



aquafides

Proprietary standard

for water footprint certification

AQF-OP — Material for Tour Operators

AQUAFIDES

TOUR OPERATOR BRIEF

How the Aquafides v3.2 water certification solves the new regulatory and market demands of European hotel procurement

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Cover letter

Dear Head of Hotel Procurement / Commercial Director,

I am writing on behalf of Aquafides — owner of the Aquafides Protocol v3.2 for water footprint certification — regarding an environmental matter that is currently at the forefront of the regulatory and market demands of European hotel procurement: water.

Aquafides is a proprietary standard that simultaneously integrates and verifies the water requirements of ISO 14046:2014, AWS Standard v2.0, ESRS E3 (CSRD), GRI 303 and CDP Water on a single file certified by an independent third party. It is specifically designed for hotels in catchments with seasonal water stress — a profile that covers much of the Mediterranean, the Canary Islands, the Balearics, the Côte d'Azur, southern Italy or Greece.

The reason I bring Aquafides to your attention is practical: the water footprint of your hotel catalogue is, alongside the carbon footprint, the most material environmental piece your organisation must report under CSRD, and the one you find most difficult to gather with verifiable and comparable hotel-by-hotel data. Aquafides solves exactly that problem at the source: at the hotels. Each certified hotel delivers a package of directly traceable and audited ESRS E3 datapoints, without your organisation having to audit hotel by hotel.

I attach to this letter three documents: this Brief (executive summary), a CSRD-specific technical Toolkit your Sustainability team can use as operational reference, and an editable model contract clause hotel — tour operator that your Hotel Procurement team can adapt to your tender documents.

I remain at your disposal for a meeting with your Sustainability/Compliance and Hotel Procurement teams, either in person at your offices or via videoconference, as convenient.

Sincerely,

Marco Antonio Oltra Cámara

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What is Aquafides in one page?

Aquafides is a proprietary water footprint certification standard and, simultaneously, a certifying body headquartered in Andorra with delegation in Spain. It was created to solve a problem that no other tourism certification solves well: water.

The best-known tourism certifications today (GSTC, Travelife, Green Key, Earth Check, Biosphere) are generalist; they cover a wide environmental, socioeconomic and management spectrum, and within that spectrum water is diluted into one or two lines. In catchments with seasonal water stress—which are most of the Mediterranean, the Canary Islands, the Balearics, the Côte d'Azur, southern Italy or Greece— that generic coverage is insufficient to answer the concrete question that is increasingly being asked: how much water does this hotel consume, how much does it reduce its impact, and has it been independently verified?

Aquafides was born for that gap. What it brings differently is:

- Specific water depth: it integrally applies the Water Footprint Network methodology and ISO 14046:2014, including catchment stress impact assessment (AWARE factor).
- Simultaneous coverage of relevant international standards: the same file covers ISO 14046, AWS Standard v2.0, ESR5 E3 (CSRD), GRI 303 and CDP Water.
- Mandatory separation between Advisor and Auditor (Annex IV of the Protocol): the person who helps implement the system at the hotel cannot be the same one who later audits and certifies. This shields the certificate's credibility before external stakeholders.
- Living water management system (not a static label): the hotel is left with a multi-year Water Footprint Reduction Plan, operational sub-metering, monthly KPI dashboard and annual Management review. It is continuous-improvement certification, not a still-photo.
- Differentiated typologies for hotels, supply chains and public administrations: the Protocol distinguishes Productive Systems (SP), Supply Chains (CS) and Public Administrations (AP) with specific documentary catalogues and requirements for each profile.
- Public page per facility with verification QR: aquafides.org/certificados/«hotel» allows the tour operator and the final client to verify the authenticity of the certificate in one click.

Guiding motto

Aquafides.org sells measurable and certifiable reduction of water impact. What is certified is not the intent, it is the verified result year after year.

Why Aquafides matters specifically to your organisation

Three material reasons, ordered by urgency:

Reason 1 — CSRD ESRS E3 compliance solved at source

Your organisation is obliged to report under CSRD (if you belong to the first wave, from financial year 2024; second wave, from 2025; the rest, in stages until 2028). The technical standard applicable to water, ESRS E3, requires reporting consumption and discharge by catchment, identifying water-stressed areas, declaring reduction policies and actions, and describing material water risks and opportunities.

The most complicated piece for a European tour operator is not reporting its own (its offices) but the indirect footprint of its hotel chain, which is the most material. The existing options to solve it are basically three: requesting the data from each hotel (unfeasible at the scale of hundreds or thousands of hotels); estimating with generic sector factors (vulnerable before auditor); or requiring third-party certification. Aquafides is the third-party option that produces comparable, verifiable data mapped directly with the ESRS E3 datapoints your annual report must contain.

Reason 2 — Differentiation before the final client, who is asking more and more

The European final client of the sun-and-beach segment increasingly asks about water at destination. Social media show images of low reservoirs in Mallorca, irrigation restrictions in Marbella, questioned hotels on the Costa Brava. Social sensitivity about water in tourist destinations grows every year and is one of the few reputational vectors where the tour operator still does not have a comfortable answer.

Having hotels in your catalogue that show an Aquafides certificate verifiable with a public QR is a demonstrable commercial differential. It allows concrete answers to the final client's questions and to media enquiries. And it allows, in your own communication, presenting yourself as a tour operator that does measure and verify its hotel water impact, not only that of its own office.

Reason 3 — Transmission mechanism, without auditing hotel by hotel

Aquafides does not oblige you to audit the hotels yourself. It is a coverage standard: an Aquafides-certified hotel delivers, in a single package, its technical report, its Water Footprint Reduction Plan, its public disclosure and its verifiable web profile. Your work is reduced to incorporating Aquafides as a positive evaluation criterion (in a first phase) or eligibility (in a second phase) in your hotel procurement tenders, and to collecting the annual certificates the hotels have already produced.

That is: you do not bear the cost of auditing hotel by hotel; the cost is borne by the hotel, which in exchange obtains positioning and operational improvement. And you obtain a verifiable ESG information layer at no additional cost.

Architecture of the Aquafides file for a typical Mediterranean hotel

So that the previous discourse does not remain abstract, the deliverables produced by the Aquafides Protocol v3.2 when applied to a Mediterranean hotel with a profile typical of your catalogue are described below: 300-500 rooms, 4 stars, year-round operation with summer peaks, located in a sub-catchment with medium-high water stress. The figures presented are representative of the sector range; they are not attributed to a specific facility. The first Aquafides flagship case in this segment is in the process of closing and its public dissemination depends on the signing of the corresponding Publication Agreement with the client.

Typical modular configuration

Typology	Productive System (SP)
Reference catchment	Mediterranean sub-catchment with AWARE factor between 20 and 60 depending on location (Marina Baixa, Spanish Southeast, Balearics, Costa Brava, Levante).
Reference year	Most recent closed calendar year
Activated modules	[CORE] + [M-ISO14046] + [M-AWS] + [M-ESRS] + [M-GRI] + [M-CDP] — simultaneous coverage of the five international standards applicable to the hotel and its contracting tour operator.
Typical blue footprint range	180-450 L/stay-night depending on operational efficiency, age of the facility and type of services (all-inclusive regime, heated pools, gardens, in-house or external laundry).
Typical quantitative commitments to 2030	20-30 % reduction in blue WF per stay-night; 15-25 % reduction in grey WF; complete sub-metering of main operational blocks; annual training of 100 % of staff.
Public verification	Web sheet with unique QR and verifiable identifier at aquafides.org/certificados/ «hotel».

Deliverables of the file to the hotel — and, by extension, to the tour operator

With the certification, the hotel has available and publishes:

- Water Footprint Technical Report v1.0 (green, blue, grey components, AWARE-weighted, ratios per functional unit, complete equivalences with each covered international standard).
- Executive Summary for Management with quantitative commitments.
- Water Footprint Reduction Plan v1.0 with operational measures, water MACC curve and 2026-2030 horizon.
- Annual public disclosure with main magnitudes.
- Public web sheet with verification QR.
- Complete Aquafides ↔ ESRS E3, GRI 303, SDG 6/12/13 mapping — all material ready for CSRD reporting of the contracting tour operator.

What your organisation obtains by contracting Aquafides-certified hotels

The annual quantitative information of each certified hotel is available to its contracting tour operators, at no additional cost and with independent verification. This allows you to:

- Integrate verified water data into your CSRD ESRS E3 reporting without generic estimates.
- Communicate to the final client the hotel's quantitative water commitment.
- Use the certificate as a differential argument in your digital catalogue.
- Demonstrate to investors the environmental traceability of your hotel chain.

How to incorporate Aquafides into your hotel procurement processes

The adoption of Aquafides by a tour operator can be gradual. The recommendation is a three-phase escalation of operator criterion adoption:

Phase 1 — Recognition (Year 1)

Aquafides is incorporated as a positive evaluation criterion in tender documents and hotel supplier evaluation rubrics. The certified hotel obtains additional points in the selection matrix. Not excluding. Message to the hotel: «we are interested in you getting certified».

Phase 2 — Preference (Year 2-3)

Aquafides is raised to a preferred criterion. Under equal conditions, the certified hotel has procurement priority. Contract renewals incorporate a model clause requesting the hotel's roadmap towards certification. Message: «we need you to get certified».

Phase 3 — Eligibility (Year 4+)

Aquafides becomes an eligibility criterion for certain segments (4-5* hotels, hotels in stressed catchments, hotels featured in premium catalogue). Message: «without certification, we do not contract».

Suggested model clause text (Phase 2-3)

«The supplying hotel commits to obtaining, within a maximum period of [12 / 24] months from the signing of this contract, the Aquafides Water Footprint certification (or equivalent certification recognised by the contractor), and to maintaining it valid throughout the contract duration. Non-compliance with this commitment may lead to contractual non-renewal.»

Frequently asked questions

How much does it cost a hotel to get certified in Aquafides?

It depends on size and activated modules. For a medium hotel (300-500 rooms) in its first certification with basic modules, the total investment (advisory + audit) is comparable to that of a standard ISO 14001, with the advantage that the file simultaneously covers five international standards. Aquafides applies penetration prices in 2026-2027 to accelerate sector adoption.

How long does the whole process take?

An average client closes the complete cycle in 12 to 16 weeks from the signing of the contract to the issue of the certificate. The technical visit and water inventory are closed in the first 4 to 6 weeks. The Technical Calculation Memorandum and the Reduction Plan are ready between weeks 8 and 10. The independent Aquafides audit and the issue of the certificate with public verification QR take place between weeks 12 and 16. Cases with very mature operational documentation may close in 10 weeks; cases with relevant documentary deviations may extend up to 20 weeks.

Is it compatible with other tourism certifications we already have?

Totally. Aquafides is specifically water-related and overlaps very little with generalist tourism certifications. It works as a deep complement on the water axis. Specific complementarities with GSTC, Travelife, Green Key, Earth Check and Biosphere are documented in the attached CSRD Toolkit.

What happens if a hotel already has ISO 14046 or AWS Standard?

Excellent starting point. Aquafides reuses all prior work. Certification is faster and less costly, because the calculation and procedures are largely already done. Aquafides adds the complete coverage of ESRS E3, GRI 303, CDP and the advisor-auditor separation.

What about small or family hotels?

The Protocol adapts to size and complexity. For hotels with fewer than 100 rooms there is a simplified variant with lower cost and same methodological rigour.

Does Aquafides exist in other hotel segments and geographies?

Yes. The Protocol applies to any productive system: urban, rural, coastal holiday, mountain hotels, integrated resorts, etc. Geographically, the offering covers Spain, Andorra, rest of EU, LatAm (Mexico line starting in 2027), and other Spanish-speaking geographies through local partners.

Who do we speak with at Aquafides?

With Marco Antonio Oltra Cámara, CEO of Aquafides, at marco@aquafides.org, or with the commercial team at operadores@aquafides.org.

Suggested next step

If the proposal fits your ESG agenda and your current regulatory demands, we suggest moving forward in this order:

1. Technical 45-60 minute meeting with your Sustainability/Compliance and Hotel Procurement teams. Marco Antonio Oltra (CEO Aquafides) can meet you in person or by videoconference, at your choice.
2. Access to the technical material of the Aquafides Protocol v3.2 — Public annexes downloadable at aquafides.org/protocolo (Methodology, Advisor-Auditor Separation, Typologies SP/CS/AP, Executive Summary, Regulatory Coverage).
3. Joint design of the Aquafides incorporation phase into your procurement tenders: evaluation / preferred / eligibility criterion.
4. Pilot programme with 3-5 European hotels contracted by your organisation willing to start the certification process in 2027 with Aquafides preferential conditions.

Contact:

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Aquafides is the piece that connects the tour operator's CSRD reporting, the hydrically verifiable catalogue and differentiation from the final client.

If the next two years are those of the consolidation of water as the central axis of European tourism ESG, today is the best moment to incorporate it into your criteria. We are at your disposal to accompany you.

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CONTACT

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