

# Stakeholder's Guide to the Marine Stewardship Council

2011



- *Are you affected by, or interested in, a decision about a particular fishery's assessment for MSC certification?*
- *Do you have an interest in resources potentially affected by a fishery that is being considered for MSC certification?*
- *Do you have information relevant to a fishery's assessment for MSC certification?*

## Are you a stakeholder?

If your answer to any of the questions above is 'yes', you should consider yourself a stakeholder in that fishery and in the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). This guide will help you understand how you can get involved in a fishery's assessment process for MSC certification. The corresponding [Template for Stakeholder Input](#) provides a series of forms to assist you in contributing relevant information to the certifier at each appropriate stage in the assessment process.

Taking part in this participatory process helps contribute to identifying and rewarding well managed and sustainable fisheries, and so improving the health of the world's oceans. Your participation also ensures that the MSC assessment process is thorough, robust and representative.

## MSC Vision & Mission

Our vision is of the world's oceans teeming with life and seafood supplies safeguarded for this and future generations. To achieve this, our mission is to use our ecolabel and fishery certification program to contribute to the health of the world's oceans by recognising and rewarding sustainable fishing practices, influencing the choices people make when buying seafood, and working with our partners to transform the seafood market to a sustainable basis.

## MSC Focus

We collaborate with fishers, retailers, processors, consumers and others to drive change forward; we never compromise on the environmental standard we set or on our independence; and we continue to lead the world in wild-capture fishery certification with the most trusted, recognised and credible seafood ecolabel.



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# Your involvement is crucial

As a stakeholder in a fishery, you are an important source of information needed to conduct a thorough assessment of that fishery. Whether you are a scientist, a fishery manager, a seafood processor, a government representative, a community member, a conservationist or other stakeholder with an interest in the fishery assessment outcome, your information contributes to a robust assessment of a fishery in relation to the MSC standard.

## Certifiers must consider and respond to stakeholder input

The input that stakeholders provide during a fishery's assessment is key to ensuring a thorough assessment and a credible outcome. For this reason, certifiers are required to carefully consider all comments received, and justify and document their responses. You can be assured that the assessment team will consider your input thoroughly and their treatment of the issues you raise will be dealt with transparently in the assessment's documentation.

### Your input helps to ensure that:

- the assessment of the fishery is well-informed and comprehensive
- the outcome of the assessment is consistent with the rigorous MSC standard
- the issues important to you or your organisation are taken into consideration in the assessment.



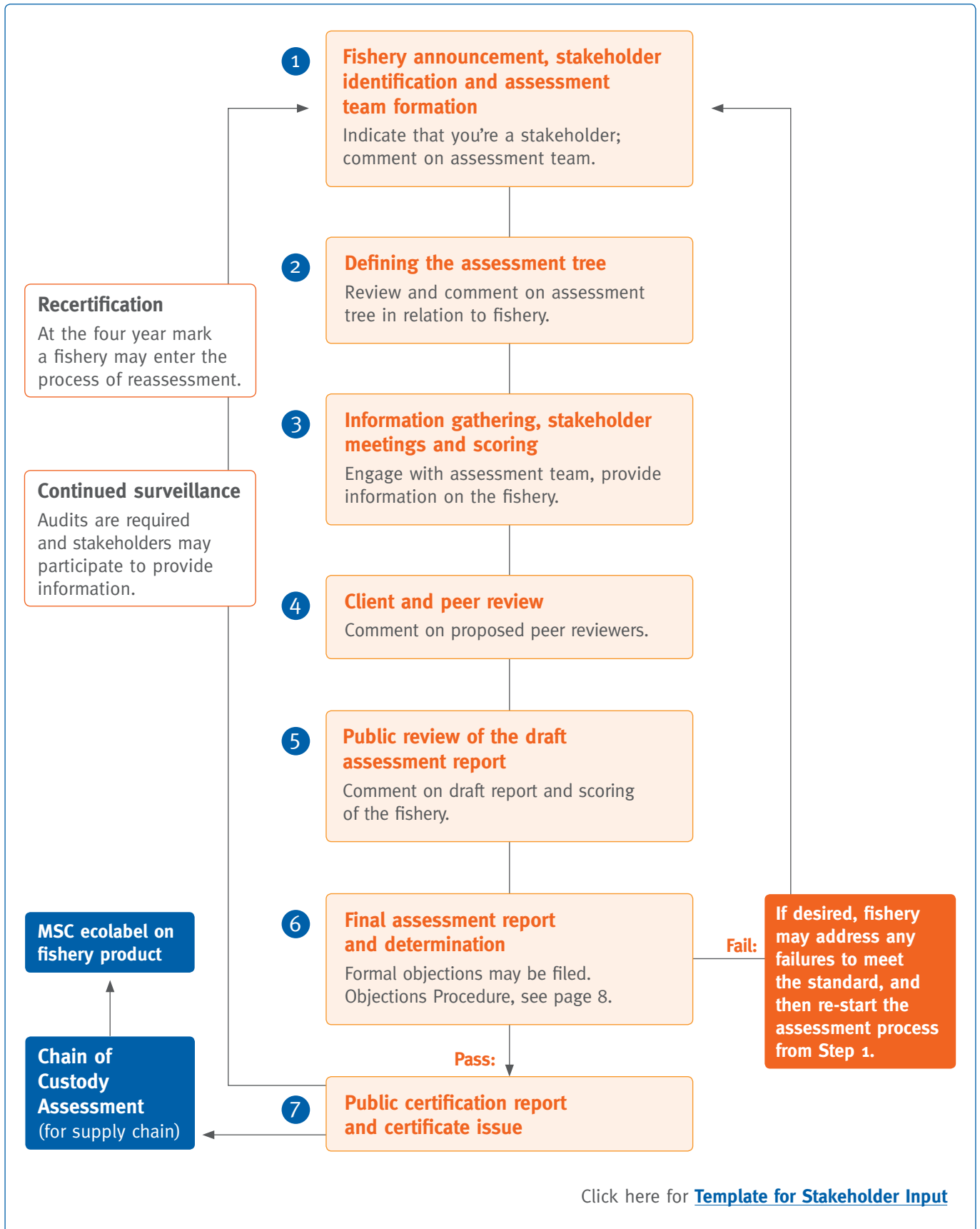
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## MSC vocabulary

<b>Action Plan</b>	The set of changes/improvements the client fishery agrees to undertake in order to fulfil any conditions of certification.
<b>Assessment</b>	A seven-step process to determine whether a fishery meets the MSC standard.
<b>Assessment team</b>	Qualified independent experts who are appointed by a certifier to assess a fishery.
<b>Assessment tree</b>	A framework used to assess a fishery. The MSC's default assessment tree has 31 performance indicators with scoring guides for each, to measure performance against MSC's Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing.
<b>Certifier</b>	An independent organisation accredited to conduct MSC fishery assessments.
<b>Client</b>	The legal entity applying for the assessment, usually representing the fishery.
<b>Condition</b>	A requirement of certification placed on a fishery for specific performance indicators where an 80 score is not achieved at the time of certification. When a condition is fulfilled, it means the fishery is performing at the 80 level or above.
<b>MSC standard</b>	The MSC, the Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing, represent the standard that a fishery must meet to become certified. Only seafood from a fishery that meets the standard can carry the blue MSC ecolabel.
<b>MSC Certification Requirements</b>	The <i>MSC Certification Requirements</i> sets out how accredited certifiers must apply the MSC standard for sustainable fishing when assessing fisheries.
<b>Performance Indicators</b>	The specific sustainability measures against which a fishery is evaluated, and scores are assigned. The default assessment tree has 31 performance indicators spread across MSC's three Principles.
<b>Risk Based Framework (RBF)</b>	An alternative scoring methodology for use in data-limited situations to evaluate certain specific performance indicators.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	An individual, group or organisation that has an interest in, or could be affected by, the assessment or certification of a fishery.

# MSC fishery assessment process

## Stages of the MSC fishery assessment process and prescribed opportunities for stakeholder engagement



## Steps of the assessment process



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*There are various stages of the fishery assessment process, and stakeholder input is invited at most of them. The assessment team can give the best possible consideration to your input when you get involved early in the process.*

### Participate in a fishery assessment

The MSC has developed a template or framework to guide stakeholder submissions into the assessment process. This template is made available by certifiers to all identified stakeholders, at any point in which they enter the process.

It is designed to help you target your efforts and input in a way that is most relevant to the process, and to ensure that your comments are considered in the process.

The stages of the assessment, and the points when you can provide input, are:

#### 1 Fishery announcement, stakeholder identification and assessment team formation

The first opportunity to indicate that you are a stakeholder, to identify other stakeholders, and comment on the proposed assessment team.

You may use sections 1 and 2 of the [Template for Stakeholder Input](#)

If you have an interest in a fishery that is entering assessment or in the wider impacts of that fishery, this is your first chance to indicate that you are a stakeholder or to identify other key stakeholders. As an identified stakeholder, the certifier is required to make sure that you are fully aware of each step of the assessment process and your opportunities to participate.

Certifiers are required to actively seek to identify all potential stakeholders in a fishery. However, if you would like to be informed by the MSC as new fisheries enter assessment so that you can identify yourself as a stakeholder, please see the 'Find out about fishery assessments' section of this guide (see page 10).

The assessment team is the group of independent experts that will evaluate the fishery against the MSC environmental standard for sustainable fishing. A 10-day consultation period will follow the announcement of the experts proposed by the certifier during which you will be invited to comment on whether you think the individuals chosen to assess the fishery have the appropriate experience and expertise to conduct the assessment, or to propose others.

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## Steps of the assessment process *continued*

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### Defining the assessment tree

Opportunity to review and comment on the assessment tree in relation to fishery.

You may use section 3 of the [Template for Stakeholder Input](#)

The assessment team will use an assessment tree to measure the fishery against the MSC's environmental standard for sustainable fishing. The assessment tree specifies 'performance indicators', which define in detail the specific areas of the fishery that will be assessed, and 'scoring guideposts', which show the performance levels that the fishery must meet in order to qualify for MSC certification.

Most assessment teams utilise a default assessment tree with pre-defined performance indicators and scoring guideposts. This default assessment tree is designed to be suitable for the majority of fisheries and to make the scoring process more consistent, transparent and faster, with no loss to the quality of the assessment.

However, given the great variation between fisheries around the world, the assessment team has to review the default assessment tree to ensure that it will fully provide for the assessment of the fishery. If the fishery has certain special characteristics that cannot be scored using the default tree, the team must propose some revisions to allow for these characteristics.

Additionally, MSC has created the Risk Based Framework (RBF) as an alternative scoring methodology to use for certain performance indicators in data-limited situations. If a certifier proposes to use the RBF, they must announce this as they would any other proposed revisions to the default tree.

Once the certifier and the assessment team have defined the assessment tree for the fishery, the tree is open for public review and comment during a 30-day consultation period. During this period, stakeholders may review the proposed assessment tree and provide comments on it to the certifier.

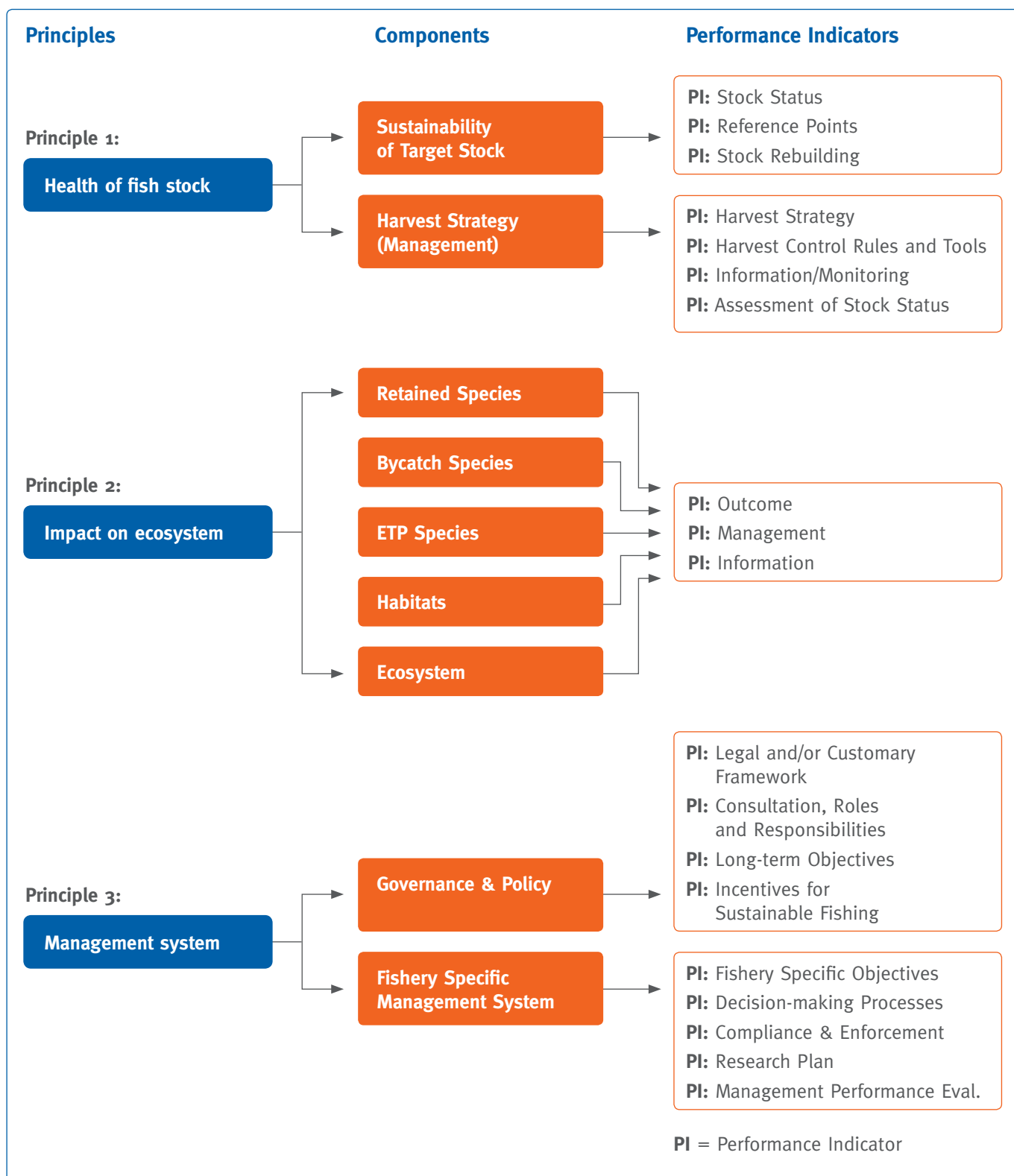
This is an important stage in the process, as later in the assessment, when the certifier reports on the performance of the fishery, it will be on the basis of the performance indicators and scoring guideposts in the agreed tree. If you have not looked at these carefully, it will be difficult to disagree later in the process with the basis for scoring.

## Steps of the assessment process *continued*

### The assessment tree for scoring fisheries

This diagram illustrates the component groupings (orange boxes) and default performance indicators (white boxes) that were established for scoring fisheries against the MSC Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing.

Get more information about the MSC certification requirements at [www.msc.org/documents/scheme-documents/msc-scheme-requirements](http://www.msc.org/documents/scheme-documents/msc-scheme-requirements)



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## Steps of the assessment process *continued*

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**3 Information gathering, stakeholder meetings and scoring**

Opportunity to engage with and provide information to the assessment team.

You may use section 4 of the [Template for Stakeholder Input](#)

In this step, the assessment team analyses all relevant information (including technical papers, reports and other direct and indirect sources). The certifier generally holds a site visit at this time, where they visit the fishery at a defined time and location in order to hold discussions with local stakeholders, as well as with the fishery managers and the fishery clients to ensure the team is aware of all potential information and issues.

This is your chance to meet the assessment team and ensure that they are aware of any information that you have about the fishery. You may also submit written information for consideration. The assessment team uses the evidence collected to score the fishery's performance against the assessment tree.

During this period of data collection and analysis, you can maximise the impact of your comments by organising your information and data submissions in line with the structure of the assessment tree. You might also make a case to the certifier about why you believe certain information translates into a specific score for each performance indicator in the assessment tree.

**4 Client and peer reviews**

Opportunity to comment on proposed peer reviewers.

You may use section 2 of the [Template for Stakeholder Input](#)

Next, the assessment team creates a draft report that assesses the fishery's performance against the MSC standard. This report will specifically evaluate the health of the target stock(s), the fishery's impact on the broader environment in which it operates, and the capacity of the management system to support the fishery's sustainability into the future. The report will contain the scores, rationale and proposed certification outcome as well as any proposed conditions of certification and associated action plan required to address lower scoring performance indicators over the period of certification.

The fishery client is given the opportunity to comment on this first draft. After that step, the report is revised and sent to two independent experts for peer review. Proposed peer reviewers' names will be published at this point and stakeholders given the opportunity to comment. This is your chance to indicate whether you believe the chosen individuals have the appropriate experience and expertise to complete the review or to suggest other potential reviewers to the certifier.

The peer reviewers provide a written review of the revised draft. These reviews and the certifier's response to them will be available for you to read in full in the Public Comment Draft Report (Step 5).

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## Steps of the assessment process *continued*

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**5 Public review of the draft assessment report**

Opportunity to comment on the draft report.

You may use section 5 of the [Template for Stakeholder Input](#)

Following the client and peer reviews and any modifications made as a result, the certifier then provides the ‘Public Comment Draft Report’ to the MSC. The MSC will then notify stakeholders by email and publish the report on the MSC website. The public consultation period allows at least 30 days for public comment on the assessment process and conclusions.

This is your chance to see the first full draft of the report. It presents how the fishery has been scored against the MSC standard and indicates the possible certification outcome. It also contains the peer-reviewer reports and certifier responses, as well as all written stakeholder comments received throughout the assessment process to date. In this report, certifiers must explicitly note and address relevant issues raised and comments submitted by stakeholders in the previous phases of the assessment process in a separate section of the Public Comment Draft Report.

Stakeholders now have an opportunity to carefully review the report and its conclusions. It is important to pay particular attention to scores and rationales given by the certifier for each performance indicator, and provide any further comment and information regarding the assessment.

**6 Final report and determination**

Opportunity to file a formal objection if appropriate.

After reviewing, considering and responding to all comments and information submitted during the previous phase, the certifier finalises the Draft Report and makes a determination as to whether the fishery should be certified as a sustainable and well managed fishery, as defined by the MSC standard. In the Final Report, the certifier will explicitly address all relevant issues raised and comments submitted on the Public Comment Draft Report by stakeholders in separate sections or appendices of the Final Report.

When the MSC has received the report, it emails all identified stakeholders and updates the MSC website with the report. This triggers a further period of 15 working days for parties to lodge an ‘intent to object’ to the decision.

If an objection is raised during the 15 days after the Final Report is published, the fishery proceeds into the MSC’s Objections Procedure. This provides a mechanism for any disagreement with the assessment of the fishery to be resolved by an Independent Adjudicator. Following appropriate consultations the Adjudicator will make a decision on whether the objection should be upheld.

It is important to note that an objector may be required to cover some of the costs of lodging an objection. For more about the Objections Procedure, please visit: [www.msc.org/get-certified/fisheries/assessment/objections](http://www.msc.org/get-certified/fisheries/assessment/objections)

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## Steps of the assessment process *continued*

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### Public certification report and certificate issue

This is the final step in the process. If no objections have been raised during the 15 working day period of 'intent to object', the certifier's determination is accepted. In the case of certification, the certifier will issue and publish a Public Certification Report, reflecting surveillance and any action plan commitments.

After this, the certifier sends a certificate to the fishery. The fishery is now certified for a period of five years, subject to surveillance audits.

### Raising a formal complaint

Certifiers are required to have procedures for dealing with any complaints throughout the process. You may lodge a complaint at any time if you believe the required process is not being followed. You should start by requesting the complaints policy from the certifier and following it as required. If this does not satisfy you, the next step is to contact Accreditation Services International ([www.accreditation-services.com](http://www.accreditation-services.com)), the organisation that oversees and accredits all MSC certifiers.

### Surveillance audits and recertification

Opportunity to provide information to the assessment team.

You may use section 6 of the [Template for Stakeholder Input](#)

The certifier is required to carry out audits over the five-year period of fishery certification. The certifier also has the right to conduct an unannounced audit at any time or to schedule more frequent audits if circumstances indicate the need.

Each surveillance 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 fishery is progressing on any action plan as defined in the Certification Report.

Failure to make adequate progress on an action plan can mean that the certifier has to suspend or withdraw the certificate.

Stakeholders who have previously identified themselves will be notified when the fishery is audited, and opportunities will be made available for them to provide comments or new information on the fishery during the audit. When each audit is complete, the certifier provides a copy of the audit report to the MSC to be published on the MSC website.

A recertification assessment typically begins about four years after the fishery's certification. The recertification assessment process follows the same steps as the fishery's original assessment process, and stakeholders can be involved at the same stages as outlined in this guide.

To stay informed of fishery audits and recertification assessments, please see the 'Find out about fishery assessments' section of this guide (see page 10).

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## Find out about fishery assessments

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*There are various ways that you can stay informed about fisheries within the MSC program.*

### Subscribe to RSS feeds on the MSC website

RSS feeds from the MSC website allow you to receive up-to-the-minute notifications about fisheries involved with the MSC and other MSC information. Subscribe to these RSS feeds to be notified of fisheries that enter assessment or fisheries that become certified, to track an individual fishery throughout its assessment, or to receive updates on MSC's Developing World Program. You can also sign up for an RSS feed of all MSC news releases. Visit [www.msc.org/newsroom/rss-feeds-to-subscribe](http://www.msc.org/newsroom/rss-feeds-to-subscribe).

### Be informed of all fishery assessments

To receive email notifications about the progress of all fisheries in the MSC program, please go to [www.msc.org/newsroom/updates/subscribe](http://www.msc.org/newsroom/updates/subscribe). You will then receive stakeholder announcements through all stages of all fisheries' assessment, audit and recertification processes.

### Receive MSC news releases

Sign up to receive MSC news releases by email – including announcements of fisheries in assessment, fisheries' assessment results, new MSC labelled products, commercial partnerships and more – at [www.msc.org/newsroom/updates/subscribe](http://www.msc.org/newsroom/updates/subscribe).

### Get involved in MSC policy-making

The MSC follows guidelines set by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and the ISEAL Alliance (International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling) that require a balance of interests to be reflected in the development or revision of MSC processes. This means that as a stakeholder in the MSC, you have the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of MSC policies and procedures that relate to the MSC fishery assessment process, Chain of Custody and other aspects of the MSC program.

To be informed of stakeholder consultation opportunities of this sort, visit [www.msc.org/aboutus/consultations](http://www.msc.org/aboutus/consultations). Subscribe to the RSS feed from that page, and you will be informed as opportunities for stakeholder consultation arise. Alternatively, you can subscribe to our regular policy updates available at [www.msc.org/newsroom/updates/subscribe](http://www.msc.org/newsroom/updates/subscribe).

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## Contact MSC for more information

### MSC Head Office

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### MSC Regional Office – Europe, Africa and Middle East

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