



January 2007

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Subject: Interpreting the *MSC Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing*: Consultation

Dear Consultee

As part of MSC's commitment to evaluate and improve its fishery assessment process, we are now consulting on statements of intent for the criteria that underpin MSC's environmental standard. The purpose of these statements is to clarify the intent of the [Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing](#) used in our fisheries assessment process. We hope that you will be interested, willing and able to provide comments and thoughts on this draft intent guidance, which will serve as an important foundation to strengthen the clarity, quality and consistency of MSC's certification programme.

The *Principles and Criteria* were developed through an extensive international consultation process that took place in 1996-97, which drew strongly from the FAO Code of Conduct and other international conservation instruments. Since that time, numerous MSC fishery assessments have been conducted by independent, third party certification bodies (certifiers), providing a wealth of practical experience in applying the MSC standard to a diverse range of fisheries. Independent assessment teams have encountered varied challenges when conducting assessments that have sometimes raised questions regarding the interpretation of the *Principles and Criteria*.

While the intent of the Principles is clearly stated and has been an integral part of the MSC standard since its initial development, the specific intent of the Criteria was not originally elaborated. We believe it is of great benefit to step back and revisit the Criteria in order to clarify and confirm the intent behind them. In so doing, our intention is to enhance understanding and improve the overall quality and consistency of the application of the MSC standard. We think this effort is particularly timely, even urgent, as the MSC is in the process of expanding its presence in both the marketplace and global fisheries. We are eager to capitalise on our experience to date, and provide improved clarity as an increasing number of fisheries seek MSC certification.

We view this effort to clarify the intent of the MSC standard as the critical first phase of a larger project focussed on improving the robustness and credibility of the MSC certification programme. This phase of the project will form the basis of further guidance to certifiers on the application of the MSC standard, as well as the consideration of critical indicators or benchmarks for fishery assessments. These latter topics will be considered and consulted on in the second phase of the MSC Quality and Consistency (Q&C) Project, which will soon begin full implementation.

Together the intent and operational guidance developed through the Q&C Project will be incorporated into a new MSC 'Guidebook' that is being developed to provide an improved understanding of the MSC's certification programme.

In early 2006 MSC conducted a number of regional public workshops around the world to help scope the issues being addressed in the Q&C Project. Following these meetings, MSC held two invited expert workshops to clarify the intent of the Criteria under Principles 1, 2 and 3 of the MSC Standard. The participants at these expert workshops were respected individuals familiar with the MSC and its certification programme, representing a wide range of relevant backgrounds. Their technical expertise in sustainable fisheries management across a range of ecosystems, species, fisheries types, regions and management contexts aided the development of 23 'Draft Intent Statements' for all the MSC Criteria.

We now seek your views on these [draft intent statements](#). Please take this important opportunity to provide the MSC with your essential input in a format that you feel appropriate before the closing date of 23 February 2007, to:

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Yours sincerely



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