

Frequently Asked Questions on the MSC Standard for Sustainable Fishing



Content

1	General Overview on MSC Fishery.....	2
1.1	What does MSC stand for?	2
1.2	Why is this standard important?.....	2
1.3	What are the main objectives of the standard?	2
1.4	What benefits can certification offer?	2
1.5	Who else can benefit from certification?	2
1.6	What is the market situation of the MSC certified products?.....	2
1.7	What is the typical critique about the MSC fishery standard?	3
2	Application Procedure.....	3
2.1	What kind of fisheries can be certified?.....	3
2.2	Can cooperatives/small-scale fisheries also be certified?	3
2.3	What is assessed in a fishery?.....	3
2.4	Can part of the stock be certified?	3
2.5	Can the unit of certification be changed during the assessment?	4
3	Assessment Procedure	4
3.1	How is the assessment procedure organised?	4
3.2	What are the duties of the “fishery client”?.....	4
3.3	Who carries out the assessment?	4
3.4	Who are the stakeholders?	4
3.5	What is the purpose of the stakeholder consultation?.....	4
3.6	How much does the assessment cost?.....	4
3.7	How can costs be reduced?.....	4
3.8	How long does the assessment procedure take?	5
4	Certification, certificate and extensions.....	5
4.1	Who gives the certification decision?	5
4.2	For how long is the certificate valid for?.....	5
4.3	What happens after 5 years?	5
4.4	Can the “fishery client” apply different certification programmes at the same time?	5
4.5	How to use the MSC logo?	5
4.6	How do fisheries apply for assessment?.....	5

1 General Overview on MSC Fishery

1.1 What does MSC stand for?

MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) is an international non-profit organization which includes representatives from industry, environmental and scientific groups from different geographical regions. MSC has two inter-related standards, one is the MSC Environmental Standard for Sustainable Fishing (MSC Fishery) which is based on the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and other international conservation instruments. The second is the MSC Chain of Custody standard for seafood traceability (MSC CoC) makes sure that the MSC label is only displayed on seafood from a certified fishery.

1.2 Why is this standard important?

Healthy oceans are essential for marine ecosystems, livelihoods and economies all around the world. Unfortunately, today's oceans are suffering from depleted fish stocks, destructive fishing methods and lack of protected areas. In order to improve the current situations of our oceans, sustainable solutions and management strategies are crucial. One of the remedial sustainability strategies to improve this situation is to convert a high number of fisheries to use the practices outlined in the MSC Fishery standard. The MSC program seeks to protect the current fish stocks, safeguard livelihoods and deliver improvements in marine conservation worldwide.

1.3 What are the main objectives of the standard?

- the maintenance and re-establishment of healthy populations of target species
- the maintenance of the integrity of ecosystems
- the development and maintenance of effective fisheries
- management systems, taking into account all relevant biological, technical, economic, social, environmental and commercial aspects
- Enforcing the relevant local and national local laws and standards and international understandings and agreements

1.4 What benefits can certification offer?

- access to new markets
- price premium
- supporting responsible supply chains

- credible and internationally recognised sustainability claim
- good management
- confidence for the future businesses
- improved brand image and corporate reputation

1.5 Who else can benefit from certification?

Beside fisheries, many others can benefit from certification, such as;

Fisheries:

- The long term interests for people who are depending on fishing for food and livelihood as it is consistent with ecological sustainability

Entire industry:

- The fishing industry benefits as they depend on the abundance of fish stocks
- Fish processors, traders and retailers will in turn benefit from the assurance of continuity of future supply and hence sustainability of their own businesses

Consumers:

- The consumers can select fish products with the confidence that they originate from sustainable and well managed sources

1.6 What is the market situation of the MSC certified products?

There is an emerging supply deficit with great potentials. Sustainable seafood is a fast-growing market. Globally, retailers demand MSC-labelled seafood which is already supported by leading brands. Restaurants and foodservice companies are also active, and Already, in Europe there are various well developed markets which are characterised by consumers who are concerned about the sustainability of seafood. Nowadays, **Southern and Eastern European** markets are also starting to be receptive. The retail sectors of the **United States and Canada** have shown rapid growth for sustainable seafood products since 2005. For companies which are active in the **Asia-Pacific** market, uptake of MSC-labelled products has been already developed in **Japan, Australia and New Zealand** as well as **Hong Kong**. Many seafood processors in **China** are certified and these companies are linked to global supply chains. In **Africa**, MSC-labelled fish is available in South Africa only, with this market positioned to expand in the future.

At the moment, there are currently 35 certified fisheries in the MSC program and currently 79 fisheries undergoing assessment.

1.7 What is the typical critique about the MSC fishery standard?

Limited logo use

- ✓ Once certified companies want to use the MSC label, they must undergo a “Chain of Custody” certification that guarantees traceability of MSC-labelled seafood. This protects the whole food chain from fishery to consumer and proof that the MSC certified products are separated from non-certified products at every stage of the supply chain.

Not enough political support

- ✓ Some interested groups argued that there should be more political support if MSC is necessary. However many international organisations like WWF and FAO fully supported the MSC fishery standard. The FAO guidelines call for financial and technical support for poorer countries to help the fisheries to be certified. In this sense, many other organisations also have a strong affect on the political decisions worldwide and support on the MSC Fishery standard.

Less access to financial resources and technical capacities may constrain the developing countries` fishery assessments.

- ✓ MSC is aware of the barriers of developing countries fishery certification due to the lack of financial resources and data deficiency. Therefore, MSC recently initiated a pilot assessment project to small scale fisheries in developing countries.

A supposedly bias in favour of industrial fisheries and developed country fisheries

- ✓ Thus was never the intention of MSC. However the long and sometimes costly assessment procedure can make it difficult for small fisheries or companies based in developing countries to complete certification without an external support in funding.

Discussions on by-catch after the certification of Hoki fishery.

- ✓ A deep water MSC certified fishery in New Zealand as a consequence of bottom-trawl fishing techniques caught seal and seabird. Some stakeholders are concerned about the detrimental ecosystem impacts upon seabed communities. Thus, the certification of Hoki was suspended as conditional during the objections period. Beside these critiques, the success of the MSC objection procedure has become apparent and it has been claimed that MSC is one of the premium standards with a democratic and transparent objections procedure, which includes the public and stakeholders in the evaluation procedure.

2 Application Procedure

2.1 What kind of fisheries can be certified?

This programme can only be applied to wild capture fisheries it does not apply to aquaculture activities. The scope of MSC fishery relates to all fishery activities up to but not beyond the point at which the fish are landed. Fisheries worldwide are eligible to apply for this programme whatever their size and wherever their location is: i.e; single species or multi species, freshwater or marine fisheries, inshore or offshore fisheries.

2.2 Can cooperatives/small-scale fisheries also be certified?

Cooperatives or groups of small-scale fisheries can also apply for the MSC programme as a group certification. IMO has services for cooperatives and group certification. For further information, please contact IMO.

2.3 What is assessed in a fishery?

There are 4 reference points - the geographic area of fishing, the target fish stock, the fishing gear and the management system of the fishery. Together, these are known as the 'unit of certification' and are decided by the 'fishery client' at the beginning of the certification process. It could include an entire fishery or just certain vessels within a fishery, one species or several, and includes reference to the gear or fishing methods utilised within the fishery. Only fish from the named unit of certification will be assessed and clients will be carefully advised by IMO's experts. After determination of the units, every unit of certification of a fishery will be assessed according to the MSC Principles and their supportive Criteria which are at the centre of this standard.

The principles of the standard are:

- I. Maintenance of the target fish stock
- II. Maintenance of the ecosystem
- III. Effectiveness of the fishery management system.

2.4 Can part of the stock be certified?

Yes, however the health of the whole fish stock will be assessed all the same. The consequence of this is that, although a fishery may be taking only part of a stock or population, the assessment must always

consider the effects of all extractions from that stock, including those from fisheries that are not being considered for certification.

2.5 Can the unit of certification be changed during the assessment?

The unit of certification cannot be changed partway through the assessment without substantial delay. This means that a fishery cannot add species, gear, geographical area or the management system – it is vital to get this correct at the very beginning of the process.

3 Assessment Procedure

3.1 How is the assessment procedure organised?

The MSC Environmental Standard for Sustainable Fisheries is based on a multi-step assessment process. The assessment starts with Pre-assessment; the primary aim of the Pre-assessment is to carry out a brief analysis of the fishery against the MSC Principles and Criteria and to inform the operator on any identified potential barriers to certification as well as any actions required by the operator prior to the full-assessment. The full-assessment seeks whether the fishery meets the MSC standards or not. The process is led by the appointed IMO expert/assessment team. The full assessment involves consulting stakeholders, scoring the fishery, identifying ways that the fishery can strengthen its performance (if needed), peer review and making a final determination about whether the fishery meets the MSC standards. After the full assessment is successfully completed, the certification decision will be given.

3.2 What are the duties of the “fishery client”?

- Ensuring that the assessment team has unrestricted access to data and information about the fishery
- Disclosing all favourable and non-favourable information of relevance about the fishery to the assessment team
- Ensuring the certifier is aware of all relevant stakeholders

3.3 Who carries out the assessment?

IMO has a team with expertise in relevant disciplines for assessments. Stock assessment experts are subcontracted on requirement, IMO will also work with local people and local IMO offices.

3.4 Who are the stakeholders?

A stakeholder is any person, group or organization who;

- may affect a certification decision
- has an interest in or affected by the fishery being assessed
- has any relevant information relevant to the assessment of the fishery

A stakeholder may be a government agency, staff/client organization, non-governmental environmental/conservation organisations, industry groups, other fishing sectors and commercial/post harvest sector.

3.5 What is the purpose of the stakeholder consultation?

The goal is to gather information to conduct a robust assessment of the fishery. A good stakeholder consultation will result;

- to ensure a well-informed certification assessment
- to optimize the durability of certification decisions and the assessment process
- to build and strengthen credibility
- to strengthen overall stakeholder support for the MSC certification programme

For detailed information concerning the stakeholder consultation, please read the stakeholder consultation manual.

3.6 How much does the assessment cost?

The costs of the fishery assessments and certification are confidentially negotiated between the “fishery client” and IMO. The MSC does not receive any payment for assessments or certifications and is not involved in setting the costs associated with assessment. Anecdotal information indicates that the total cost for pre-and full assessment including certification can range from € 20,000 to € 500,000.

3.7 How can costs be reduced?

Preparation and negotiation are the keys to managing costs. Rephrase the assessment team (e.g. collecting information and reports, etc) will lead to lower costs.

IMO gives support to minimize the costs and offers combined assignments for different “fishery clients”. Also grants are available to help “fishery clients” cover these costs as well. For further information please contact to IMO-CH.

3.8 How long does the assessment procedure take?

The length of the process depends to some extent on the preparation as well as the nature and complexity of the fishery. A typical length to complete assessment is 12-14 months but in the past this has varied considerably between fisheries. Also, the degree of commitment and willingness to engage those who hold important information or data of the fishery is a crucial factor that influences the length of the process. Another process which varies the length of the assessment procedure is the objection to the certification. In case there are any objections to the certification then the objection procedure takes place.

4 Certification, certificate and extensions

4.1 Who gives the certification decision?

The certification decision making entity of IMO will decide whether the fishery shall gather the MSC certificate. Any comments or objections made by stakeholders may affect the decision of the decision making entity of IMO. For detailed information on the objection procedure, please ask for the standard procedure manual from IMO-CH.

4.2 For how long is the certificate valid for?

The fishery is certified for a maximum period of 5 years. IMO will carry out surveillance visits annually over this 5 year period. IMO also has the right to conduct unannounced audits at any time or schedule more frequent audits if circumstances indicate the need. Each audit will examine any significant changes that might have occurred either in the physical environment or in the management of the fishery. Each audit will also examine whether the certified fishery is still satisfactorily addressing any certification conditions.

4.3 What happens after 5 years?

After the 5 year period the fishery can apply for a re-certification. In that case full assessment will be conducted and the certification procedure will be undergone as previously explained.

4.4 Can the “fishery client” apply different certification programmes at the same time?

Yes, interested fishery will be informed about other certification programmes as well. If applicable, to make the assessment and audits

in one combined process would reduce the costs and the amount of work.

For further information of other certification programmes, please contact IMO-CH.

4.5 How to use the MSC logo?

Only the fishery, fish stock or particular gears/fishing methods identified in the unit of certification at the beginning of the assessment process can be certified and are therefore eligible to carry the MSC eco-label in the marketplace.

4.6 How do fisheries apply for assessment?

The first step is to contact the IMO-CH office. For further information, specific questions or advertising materials please contact Asli Gargili K hl msc@imo.ch at IMO-CH.

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