unit/year).

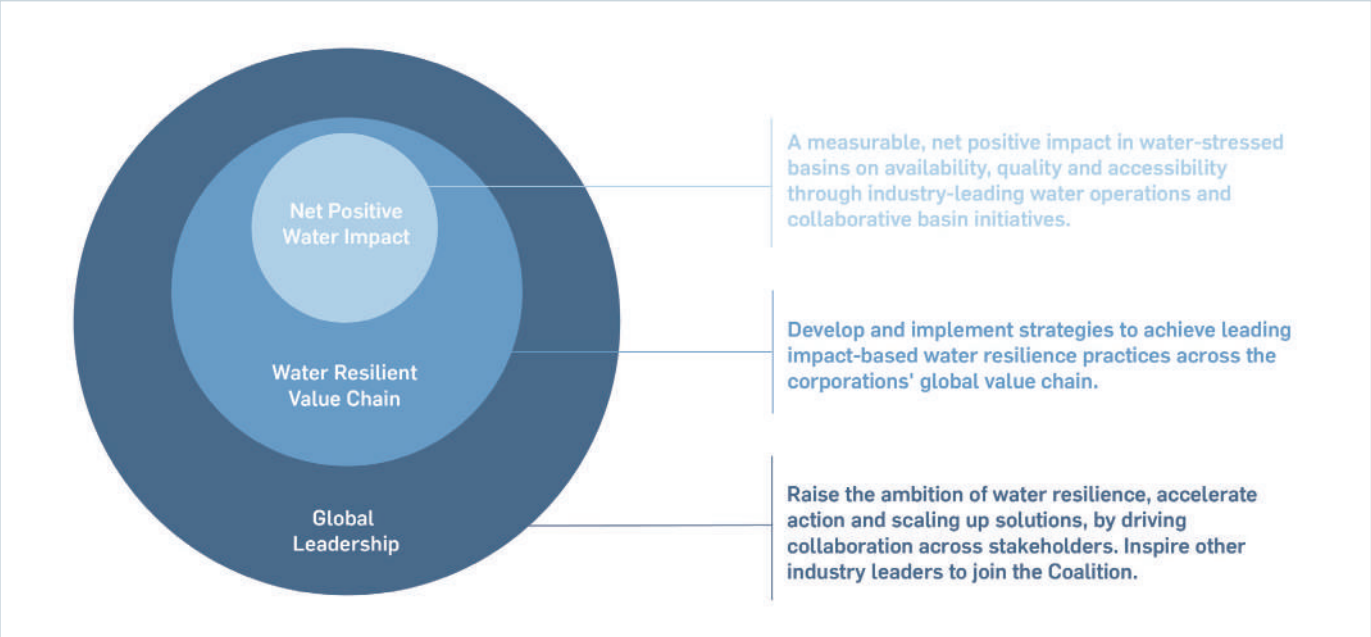
Water quality:
The objective of this dimension is to reduce (and ultimately avoid adding) pollutant load at the site, downstream and in the basin (percentage or total pollutant load reduction in mass or volume/year).

Water accessibility:
The objective of this dimension is to improve access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services that are physically accessible at work, within or near the employee household and for the population in the overall basin (percentage of people with safely managed and climate-resilient WASH services).

The CEO Water Mandate has developed a series of guides to help organisations in their journey toward achieving the NPWI ambition. These documents are a work in progress and continue to evolve with input from partners.

Figure 3: NPWI at a glance

Figure 4: Three Pillars

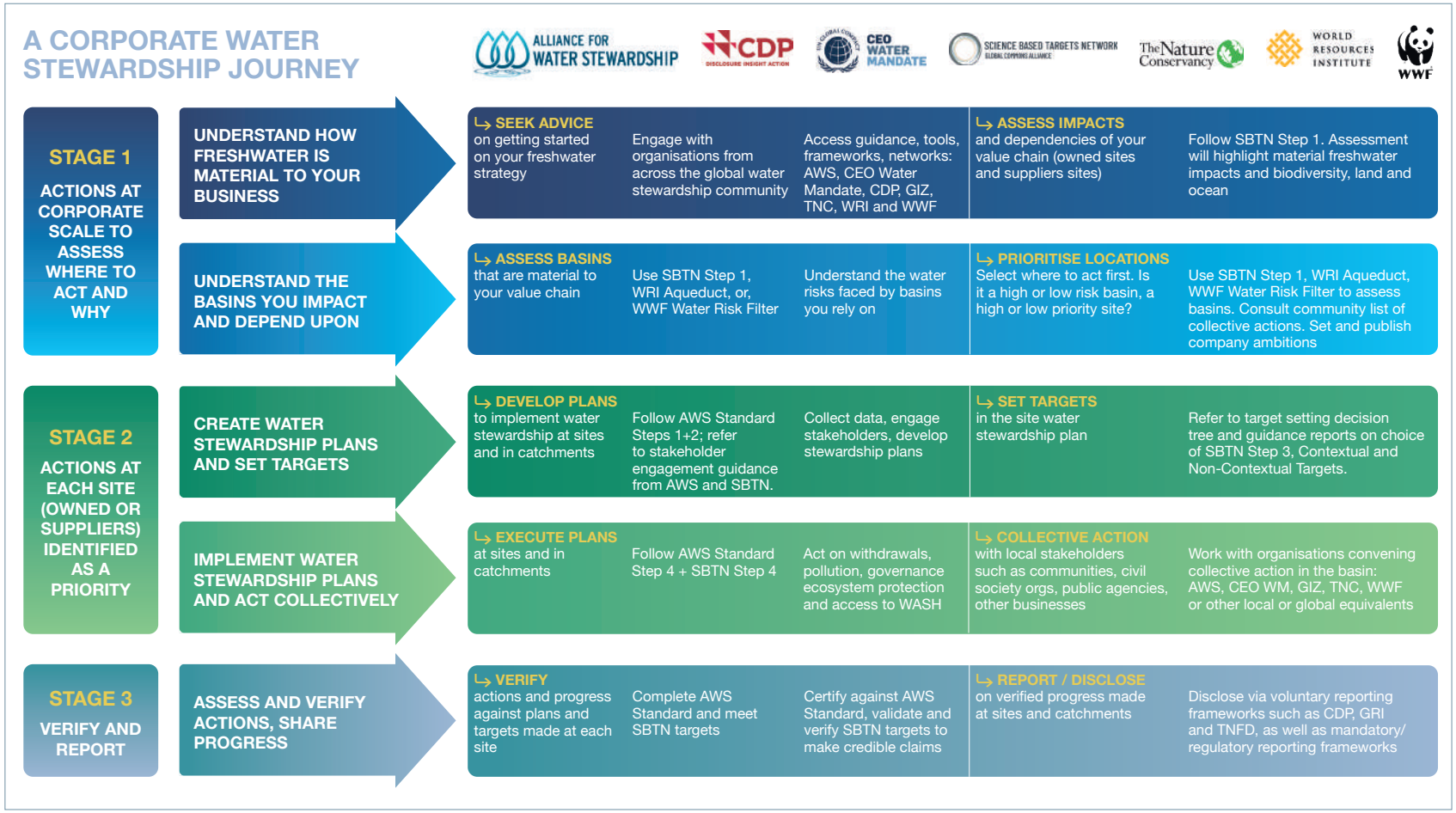


A corporate water stewardship journey

This 'corporate water stewardship journey' diagram was developed by AWS, CDP, the CEO Water Mandate, Science Based Targets Network (SBTN), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), World Resources Institute (WRI), and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) to accompany the launch of the SBTN Freshwater methods in 2023 (Figure 5). It was intended to highlight the inter-operability and compatibility of different water stewardship initiatives and 'products' for corporate organisations.

The figure provides a high-level overview of the possible route a water stewardship journey might take. It also provides insights into when different frameworks, tools, disclosure platforms or the AWS Standard might be useful. The AWS Standard is referenced in Stages 2 and 3, where site-specific actions around water stewardship are relevant. The NPWI ambition guides were not finalised at the time Figure 5 was published but, in retrospect, it would fit across all three stages.

Figure 5: A corporate water stewardship journey.[6]



How do NPWI ambition and the AWS Standard interact?

The AWS Standard and NPWI ambition guides are complementary

They can both be applied at the same scales – within operational sites and in their catchments. They also focus on similar areas of water stewardship – availability, quality and accessibility.

Applying the AWS Standard will help to achieve NPWI

Should a company decide that its commitment is to reach NPWI across priority sites, the AWS Guidance and Standard can help lead them through the process. Implementing the AWS Standard, in particular, the data collection and validation processes with stakeholders can translate into NPWI implementation for water availability, quality and accessibility. Certification through AWS also gives credibility to an NPWI ambition.

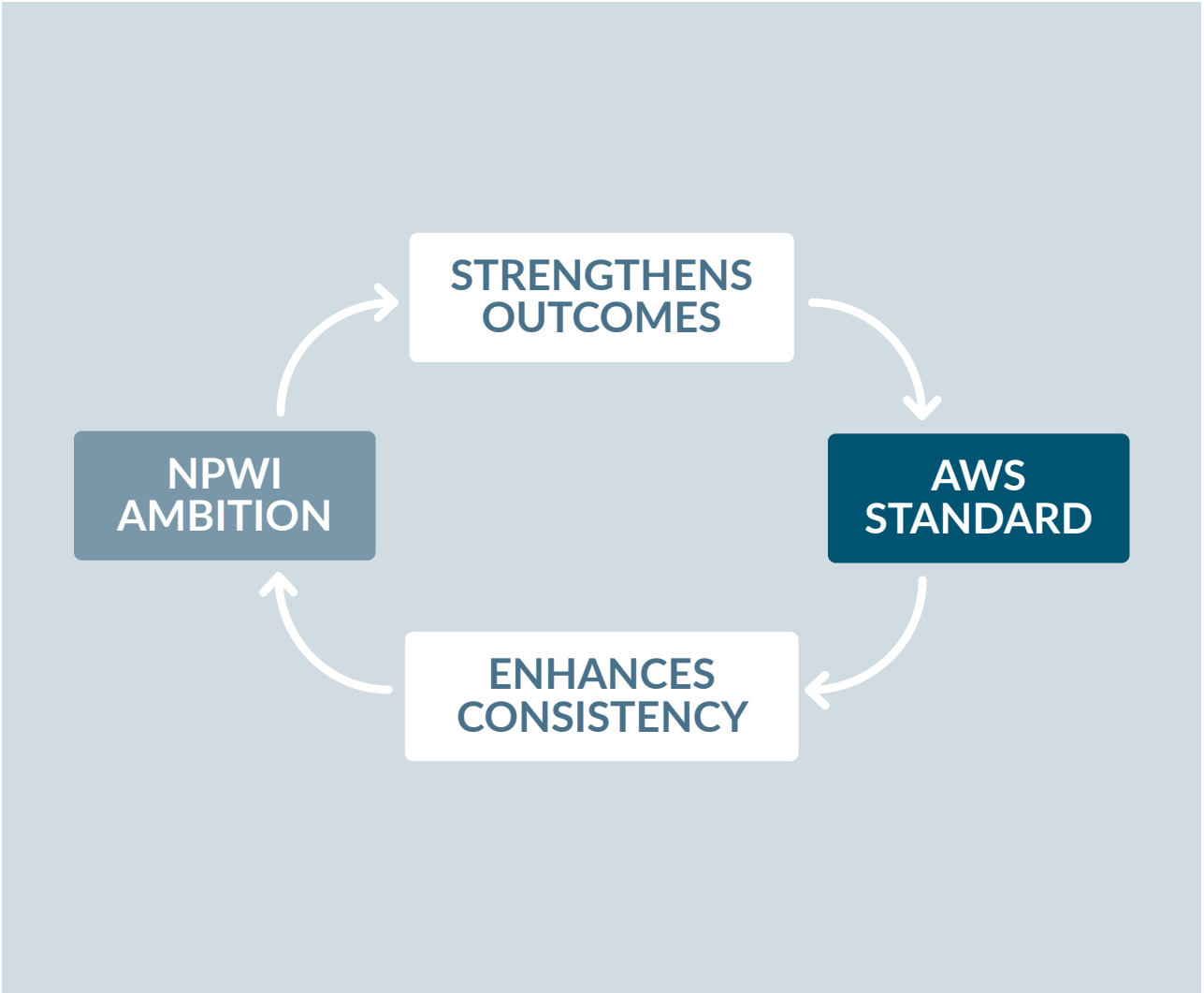
The NPWI ambition will strengthen the outcomes of water stewardship plans developed through AWS

NPWI sets the company's ambition for reducing water stress in terms of its availability, quality and accessibility (i.e. three of the five AWS Standard outcomes). The AWS Standard helps operations gather site and catchment data to develop robust water stewardship plans that can help achieve that ambition. The NPWI ambition can also strengthen the implementation of the AWS Standard by committing to achieving specific outcomes within a set period (i.e. 2050).

Mutual reinforcement

NPWI's ambition is to achieve a measurable and net positive impact on water availability, quality and accessibility in water-stressed basins through improved water-related operations and basin-wide initiatives by 2050. The AWS Standard provides a reliable basis for people to share expectations about the workings of a business, operational facility, production method or service.[7] There's a strong alignment between NPWI's ambition and the AWS Standard, with both reinforcing each other (Figure 6). NPWI's ambition is enhanced by the consistency of practice that implementing the AWS Standard creates. In turn, NPWI's ambition reinforces the need to adopt the AWS Standard to ensure consistency of practice.

Figure 6: Mutual reinforcement of NPWI's ambition and the AWS Standard



Different focus and strengths

The NPWI ambition and the AWS Standard have different areas of focus and strengths. For example, the NPWI ambition is set at the enterprise level while implemented at the site level, while the AWS Standard is solely site-based. At the time of writing, AWS Certification is the only auditing and verification process of site-based actions.

The intention is that NPWI can be used as best-practice guidance to achieving net positive impact for water using an internal tracking framework for progress reporting.

Table 2: NPWI and AWS comparison

SIMILARITIES	CEO WATER MANDATE	AWS
SCOPE	Site and basin	Site and catchment
VALUE CHAIN	Not yet	Not yet
LINK TO SDGS	Yes	Yes
SITE EFFICIENCIES	Yes	Yes
COLLECTIVE ACTION	Yes	Yes

DIFFERENCES	CEO WATER MANDATE	AWS
MATURITY	Launched 2022	Launched 2014
UPTAKE	7 pilots	280 sites certified
OUTCOMES	Availability, quality, accessibility.	Sustainable water balance, good water quality, healthy status of important water-related areas, access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for all, improved water governance.
MONITORING & EVALUATION	Metrics and key performance indicators for the WRC to aggregate progress (using the Internal Tracking Framework).	Criteria and indicators used as evidence through an audit.
BUSINESS SCOPE	Enterprise ambition with site action.	Site-level action, inspired by company commitment.
Verification/ certification/ validation	NPWI can be used as an internal tracking framework of progress, and/or be communicated externally, which requires third-party validation of NPWI milestones and claims.	Certification against the AWS Standard is achieved through in-person third-party audit at a facility. Sites are certified as either Core, Gold or Platinum level. depending upon performance.

How can the AWS Standard support an NPWI ambition?

"The connections between NPWI and AWS are extremely strong. If you follow AWS, it can help with meeting the key performance indicators for NPWI – especially the gathering of information and stakeholder engagement through AWS. In one way or form, almost every indicator of AWS can feed into NPWI."

From a company that has piloted NPWI

If all three pillars of the NPWI ambition are achieved, then all five AWS Standard outcomes are achieved.

NPWI ambition's third pillar is: '**Delivered measurable watershed outcomes through meaningful collaborations and collective action to improve watershed health, contributing to good water governance, sustainable water balance, good water quality status, important water-related areas, and/or safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all**'.

This pillar matches the five outcomes of the AWS Standard. After meeting these outcomes, AWS Certification is about auditing and verifying processes rather than implementing new actions.

Conversely, the AWS Standard is a robust pathway for achieving the NPWI ambition. To carry out the actions in all five steps of NPWI implementation, different voluntary frameworks, tools and guidance could be used (Figure 7)[8]. However, the AWS Standard is the only one in the water stewardship cannon that can be used at every step. Furthermore, AWS Certification is the only auditing and verification process of actions.

Figure 7: Five steps for NPWI implementation

STEPS AT A COMPANY LEVEL		STEPS AT A SITE AND BASIN LEVEL		
Step 1 Awareness	**Step 2 Ambition**	**Step 3 Assessment**	**Step 4 Action**	**Step 5 Measurement**
1. Understand NPWI. 2. Integrate NPWI into company business goals and priorities.	1. Identify list of sites in water-stressed basins. 2. Prioritize where and when to achieve NPWI across company sites.	1. For each site and its basin, develop a baseline/benchmark assessment. 2. For each site and its basin, translate NPWI requirements into own objectives and targets.	1. For each site and its basin, identify opportunities and prioritize activities. 2. Establish and secure inputs needed for financing and partnerships. 3. Implement activities.	1. For each site and basin, build a monitoring and evaluation plan. 2. Analyze and evaluate outputs and outcomes with recommended indicators. 3. Report and communicate outputs and outcomes. 4. Learn, improve and adapt over time.

Adapted from AB InBev and TNC, 2022.

A detailed crosswalk between NPWI and the AWS Standard

This step-by-step comparison of the NPWI ambition and the AWS Standard seeks to highlight complementarities and uncover opportunities for companies to leverage one initiative to strengthen the other.

NPWI STEP 1: AWARENESS
1.1 Understand NPWI. 1.2 Understand how NPWI contributes to your company's business goals and priorities.
Links with AWS: Water stewardship resources At this step, links with the AWS Standard may not appear obvious. However, there are useful AWS Standard System resources that can provide a broad overview of water stewardship. The AWS Step 1.1 may be useful reading to help conceptualise the three Pillars of NPWI. The AWS network could also be useful for engaging with other certified or registered sites nearby. See a4ws.org for more details.
NPWI STEP 2: AMBITION
2.1 Define when and where to achieve NPWI across your company. 2.2 Identify sites and catchments facing water stress for availability, quality and access.
Links with AWS: Due to the NPWI ambition being set at the enterprise level, Step 2: Ambition includes a water-risk evaluation across all company sites, resulting in a list of priority sites in which to engage first. This step has no overlap with AWS, which is site- and catchment-based. However, members of the Alliance for Water Stewardship share that they use the criteria of the AWS Standard to guide water-related actions across sites within their company or its supply chain.
NPWI STEP 3: ASSESSMENT
3.1 For each site and watershed, understand the impacts, dependencies, risks and opportunities.
Links with AWS Step 1: Gather and Understand Step 1 of the AWS Standard helps companies understand water impacts, dependencies, risks and opportunities across their sites. The requirements of NPWI mirror this. The NPWI Guidance states that, 'To achieve NPWI, start by understanding the local context and business drivers to gain visibility into the specific local water challenges, stakeholder values and priorities, as well as uncertainties and information gaps. This will help you define your company's NPWI objectives in each watershed'. To achieve NPWI you will need access to the following information for each site (AWS relevant criteria are in brackets): • Site water balance (e.g., inflows, losses, storage and outflows). (AWS criteria 1.3) • Site water sources and discharge locations. (AWS criteria 1.1) • Basic environmental, social, cultural and economic characteristics of the watershed. (AWS criteria 1.5) • Who the relevant stakeholders are, and their water-related values, priorities and concerns. (AWS criteria 1.2) • Current and emerging shared water challenges, their root causes and desired state. (AWS criteria 1.6) • Ongoing water stewardship activities and collaborations in the watershed. (AWS criteria 1.7)

Continued on next page

As you can see, following the steps in the AWS Standard at a site will help instill the behaviours necessary to achieve the ambitions of the NPWI commitment.

3.2	For each site and its watershed, define objectives, goals and targets to achieve NPWI.

Links with AWS Step 2: Commit and Plan
Step 2 of the AWS Standard is to 'Ensure there is sufficient leadership support, site authority and allocated resources for the site to implement the AWS Standard. It focuses on how a site will act on shared water challenges and improve its performance and the status of its catchment in terms of the AWS water stewardship outcomes'. Step 2 provides criteria and indicators to guide companies in creating a water stewardship strategy and plan, with NPWI as part of their public commitment. Criteria 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 are particularly relevant at this stage.[9,10,11]

NPWI STEP 4: ACTION	
4.1	For each site and its catchment, identify and prioritise opportunities.
4.2	Secure financing, establish partnerships and implement activities.

Links with AWS Step 3: Implement Step 3 of the AWS Standard is to 'Ensure that the site is implementing the plan outlined in Step 2, mitigating risks and driving actual improvements in performance'. It includes a framework for required evidence that a water stewardship plan has been implemented across all five of the outcomes. This covers the three outcomes of NPWI – water availability, quality and accessibility.

NPWI STEP 5: MEASUREMENT	
5.1	Plan and collect data.
5.2	Analyse and evaluate impact.
5.3	Report and communicate results.
5.4	Learn, improve and adapt over time.

Links with AWS Step 4: Evaluate (4.1-4.4) and AWS Step 5: Communicate and Disclose (5.3-5.4)
AWS Steps 4 and 5 can help companies achieve the measurement phase of NPWI. NPWI Guidance states that, 'Monitoring and evaluation are essential to understanding if your project is succeeding in driving NPWI through measurable improvements in watershed health and informing future investment decisions. Companies are encouraged to monitor and evaluate their efforts to achieve NPWI with existing methods and approaches. Both company-specific project indicators and outputs need to be reported on in addition to the broader collective action project indicators and outcomes'.

Step 4 of the AWS Standard is to 'Review a site's performance against the actions taken in Step 3, learn from the results – both intended and unintended – and inform the next iteration of the site's water stewardship plan'.

Step 5 of the AWS Standard is to 'Encourage transparency and accountability through communication of performance relative to commitments, policies and plans. The disclosure of relevant information allows others to make informed opinions on a site's operations and tailor their involvement to suit'.

How does the NPWI ambition relate to the AWS Standard?

Setting a target or commitment falls into Step 2 of the AWS Standard: Commit and plan. For example, suppose that site X is currently using the AWS Standard. When they get to Step 2: Commit and plan, they will need to meet AWS Standard criteria 2.1 which is to 'Commit to water stewardship by having the senior-most manager in charge of water at the site sign and publicly disclose a commitment to water stewardship, the implementation of the AWS Standard and achieving its five outcomes and the allocation of required resources'. For site X, the commitment could be the NPWI ambition for their site.

NPWI may also be explicitly mentioned as part of a company's water stewardship strategy and plan within AWS Standard criteria 2.3 which is to, 'Create a water stewardship strategy and plan including addressing risks (to and from the site), shared catchment water challenges and opportunities'.

In the case of GlaxoSmithKline in India, the AWS Standard was used as the underlying structure through which all data was collected. Thereafter, specific data for NPWI was extracted for reporting purposes.

Image credit: Ruvim Miksanskiy

In it together: Collective action on water

The CEO Water Mandate's 2013 'Guide to water-related collective action' sets out clearly why collective action is important for water stewardship. It states,

'Effective collective action is both the key to approaching shared water risks successfully and to addressing a substantial point of vulnerability for many companies. In its most productive form, collective action leads to a strong sense of shared interests, shared responsibility and shared benefits. Companies will typically embrace collective efforts with interested parties to benefit from their experience, gain fresh ideas and perspectives, enhance credibility and legitimacy, increase the momentum for tackling a water challenge, pool resources to address common objectives, or simply become better stewards of a water resource'.[12]

Both NPWI and AWS recognise the importance of collective action and use it as a central pillar to their engagement within local catchments. Their approach takes two forms – embedding collective action as a concept within frameworks and connecting with associated programmes to foster collective action.

Collective action within frameworks

AWS Standard

Within the AWS Standard, stakeholder engagement and collective action at catchment-level are required in selected indicators. It states, 'The AWS Standard outcomes cannot typically be fully achieved for a catchment by a single organisation. This is especially the case for small organisations. Therefore, an important principle of good water stewardship is collective action within a catchment, inclusive of the water steward and its relevant stakeholders. Collective action should support and contribute to existing catchment initiatives, and not replace or compete with them, so long as they align with the objectives and outcomes of the AWS Standard'.

NPWI ambition

Pillar 3 of the NPWI ambition specifically addresses collective action. It requires, 'Delivered measurable basin outcomes and impacts, through meaningful collaborations and collective action to improve basin health, contributing to good water governance, sustainable water balance, good water quality status, important water-related areas, and/or safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all'. This is also the pillar that highlights the five outcomes of the AWS Standard.

Collective action with associated programmes

AWS Collective Action Accelerator

Through the Collective Action Accelerator, AWS works with members to identify common locations of interest and supports them in collectively engaging sites (owned or supply chain) to use the AWS Standard System at the same time and in the same places, so as to minimise costs and foster collaboration and peer learning.

The approach is cross-sectoral and aims to create a hub of sites that are 'collective action ready', using training, capacity building and shared data collection. AWS acts as the convenor and provides training while the companies provide financing and undertake implementation activities.

WRC 100 Priority Basins

With a focus on enabling groups of water-using sites within global value chains to begin their individual water stewardship journeys, the AWS Collective Action Accelerator helps prepare large numbers of participants to engage in collective action. This resonates with and creates opportunities within WRC's ambition to foster collective action in 100 priority basins. This target list of worldwide basins includes those with the highest level of opportunity for collective action from an economic and shared water risk perspective.

While the ambition for collective action in these basins extends beyond the site-focus of the AWS Standard – towards nature-based solutions implementation, WASH provision, ecosystem protection and restoration and policy engagement – the AWS Standard's grounding in best water stewardship practice, along with the convening of multiple actors in the same catchments, mean that the AWS Collective Action Accelerator can provide a pathway for building broader participation. The shared ambition of AWS and WRC is to maximise these opportunities whenever possible.

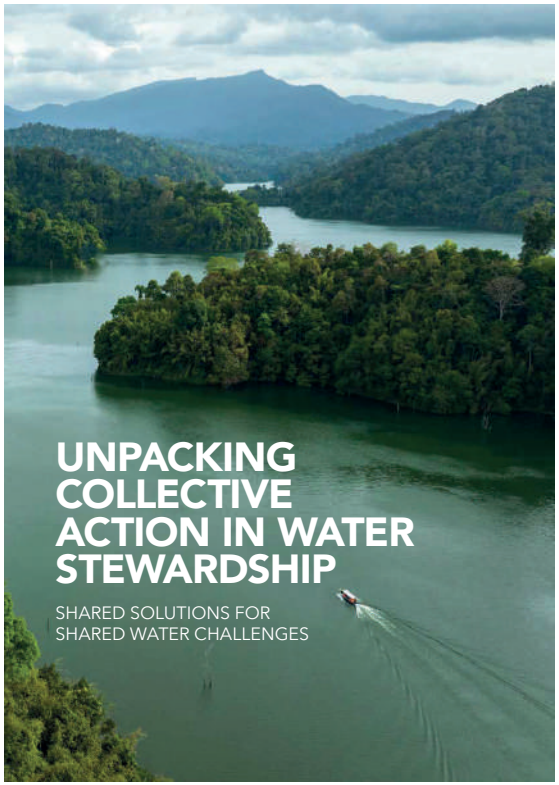
AWS and WRC are actively collaborating on how future Collective Action Accelerators can be aligned with WRC's 100 Priority Basins. They are also looking at how WRC-inspired commitments can use the Collective Action Accelerators to engage any facilities operating within WRC basins. For WRC, this collaboration will help to build the site-based capacity for and practice of water stewardship by companies committing to collective action. For AWS, the WRC commitment platform provides an opportunity to engage facilities beyond AWS Members.

Unpacking collective action in water stewardship

The spirit of collaboration between AWS and WRC is just one example of a renewed sense of energy and direction behind collective action that has emerged across the wider water stewardship community of NGOs, membership platforms, convenors and companies since the UN 2023 Water Conference.

Initiated by World Wide Fund for Nature but written and authored by 15 different organisations, including AWS, the CEO Water Mandate and the Water Resilience Coalition, the 2024 report 'Unpacking collective action in water stewardship'[14] sets out to define and build pathways towards collaboration across the growing diaspora of water stewardship-focused and water stewardship-adjacent civil society, private and public sector organisations.

For greater insight into how your organisation can connect with, draw strength from and engage with collective action, the authors of this report strongly recommend that you read 'Unpacking collective action in water stewardship' and engage with the organisations involved in its development and future activation. →



UNPACKING COLLECTIVE ACTION IN WATER STEWARDSHIP

This joint report lays out a framework for working together as an ecosystem of freshwater solution providers to address shared water challenges at scale. Download the report

How AWS and the CEO Water Mandate can help you

There are several tools and services that AWS and the CEO Water Mandate provide to support corporates on their water stewardship journey.

AWS resources:

- **AWS Standard V2.0 and Guidance:**
  A globally applicable framework for major water users to understand their water use and impacts. It asks water-using sites to understand and address shared water challenges as well as site water risks and opportunities.
- **AWS Tools Hub:**
  The AWS Tools Hub offers online learning modules and a growing range of tools, such as the AWS E-Standard and Guidance and the AWS Audit Ready Tool. Access to the platform is free to AWS Members and is available to buy on an 'a la carte' payment basis for non-members.
- **AWS Collective Action Accelerator:**
  AWS is working with members to identify common locations of interest (aligned with WRC's 100 Priority Basins) to collectively engage sites supported by the AWS Standard System.
- **AWS Priority Sectors:**
  AWS work with priority sectors through global engagement with multi-national companies and their stakeholders. This is done in conjunction with context-driven national action with brands, producers and suppliers feeding international supply chains, as well as other local stakeholders from both the public sector and civil society. The four priority business sectors are: agricultural supply chains, food and beverage manufacturing, ICT and microelectronics, textiles and apparel. Through global working groups and national platforms, the working groups identify barriers to the adoption of the AWS Standard and, through collaboration, create solutions enabling implementers to overcome those barriers.

The CEO Water Mandate resources:

- **The NPWI project page:**
  Provides access to all NPWI guidance materials.
- **The Water Action Hub:**
  The Water Action Hub is a global online collaboration and knowledge sharing platform for water sustainability and climate resilience. It helps companies and other organisations address water risk, advance sustainable water management and build resilience by:
  - Raising awareness of sustainability projects around the world and the organisations that administer them.
  - Allowing organisations to propose new projects and garner interest among potential partners.
  - Facilitating new partners and collective action.
  - Contextual and enterprise target guidance to support target setting and NPWI steps.
  - The Water Resilience Assessment Framework (WRAF) is an excellent resource for corporates, utilities and basin managers and planning authorities to build long-term, system-wide water resilience.
  - Several practical guidance documents to build the business case for nature-based solutions as well as a decision-support tool, the NBS Benefits Explorer.
  - WASH4Work is a multi-stakeholder initiative hosted by the CEO Water Mandate to mobilize business action on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in workplace operations, in communities where companies operate, and across supply chains.

For any questions regarding these resources and others that may be applicable, please reach out to AWS and/or the CEO Water Mandate via their websites:

a4ws.org

ceowatermandate.org

Footnotes

1. For more information about the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS), visit a4ws.org/about
2. For more information about the CEO Water Mandate, visit ceowatermandate.org/about/what-is-the mandate
3. For more information about the Water Resilience Coalition (WRC), visit ceowatermandate.org/resilience
4. ISEAL is the standard-setting body for voluntary standard systems. For more information about ISEAL, visit isealalliance.org
5. Brill, G., K. Schachtschneider, A. Chapagain, G. Moreira, D. Carlin. (2024). Net Positive Water Impact: An Introduction. CEO Water Mandate and Water Resilience Coalition.
6. 'A corporate water stewardship journey' is available to download at a4ws.org/download/corporate-water-stewardship-journey
7. To date, the AWS Standard V2.0 is the only third-party verified standard specifically for water. SBTN, NPWI, CDP and TNFD (in their current form) are ambitions, disclosure platforms or frameworks to help support companies, rather than standards.
8. Schachtschneider, K., G. Brill, A. Chapagain, G. Moreira, D. Carlin (2024). Implementing Net Positive Water Impact: Technical Guidance. CEO Water Mandate and Water Resilience Coalition.
9. Criteria 2.2: 'Develop and document a process to achieve and maintain legal and regulatory compliance'.
10. Criteria 2.3: 'Create a water stewardship strategy and plan, including addressing risks (to and from the site), shared catchment water challenges and opportunities'.
11. Criteria 2.4: 'Demonstrate the site's responsiveness and resilience to respond to water risks'.
12. To download the CEO Water Mandate Guide to Water-Related Collective Action, visit ceowatermandate.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Water_Guide_Collective_Action.pdf