

# INTERPRETING THE MSC PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE FISHING

## An Overview of MSC's Assessment Process

### 1 Introduction

This is a broad introduction to the hierarchy and scoring approach that represents the MSC assessment process. It should be read in conjunction with '[A Guide to the Principles and Criteria](#)'.

#### 1.1 The MSC Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing

The [MSC Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing](#), produced through a lengthy and comprehensive international consultation process, represent the 'MSC standard' against which each fishery applying for MSC certification is evaluated. This standard is made up of three core principles considered to underpin sustainable and well-managed fisheries:

1. The sustainable harvest of the target stock
2. The acceptable impact of the fishery on the ecosystem
3. The effectiveness of the fishery management system

These Principles form the basis for detailed Criteria, which define the components against which a fishery seeking certification under the MSC programme is assessed. The *MSC Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing* describe the statements against which a fishery may be compared to enable its operators to make a claim that the fish sold on to processors, retailers and consumers comes from a well-managed and sustainable source.

### 2 Interpreting the Principles and Criteria

The certification methodology adopted by the MSC involves the application and interpretation of the Principles and Criteria to the specific fishery undergoing assessment. This is necessary, as the assessment of each fishery will vary with the nature of the species, capture method used, the nature of the ecosystem, etc.

Accordingly, a third party certification body (certifier) and its independent assessment team, in consultation with the fishery clients and other stakeholders, build a unique structured hierarchy of 'Sub-criteria' and 'Performance Indicators' (PIs) for each fishery in order to conduct the assessment. PIs represent specific statements or questions in the assessment, against which specific elements of a fishery's performance are measured. This hierarchy of the 'assessment tree' is illustrated below (Figure 1).

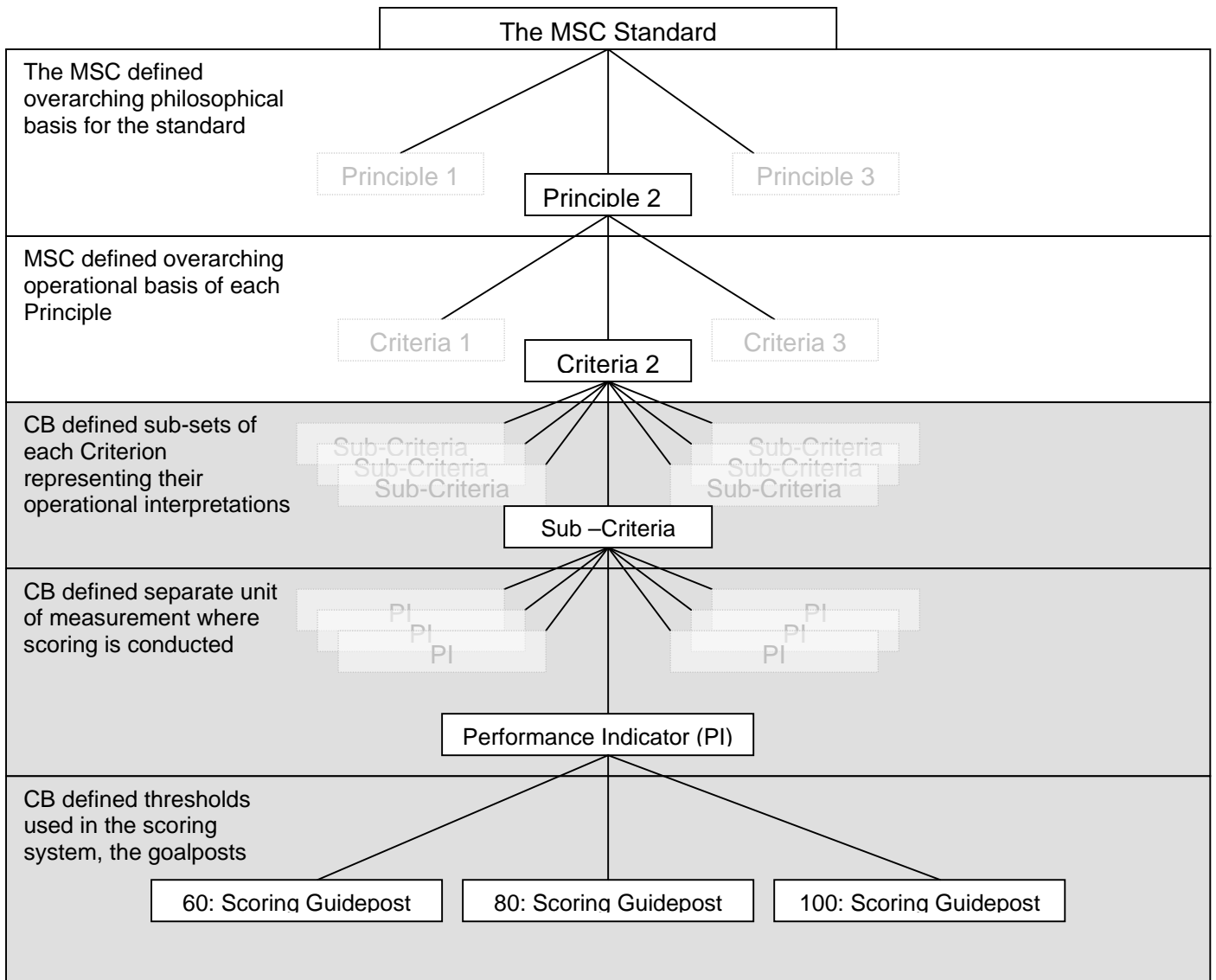
#### 2.1 Assessing a fishery against the Principles and Criteria

Each PI has three 'scoring guideposts' that define the main performance thresholds in the assessment process. The scoring guideposts can be characterised as follows:

- Perfect practice, representing the level of performance that would be expected in a theoretically 'perfect' fishery (100).
- Exemplary or best practice (80)
- Minimum sustainable practice (60).

It is noteworthy that numerical values were assigned to these guideposts within the MSC methodology in order to facilitate weighting and aggregating scores across PIs and were not designed to reflect any sort of percentile ranking.

Figure 1 The Assessment tree: A hierarchy



### 3 Scoring for Sustainability

After site visits to the fishery and consultation with interested stakeholders, the certifier and assessment team compile the relevant information, and then assess and score the fishery, fully documenting the rationale for each score. The scoring requirements that constitute the MSC's minimum threshold for a sustainable fishery are:

- The fishery must obtain a score of 80 or more for each of the three MSC Principles, based on the weighted aggregate scores for all PIs under each Criterion in the Principle; and
- The fishery must obtain a score of 60 or more for each PI.

After meeting these requirements, in order to be granted a certificate a fishery client also must meet any identified need for improvements (see 3.1 below). If a fishery fails this basic 'sustainability test', the certifier defines improvements that would be needed to raise the relevant scores to meet these minimum thresholds, thus defining a potential pathway for the fishery to become certified.

#### 3.1 Fishery improvements

In order to be granted a fishery certificate, the fishery client must agree to make further improvement(s) in the fishery (often referred to as conditions) that are identified by the certifiers. These agreed improvements are identified for PIs where the fishery achieves a score of less than 80, but of at least 60. They typically address potential risks to future sustainability that have been identified in the assessment related to such things as data deficiencies and related key uncertainties.

#### 3.2 On going monitoring and surveillance

In order to be granted and maintain a certificate the fishery client also must establish an agreed surveillance program for the fishery. These surveillance audits ensure meeting required achievement of the agreed fishery improvements and also assess whether any changes in the fishery's circumstances have occurred that could affect the original assessment decision. The surveillance audits happen at least annually throughout the period of the certification. The certifier also may carry out short notice monitoring as circumstances in the fishery warrant.

The diagram overleaf highlights these requirements.

**THE ASSESSMENT TREE**

Principle

**1 MSC PRINCIPLE 2**  
 Fishing operations should allow for the maintenance of the structure, productivity, function and diversity of the ecosystem (including habitat and associated dependent and ecologically related species) on which the fishery depends

Criteria

**1.1 MSC Principle 2 Criterion 1**  
 The fishery is conducted in a way that maintains natural functional relationships among species and should not lead to trophic cascades or ecosystem state changes.

Example of Sub-criteria

**E.g. There is adequate understanding of ecosystem factors relevant to the distribution and life history strategy of the target species.**

Example of a PI

**E.g. The nature and distribution of habitats relevant to the fishing operations are known.**

Example of Scoring Guideposts

<b>100</b>	The nature and the distribution of all habitats relevant to the fishing operations are known in detail. Information is recent.
<b>80</b>	Nature and distribution of all main habitats are known in moderate detail. Information is recent. The distribution of fishing operations is monitored.
<b>60</b>	Some information exists but may not be comprehensive or up to date. The distribution of fishing operations is mapped.



THE 'SUSTAINABILITY TEST'

1. Each PI must score  $\geq 60$ .
2. Each MSC Principle must achieve  $\geq 80$  based on the weighted aggregate scores for all PIs under each Criterion in the Principle.

FISHERY IMPROVEMENTS

In order to be granted a certificate the fishery client must also agree to make fishery improvements where PIs have scored from of 60 to 79 (often called conditions).

For instance, if the example PI here had scored 60 then the following response might have resulted:

Agreed improvement

Within two years the nature and distribution of all main habitats are known in moderate detail. Within four years a monitoring program for fishing operations will be in place.

Client and CB agreed action

Within the 2nd year of certification all the fished areas will be mapped with side scan sonar and VMS will be introduced to all vessels. By the fourth year a comprehensive vessel habitat and monitoring program will be up and running.

ANNUAL SURVEILLANCE

In order for the fishery to be granted and maintain a certificate, the certifier must conduct an annual (at a minimum) on-site visit and audit to ensure that agreed fishery improvements are being implemented and to evaluate whether any significant changes in the fishery or stocks have occurred that would affect the original assessment against the MSC Principles and Criteria.