

Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch®

Expanding Research Capacity: The Seafood Watch® External Assessment Program

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1. Background

Seafood is supplied into the North American marketplace from a diversity of global sources. In fact, the United States imports 91% of its seafood, about half of which is from aquaculture¹. The United States alone manages 715 commercially fished species. Global capture fisheries production in 2011 was about 90 million tons² originating from many thousands of fisheries. Global aquaculture production in 2011 was approximately 63 million tons with production originating from every continent except Antarctica².

As more businesses make commitments to source environmentally responsible seafood, Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program is experiencing a high demand to assess a diversity of global fisheries and aquaculture operations against our sustainability criteria.

We recommend that consumers and businesses buy seafood from fisheries and aquaculture operations that have resulted in green "Best Choice" or yellow "Good Alternative" ratings. In addition, we recommend procurement from fisheries or farms that have been certified to standards found to be equivalent to a Seafood Watch yellow 'Good Alternative' rating, or are engaged in a [credible improvement project](#).

Seafood Watch can maintain a limited number of seafood reports, the scope of which varies from individual to multiple fisheries and farms, typically yielding multiple recommendations. To ensure we best utilize our resources and focus on the most relevant species we prioritize seafood for assessment based on the following three filters:

- Importance to the U.S. market (i.e. shrimp would score higher than whelks)
- Importance to our business partners
- Importance to our non-governmental organization (NGO) partners

Therefore, there are instances when Seafood Watch is unable to assess a fishery or aquaculture operation because it does not meet the criteria of our annual research priorities.

The External Assessment Program (EAP) however enables third parties to utilize the Seafood Watch Criteria, Methodology, Research Process & Protocols, and approved trained contractors to assess fisheries or aquaculture operations of interest that have not, or will not, be assessed by Seafood Watch.

In short, the EAP has been developed to make it easier for companies to fulfill their commitments by assessing more fisheries and aquaculture operations over a shorter time frame than would have been possible by the capacity of the current Seafood Watch program and our NGO colleagues.

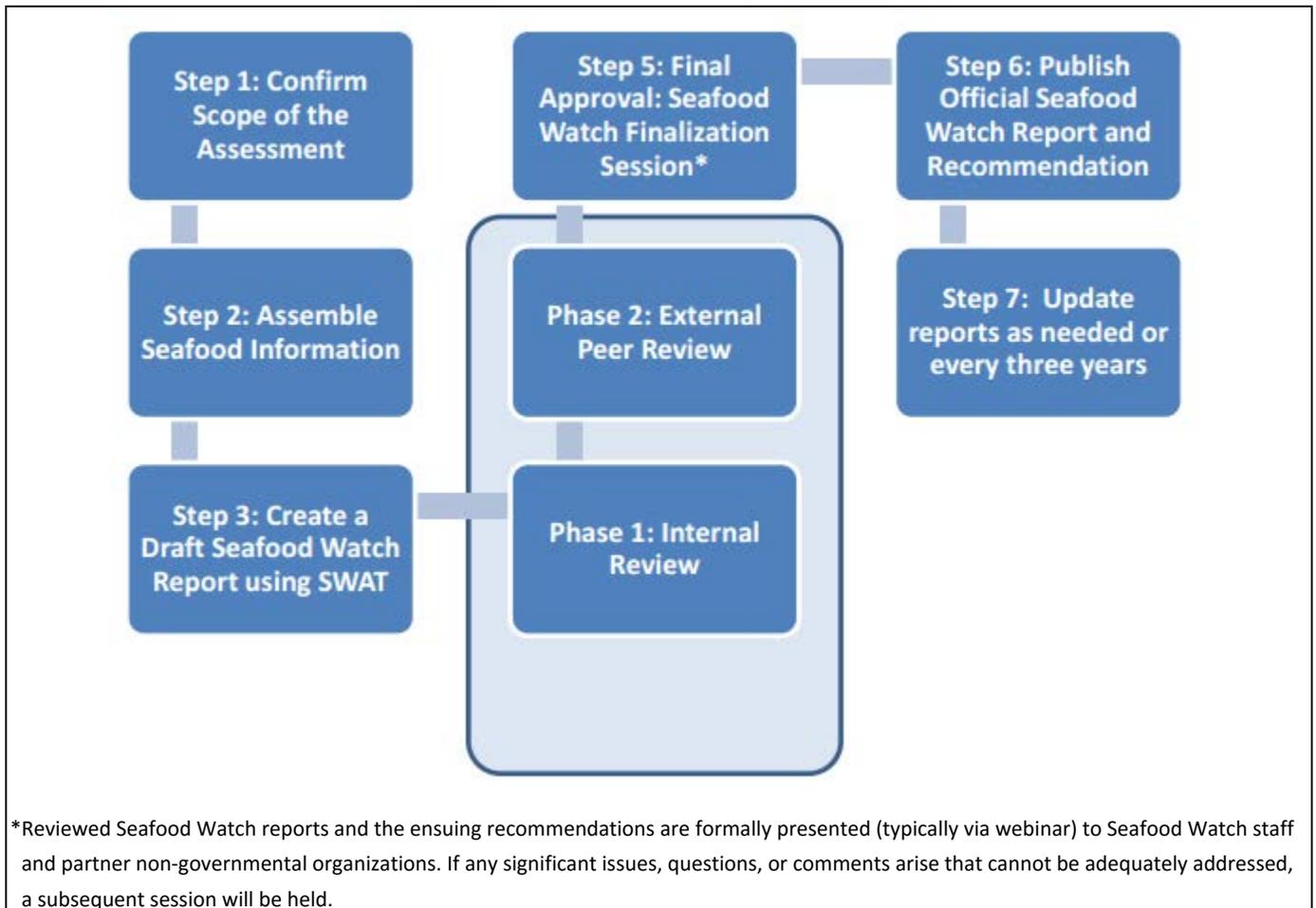
¹ http://www.fishwatch.gov/farmed_seafood/outside_the_us.htm

² FAO. The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2012 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2727e/i2727e00.htm>

2. How would the External Assessment Program work?

Currently Seafood Watch assesses fisheries or aquaculture operations using a standardized research process that results in a comprehensive, fully referenced, peer reviewed Seafood Watch report. The process is summarized in Figure 1 below and further details can also be found in our [Developing Seafood Recommendations](#) paper.

Figure 1: Seafood Watch Assessment Process



In the External Assessment Program, Seafood Watch is partially withdrawn from Steps 1-4. These steps are instead completed by an external analyst and reviewer who has been pre-approved and trained by Seafood Watch. Section 3 outlines the roles & responsibilities of each party.

2.1 Ensuring Rigor

Seafood Watch reports are highly regarded for their accuracy, depth and rigor. We utilize the following factors to assure the robust nature of the seafood reports and recommendations that are generated using the EAP:

- **Mandatory training of the analyst and reviewers.** Seafood Watch will require that all analysts and reviewers have successfully completed our training program on the use of our criteria, scoring methodology and research process & protocols. To become a reviewer you must have authored at least three Seafood Watch reports.
- **Mandatory use of the Seafood Watch Assessment Tool (SWAT).** All reports produced through the EAP will need to be completed and reviewed using the Seafood Watch Assessment Tool (SWAT). This is an online platform where Seafood Watch assessments are conducted. The SWAT provides for increased stakeholder engagement, streamlining of the report process, increased data and scoring consistency between reports, and enhanced transparency of scores and their justification.
- **External Peer Review.** Peer review is essential to ensure scientifically robust reports based on appropriate interpretation of the most up-to-date data and information available for the species in question. Seafood Watch reports must be peer reviewed by at least three scientists with expertise in the report's content. These experts are drawn from government, academia, the conservation community, and the seafood industry.

3. Roles & Responsibilities

The roles & responsibilities of the four parties to each EAP are shown below. Further details on the Seafood Watch assessment criteria and our process and methodology can be found on the [Our Standards](https://seafoodwatch.org) of seafoodwatch.org.

The subsequent graphics use the following key:

Assessment Seeking Organization (ASO)

The proposer of the assessment. An ASO can be the producer, a component of the supply chain, a fishery manager or an NGO using the Seafood Watch recommendations in advising consumers/businesses.

Seafood Watch

Seafood Watch administers the project contracts, collects project fees and distributes payment, provides status updates to the ASO, coordinates the Finalization and Education session, and manages final editing and posting of the completed assessment on the various Seafood Watch platforms.

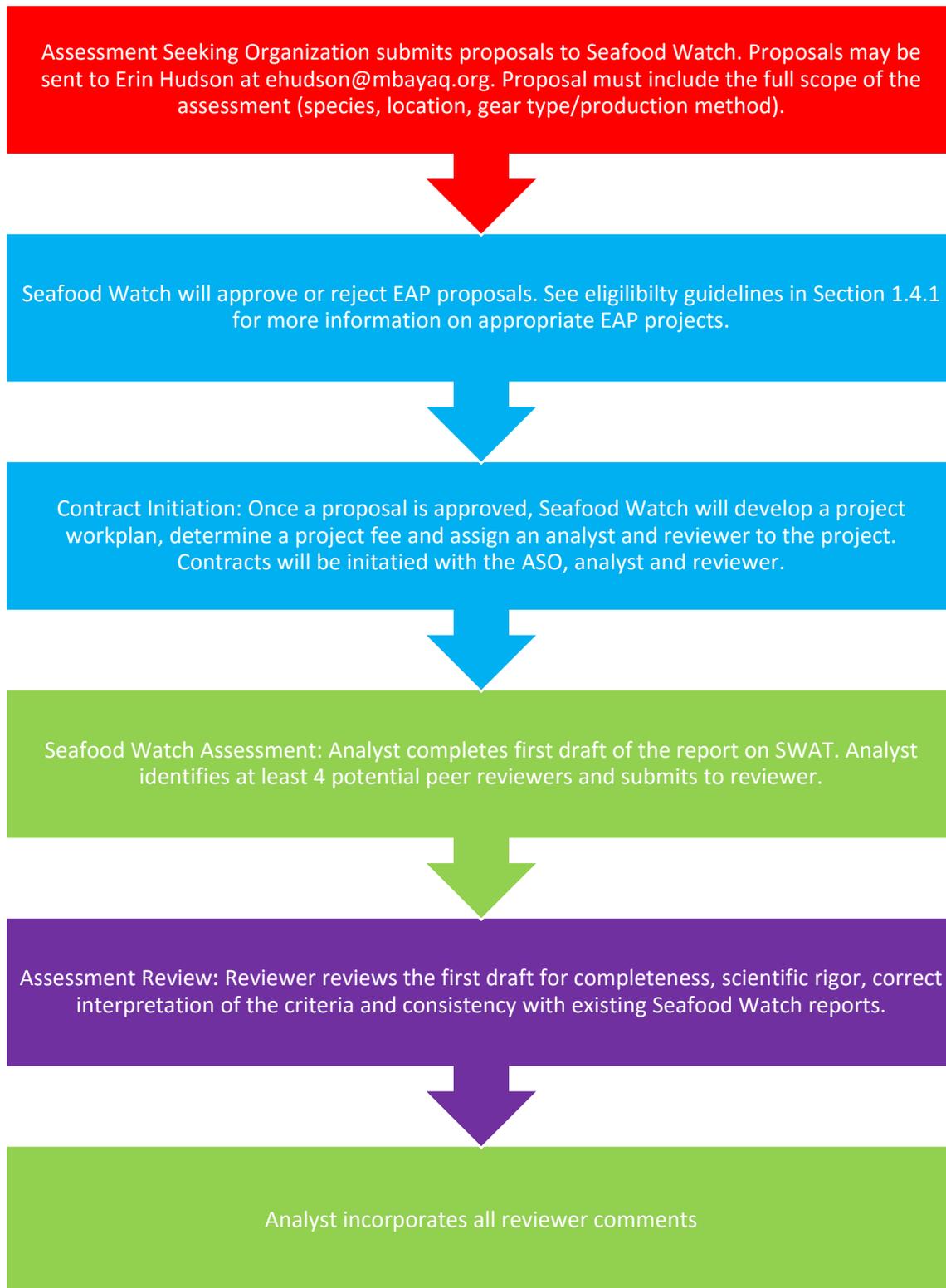
Reviewer

The reviewer administers the development of the report and oversees the review, including external peer review. The reviewer is responsible for ensuring project timelines are met and reporting regular project status updates to the Seafood Watch representative.

Analyst

The analyst drafts the Seafood Watch report and must be fully trained by Seafood Watch and a member of the 'EAP analyst Pool'. Analysts will be assigned to each project by Seafood Watch.

3.1 Assessment Initiation (Steps 1 through 3 in Figure 1)



3.2 Peer Review (Step 4 Phase 2 in Figure 1)



3.3 Completion of Report (Step 5 & 6 in Figure 1)

Analyst presents results at the Finalization & Education Session. Reviewer must also participate and provide any clarification on scoring.



Reviewer will coordinate any edits/corrections arising from the Finalization & Education Session and provide detailed guidance to the analyst on how to address the comments.



Analyst incorporates Finalization & Education Session comments.



Seafood Watch will administer copy-editing, and publish the final report and resulting seafood recommendation(s) at seafoodwatch.org. Publication may take up to 6 weeks following the Finalization and Education session date.

4. FAQs

4.1 External Assessment Program Project Eligibility

Can the EAP be used for wild fisheries *and* aquaculture reports?

Yes

Can an external assessment be conducted on seafood already assessed by Seafood Watch?

If a fishery or aquaculture operation has already been assessed or is in the process of being assessed by Seafood Watch it cannot be re-assessed by the External Assessment Program. Instead, we would encourage interested parties to submit any new information for consideration via the Seafood Watch Assessment Tool. A list of existing and in-progress reports can be found using the search function here: <http://swat.seafoodwatch.org/>

Can an external assessment be conducted on a subset of a fishery or aquaculture operation already or currently being assessed by Seafood Watch?

Yes, EAP may be used for a defined unassessed subset of an existing Seafood Watch assessment.

If a particular subset that falls outside of the scope of a Seafood Watch assessment currently underway, please contact Erin Hudson at ehudson@mbayaq.org to discuss further. In this situation, the interested party may be able to provide funding to expand the scope of the ongoing assessment. Due to data inconsistency issues, a separate/parallel EAP of a subset cannot be carried out while an internal Seafood Watch assessment of the larger fishery or aquaculture operation is underway. Please use the search function at <http://swat.seafoodwatch.org/> to identify in-progress Seafood Watch reports.

Can external assessment be conducted on an eco-certified fishery or aquaculture operation?

In 2013, Seafood Watch completed a comprehensive study of the most recognized eco-certification programs to determine which of these have standards equivalent—at a minimum—to our yellow, or "Good Alternative" rating.

These standards are recognized on the seafoodwatch.org website and we recommend them to seafood buyers. It is important to Seafood Watch to eliminate redundancies in the broader sustainable seafood movement by not researching fisheries and aquaculture operations that have already undergone assessment against a robust standard. In order to best utilize our limited analyst and reviewer pool, fisheries and farms certified by these standards are not eligible for EAP. If a certification for a fishery or farm expires or is discontinued, there would be a two year waiting period before a previously certified fishery or farm would be eligible for EAP.

Farms and fisheries certified by a standard not listed above may be eligible for EAP, provided they meet the other eligibility guidelines listed in section 4.1.

Can external assessment be conducted on any unassessed seafood?

EAP will allow the ASO to assess a variety of fisheries and aquaculture operations that would not otherwise be assessed by the Seafood Watch program, however, EAP is not appropriate for all assessments. Highly complex or controversial fisheries or aquaculture operations are not candidates for the EAP. Reports of this nature would likely be done by Seafood Watch analysts.

How do I submit a project for consideration?

All project submissions should be sent to Erin Hudson at ehudson@mbayaq.org. The selection is on a *first-come, first-serve* basis provided the scope of the assessment is appropriate for EAP. If the total number of EAP applicants exceeds our EAP project capacity, preference will be given to assessments that are most relevant to the North American market.

Is the External Assessment Program meant to be a global program? Will it apply to fisheries and farms outside North America?

Yes, given that more than 90% of our seafood is imported, many of the fisheries and aquaculture operations that we already assess are from sources outside of North America.

Can one of my competitors assess me?

Only if you wish it. All EAP aquaculture reports must have the full approval of the farm(s) being assessed.

4.2 External Assessment Program Process

How much will an External Assessment cost?

The cost of an external assessment varies greatly based on the scope of the fishery or farm being assessed and the level of expertise of the contractors being hired. Actual project fees will be determined by Seafood Watch. Box 1 offers an *estimate* of project fees. Project fees must be paid in full by the ASO at the start of the project. The project funds will be held by Seafood Watch and distributed in three payments to the analyst and reviewer following the successful completion of each deliverable.

How much does Seafood Watch receive from each EAP?

Seafood Watch collects an administration fee of \$800 per assessment. These expenses include report copy-editing, administration and attendance at the Finalization & Education Session and maintenance of the assessment criteria and tools.

What if the Seafood Reports generated by the External Assessment process don't pass through Step 5: Finalization and Education session?

As with any Seafood Report, regardless of whether it was drafted by Seafood Watch staff or an external party, any concerns raised during the Finalization and Education session must be addressed before continuing to the next step (i.e. publication). Examples of such issues would be inaccurate or incomplete data provided in the report or an inaccurate interpretation of the Seafood Watch criteria. These should be picked up at the review stage, however, if not, the report may be sent back to the analyst to address remaining issues. The report will go through a subsequent Finalization and Education session (until the report successfully passes).

Who is responsible for updating the Seafood Reports conducted via the External Assessment process?

Every Seafood Report, regardless of whether it was drafted by Seafood Watch staff or an external party, is required to have an expiration date. This date is influenced by factors unique to the fisheries or aquaculture operations in question such as frequency of updates to stock assessments. By default, Seafood Watch instills a three year maximum expiration date.

The ASO responsible for an existing seafood report must submit a request to update the report one year in advance of the report's expiration date if they wish to maintain the recommendation. If not updated, the report and all recommendations contained within will be retired by Seafood Watch.

In the event that data within an assessment changes prior to the expiration date or the validity of the assessment comes into question, Seafood Watch will contact the ASO regarding interest in an update. If the ASO is not interested or able to conduct an update in a timely manner, Seafood Watch reserves the right to retire the assessment prior to the expiration date.

Can I terminate an in-process assessment? What if the assessment comes out as a Seafood Watch Avoid?

Once a contract is in place, the ASO may not terminate an ongoing assessment. Seafood Watch will publish the final assessment regardless of outcome (Best Choice, Good Alternative, or Avoid). Seafood Watch does not guarantee a particular outcome in the assessment and we encourage interested parties to review the Seafood Watch criteria and information assessed in our reports on the [Our Standards](#) of seafoodwatch.org prior to submitting a project proposal.

4.3 External Assessment Program Final Product

Who owns the final assessment?

All work developed as part of the External Assessment Program, including, but not limited to, analyses, reviews, reports, conservation notes, and more generally all photographs, artwork, music, prose, poetry, software, mobile applications, HTML files, Java files, graphics files, animation files, data files, technology, scripts, programs, both in object code and source code form, designs, drawings, experimental protocols, and tests is either the direct property of Monterey Bay Aquarium or has been commissioned by the Aquarium as “work made for hire”. All EAP materials are the exclusive property of Monterey Bay Aquarium and may not be used without the express written consent of Seafood Watch. Seafood Watch will also have sole discretion over language used in other materials associated with the assessment, such as the summary on seafoodwatch.org, the Seafood Watch app, and the Seafood Watch Pocket Guide.

Can I use the final assessment and recommendations on my website/product/marketing materials?

You will be able to use certain language and Marks on printed and digital media once the assessment is complete, however, any language must be approved in writing by Seafood Watch prior to publication. This language must not imply that any products or business are endorsed or sponsored by Seafood Watch. More information and brand guidelines are included in the External Assessment agreement.