



Technical FAQs

Initial freshwater science-based targets for nature

DISCLAIMER: As SBTN develops its tools, methods, and guidance, the technical team is working to answer questions that arise. Some of these questions are answered, some of these questions are in the process of being answered, and some of these questions cannot be answered (because the question is currently out of scope, or because there is insufficient research or evidence to provide a confident answer). This is a living document – please expect questions and answers to be added over time. Check back regularly for updates.

If you do not find an answer to your question here, please send your question to corporate-engagement@sciencebasedtargetsnetwork.org.

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SBTN's 5-step framework for setting science-based targets for nature



W1. Why do the target-setting methodologies focus on individual company actions? Isn't collective action across basins required for target attainment?

SBTN recognizes the importance of collective action in achieving common goals, but our target-setting methodologies are focused on identifying individual actions, as those are the cornerstone to mobilizing broader action and holding individual stakeholders accountable for their own contributions and responsibilities. Hence, while the outcome of target-setting is individual targets, the resulting actions that companies take can both support and lead to collective action. We encourage companies to enter into dialogue with stakeholders, mobilize others to contribute to collective efforts, and maximize collective action wherever possible. The response options provided by SBTN will be practical and aligned with existing approaches, metrics, and indicators, facilitating collective action in basins where many companies are co-located. SBTN will provide additional guidance on response options and how to attribute credit or efforts, including through collective action, after Q1 2023, as part of guidance on Act and Track (Steps 4 and 5).

W2. Could SBTN explore a better approach than “equal contraction of efforts to allocation” for allocating responsibility?

The equal contraction of efforts approach to allocation is currently the only approach that is implementable due to technical limitations and data gaps. SBTN is aware of the shortcomings of this approach – in particular, the potential for perverse incentives and entrenching economic inequalities that may arise from it. We are busy identifying alternative allocation approaches *that can be implemented in a practical manner in the final version of the methodologies*. While we develop and enable the implementation of these alternative approaches to allocation, we must make use of the one approach that is readily available. While potentially suboptimal, equal contraction is a valid and generally used approach in target-setting, and its use can help early adopters set initial targets. We expect that as newer versions of the SBTN methodologies are published in the future and companies renew their targets, the immediate shortcomings of equal contraction will be overcome.

W3. Will SBTN include methodologies to assess downstream business activities?

Methodologies to assess the impact at downstream sites – which themselves are tools to identify what activities may fall within the organizational sphere of influence and responsibility in the downstream part of the value chain – are under development. Downstream impacts are thus not a part of the first release of science-based targets for nature in early 2023 for Assess and Prioritize (Steps 1 and 2), and can't be subject to target-setting (Step 3). We did pilot some of the steps with one company that included downstream considerations, such that learning from that pilot will be brought into the development of approaches to enable target-setting for downstream activities in future development.



W4. Could you make sure you allow for future reserves when developing the methodology around available capacity allocation?

This is a valid suggestion to be considered in future updates to the methodology. However, doing so in a manner that is equitable requires further discussion and consideration than is possible in current timeframes.

W5. How is freshwater biodiversity included in the Freshwater SBTs v1, 2023?

Biodiversity does not appear explicitly as part of target-setting (Step 3) methods, but it's embedded implicitly in parts of the methods. SBTN recognizes that biodiversity and nature are interlinked and may not even be distinguished in some contexts. Hence, all action on nature will effectively support biodiversity. Nevertheless, we are developing additional guidance for Prioritize (Step 2), by which freshwater biodiversity priority areas would receive a higher weight in the definition of the target boundary. We also point out that in target-setting (Step 3), the sub-step by which desired environmental conditions are set ("the threshold definition") considers biodiversity needs and issues. In particular, water quantity needs to account for the needs of species in terms of environmental flow requirements, and water quality thresholds for nutrients are set so as to avoid impacts on freshwater species and ecosystems.

W6. Could SBTN avoid the use of global models as they do not accurately represent local conditions?

SBTN has chosen to include two different approaches to target setting (i.e., using locally and globally developed models) in this methodology because they provide different advantages – namely, they require companies to set targets in more precise ways where local models are available and provide a back-up of global model application when a local model is unavailable. SBTN is currently assessing the robustness of the globally developed model approach and will consider additional measures to increase robustness or safeguards to apply this approach based on the results of that assessment.

W7. Could SBTN switch to the use of global models as the default approach?

While global models can support rapid assessments at large scales, there are limitations in their application (see Question W6) given the local nature of hydrological processes and associated variables that influence the timing and status of water availability and quality. Thus, the default, if available, are local models and thresholds.

W8. Can SBTN provide a database of existing local models that would be approved for use in setting freshwater SBTs?



Although this resource is not yet available, SBTN plans to develop a database to provide information on available models and thresholds that have been approved for use in setting freshwater SBTs.

W9. What if other companies in the same basin choose not to reduce their pressure?

The vision of SBTN is that SBTs will become best practices, such that a majority of companies will be adopting targets as a minimum level of effort in the future. Guidance for Act and Track (Steps 4 and 5) will allow companies to get credit for their individual efforts independently of the actions of others; these steps will also allow companies to pursue (and get credit for) collective action. Regardless, reluctance from others to participate should not hinder a company's ability and willingness to act.

W10. How do companies set SBTs for freshwater in transboundary water basins?

Companies will apply the same methods as they would in a non-transboundary basin. This is possible by using a transboundary model if using the locally developed approach and with the provided model in the globally developed approach.

W11. What happens if, during the stakeholder engagement process, stakeholders suggest focusing on other issues (e.g., pollutants of local concern, species or habitat restoration, or water access)?

This should not change the focus of the targets. The methods are designed to provide an indication of how to address two specific pressures (withdrawals and pollution). If the process concludes that these two pressures are not relevant, the company should provide sufficient justification for not setting targets for these pressures. They shouldn't replace these pressures with others, as withdrawals and pollution are the only pressures for which SBTN has methods and validation criteria in place. If other pressures are considered important, companies can take action to prevent, control, and manage them, but this will be outside the scope of the SBTs (SBTs for nature v1, 2023).