

DRAFT FRAMEWORK — proposed by analogy with BAP / HAP / SBP. Review categories, criteria and point values with the committee before publishing.

ECAAC PROGRAMS

Aquascaping Awards Program

Recognising vision, craft and patience underwater. The Aquascaping Awards Program (AAP) celebrates members who design, build and maintain outstanding planted and hardscape layouts. Through regular judged showcases and a season-long points ladder, the program encourages members to refine their technique, experiment with new styles, and share what they learn with the club.

I. PURPOSE

What the program is here to do

Our Aquascaping Awards Program is designed to:

- Encourage members of ECAAC to design, build, and maintain planted and hardscape aquariums to a high standard.
- Recognise the achievements of ECAAC members in aquascaping composition, plant health, and technical execution.
- Promote an interest in a wide range of aquascaping styles, from nano and Iwagumi to biotope and Dutch layouts.
- Encourage more members to be active participants in the society's showcases and meetings.
- Share knowledge of layout design, hardscape sourcing, and long-term tank maintenance.

Draft note: the numbered sections below (Eligibility, Qualified Entry, Lifetime Achievement) mirror the structure used in the club's Breeding and Horticulture Awards Programs, so members moving between programs find the same shape of rules. Point values and thresholds are placeholders for the committee to set.

II. ELIGIBILITY

Who and what qualifies

- Participation is open to ECAAC members in good standing. Points accrue only for entries submitted while the aquascaper is a member.
- The tank must be owned and maintained by the member, at the member's own premises. Tanks jointly maintained by more than one member are credited to one nominated entrant only.
- Layouts entered elsewhere (e.g. IAPLC, AGA, other national contests) may also be entered here, but points are awarded once per layout per contest cycle, not per external result.
- Purely artificial layouts (plastic plants, synthetic hardscape) do not qualify. Mixed layouts must be predominantly live planted or a recognised hardscape-only style (e.g. Iwagumi) to qualify.
- The program applies to entries submitted on or after the program launch date.

III. WHAT COUNTS AS A QUALIFIED ENTRY

Four conditions, all required

An entry qualifies for points only when all of the following are met:

1. The layout has been running, substantially in its entered form, for at least 60 days at the time of judging.
2. The tank is entered into one of the recognised categories listed below, selected by the member at submission.
3. Photographic evidence (minimum three angles, plus one full-tank shot) is provided, taken within 7 days of the judging date.
4. The entry is logged with the committee before the announced cut-off for that judging cycle, with judging carried out by at least two committee members or appointed judges.

IV. SUBMIT AN ENTRY

Log a layout for judging

Every entry is reviewed by the committee and scored against the judging criteria below before placings are announced at the next general meeting. Have your details ready before you start.

5. Fill in your tank details, category, and setup date in the online form. Use the Tank Categories list below to find the right one.
6. Attach 3–4 photos (three angles plus a full-tank shot) as evidence — email these separately to president@ecaac.co.za, referencing your name and category.
7. Submit the form. This opens a pre-filled email to the committee — just hit send from your email app.
8. The committee scores your entry against the judging criteria and announces placings at the next general meeting.

Submission fields collected online: full name, email address, layout title, tank category, date set up, tank dimensions/volume, key plants & hardscape used, and design notes.

V. LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Six levels, built on accumulated points

The Lifetime Achievement Award honours ongoing dedication to aquascaping. Members progress through six levels based on points earned from judged, qualified entries across judging cycles — placings earn points, and higher categories or repeat excellence move you up faster.

- Points are earned per judged entry, based on the placing achieved (see table below).
- Each layout may earn placement points once per judging cycle; a substantially unchanged layout re-entered in a later cycle earns points again only if meaningfully refreshed (committee's discretion).
- Certificates and/or plaques will be awarded to aquascapers in each category.
- Attainment of any level will be recognised at the next general meeting after official verification.
- Participants reaching Grand Master will be awarded a Lifetime membership in the ECAAC.
- Exceptional layouts (e.g. external contest recognition) may be considered by the ECAAC for special recognition.

Points per placing

Placing	Points
Honourable Mention	5 pts
Bronze	10 pts
Silver	15 pts
Gold	25 pts
Best in Show (bonus, on top of category placing)	+15 pts
People's Choice (bonus, on top of category placing)	+10 pts

Achievement levels

Achievement	Points Required	Award
Novice Aquascaper	25 pts	Certificate
Intermediate Aquascaper	50 pts	Certificate
Advanced Aquascaper	100 pts	Certificate
Senior Aquascaper	175 pts	Certificate
Master Aquascaper	300 pts	Certificate & Plaque
Grand Master Aquascaper	450 pts	Certificate, Plaque & Lifetime Membership

VI. TANK CATEGORIES

Find your category

Entries are judged against others in the same category, so layouts of similar scale and style are compared fairly.

Nano — under 20L

Compact layouts prized for making the most of very limited space — every stem and stone counts.

Standard Planted — 20–120L

The most common contest category — a balanced mix of hardscape and planting at typical living-room scale.

Natural Biotope — any size

Accurate replicas of a specific wild habitat, judged on authenticity of hardscape, planting, and livestock to the represented biome.

Iwagumi / Hardscape-only — any size

Minimalist stone or wood-led layouts judged primarily on composition, proportion, and restraint.

Dutch Style — any size

Dense, structured planting arranged in rows and groups (“Dutch streets”), judged on colour contrast and plant health.

Paludarium / Riparium — any size

Layouts combining aquatic and above-water elements — emersed planting, land sections, or a waterfall feature.

VII. JUDGING CRITERIA

How an entry is scored

Each entry is scored out of 100 across five criteria by at least two judges; scores are averaged to produce the final result.

Criterion	Max Points	What judges look for
Composition & Layout	25 pts	Use of space, focal points, sense of depth and perspective.
Plant Health & Coloration	25 pts	Growth condition, absence of algae or deficiency, colour vibrancy.
Hardscape Execution	20 pts	Quality and naturalism of stone/wood placement and integration with planting.
Technical Merit	15 pts	Water clarity, equipment integration, evidence of stable long-term maintenance.
Overall Impression	15 pts	Cohesion, originality, and the judges' overall response to the layout.

Scoresheets and judge comments are shared with the entrant after each cycle, so members can see where points were gained or lost — this is meant to be as useful for improving your next layout as it is for the placing itself.

Ready to show off your layout? Whether it's your first nano bowl or a biotope you've been refining for years, the committee wants to see it at the next judging cycle — submit through the Aquascaping Awards Program page at ecaac.co.za.