

30th Meeting of the Marine Stewardship Council's Technical Advisory Board

Public Summary

June 3rd-6th, 2019

MSC Offices, London

This summary contributes to the transparency of MSC's governance. Readers should note that recommendations made by the MSC Technical Advisory Board are reviewed by the MSC Board of Trustees and only those recommendations that are formally endorsed by the MSC Board of Trustees will result in changes to the program. The Board may not always immediately consider the TAB's recommendations, especially in instances where more consideration is required. Project pages on improvements.msc.org will be updated to reflect final decisions, including rationales.

MSC's Technical Advisory Board (TAB) convened for its 30th meeting to discuss proposals for development of the MSC's Fisheries and Chain of Custody Standards and associated audit requirements. Sub-groups of the TAB also held meetings for a number of projects in development. (TAB sub-groups perform intersessional work with reduced TAB membership and providing recommendations to the TAB for decisions and approval).

Member	Days Present
Dr Simon Jennings (Chair)	All
Dr Chris Zimmermann	2; 3; 4
Mr Adam Swan	3; 4
Dr Tim Essington	All
Ms Lucia Mayer Massaroth	3; 4
Dr K Sunil Mohamed	All
Dr Keith Sainsbury	All
Mr Alex Olsen (Chain of Custody Sub-Group Chair)	2; 3; 4
Dr Victor Restrepo	2; 3; 4
Dr Juan Carlos Seijo	All
Ms Michèle Stark	2; 3; 4
Dr Florian Baumann	3; 4
Mr Sergey Sennikov	3; 4
Mr. José Augusto Pinto de Abreu	All
Dr Rebecca Lent	2; 3; 4

The following observers were present for the meetings: Dr Jason Combes (Days 1-3) and Mr Martin Gill (Day 4) of Lloyd's Register, Mr Sam Wilding of Monterey Bay Aquarium (All days), Ms Stephanie Good of Accreditation Services International (All days), Dr Andrew Hough representing the Association of Sustainable Fisheries (Days 2-4) and Ms Wendy Banta and Ms Vân Roetert of the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (Day 3). Mr Peter Trott (All days) and Mr Tor Bjorkland Larsen (Days 2-4) were representing the MSC's Stakeholder Advisory Council. External observers were not present for internal governance discussions and Executive updates and were asked to leave where potential for conflict of interest was identified.

Fisheries Assessment Tools Workshop (Day 1)

The workshop focussed on a range of tools designed to support the application of the Fisheries Standard, specifically a **Data Limited Methods** tool (which is being developed as a means of assigning MSC evaluation scores for Principle 1 Stock Assessment where key assessment data are limited or missing); a **Risk Based Framework (RBF)** for assessing data limited fisheries the **Relative Benthic Status** tool (used to help quantify the status of benthic habitat in areas where fishing takes place).

The TAB members attending the workshop commended progress with the development of the Data Limited Methods tool but, given the high level of expertise needed to use the tool and interpret inputs and outputs, noted that if it was used without sufficient understanding it could lead to incorrect conclusions. The TAB members expect that application of the tool would be complex, and that the main issues to progress were now related to training and application and development of a real understanding of who the users of the tool would be in practice.

The TAB members highlighted the need for effective calibration for risk assessments made through the RBF. The TAB members suggested that work on this topic be progressed, building on past calibration exercises in the first instance. The TAB members continued to support the position that the RBF could be moved into a separate Tools Annex to the Fisheries Certification Process.

A team of external academics introduced a new tool, the Relative Benthic Status tool, that could be used for assessing the status of benthic habitat in fished areas. The TAB members expressed interest in defining the minimum quantity of data needed to use the tool, while maintaining appropriate levels of precaution.

In general, the TAB members considered that the use of specific tools in the Annex was probably best seen as optional, and a way of supporting assessors in their work. However, if tools outside the Annex were used, then the onus would be on assessors to demonstrate their veracity. This observation contributed to a subsequent proposal from the working group that there may be a role for MSC to provide testing architecture to assess whether tools could be used in assessments. But this is also a longer-term project. In relation to tool development and testing it was necessary to ask how to test for/achieve risk equivalence across the range of tools/ approaches used to support MSC assessments. There are now examples of such testing in the research literature.

Accessibility Working Group (Day Two)

This Accessibility Working Group received updates on the **In-Transition to MSC (ITM)** pilot, and other ongoing work related to **small scale fisheries** and other MSC initiatives designed to improve accessibility.

There were no formal recommendations made in this session, however the working group encouraged the MSC to seek to include a greater diversity (in species, gears and geography) of fisheries in the ITM pilot. It noted that the ITM pilot is limited to small-scale fisheries, though the scope of the program would expand if the pilot were successful. In respect of small-scale fisheries, the Accessibility Working Group discussed the relative importance of fishery capacity (to participate) or the value proposition (for participating) that may be hindering accessibility to the accessibility program.

Fisheries Sub-Group: Fisheries Certification Process (Day Two)

The Fisheries Sub-Group reviewed proposals for changes to the Fisheries Certification Process related to (a) **persistent disagreement with expert judgement** and the proposed mechanism that allows stakeholders, including the MSC, to respond to a CAB's response to feedback on an assessment, (b) document restructuring to facilitate a more flexible review schedule for the **Objection Procedure**, (c) clarifications on when and why an **expedited audit** may be triggered, and the process of conducting an expedited audit, and (d) the requirements for **setting, overseeing and closing conditions** for certification. These topics had been recently subject to public consultation, and final proposed changes to the requirements will be made available for review of auditability over the summer. The sub-group supported public consultation on the recommendations of the MSC Executive with some minor suggested refinements.

The TAB (Day Four) endorsed the recommendations made by the sub-group.

Fisheries Sub-Group: Fisheries Standard Review (Day Three)

The Fisheries Sub-Group was given an update on the Fisheries Standard Review (FSR), as the MSC looks to move from the review phase (scoping of issues and development of intent) of the FSR to the revision phase (development of requirements to deliver on that intent). The MSC Executive reported that **Terms of Reference** for the development of potential revisions to the Fisheries Standard would be presented to by the MSC Board of Trustees for consideration in early 2020.

The Fisheries Sub-Group discussed the review of the accessibility of **Principle 3** to small-scale and developing world fisheries, and supported efforts to clarify MSC's intent, language and definition under this principle, provided any changes still placed an evidence-led process at the centre of any related decision-making.

The Fisheries Sub-Group discussed work related to abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear (known as **ghost gear**), specifically the MSC Executive's work to date in reviewing current best practice to minimise ghost gear through approaches/strategies to avoid gear loss. It is anticipated that this topic will also be discussed by the MSC Stakeholder Advisory Council later in 2019.

The Fisheries Sub-Group discussed work related the effectiveness of the Fisheries Standard with regard to the assessment of species that are not easily distinguishable (i.e. **inseparable or practicably inseparable or IPI species**), supporting the MSC Executive's proposal for removing inconsistencies with other Principle 2 guidance, providing guidance for IPI designation reference periods and making revisions of IPI eligibility requirements to prevent the inclusion of species that are otherwise out of scope for MSC certification.

The Fisheries Sub-Group considered the effectiveness of current Principle 1 requirements related to **harvest strategies**. The Fisheries Sub-Group supported the MSC Executive's planned approach to dealing with confusion related to the term 'responsiveness', reviewing how often stock status is greater than the MSY level but a condition on PI 1.2.1 is in place and potentially merging the 'rebuilding' performance indicator with another performance indicator.

The MSC Executive gave an update on a project related the potential evolution of the Fisheries Standard regarding **Endangered, Threatened and Protected (ETP) Species**. Review work is ongoing and no decisions or recommendations were made at this point. Stakeholder workshops were discussed and TAB provided guidance on clearly articulating the scope of such workshops.

The working group were updated on a review of **Annexes SB – SD** of the Fisheries Standard relating to **enhanced fisheries** to identify and address any issues with their implementation. Outcomes of work to date highlighted that improved guidance and/or minor and medium level revisions to normative text are needed to improve clarity of intent and consistency in application.

Finally, the Fisheries Sub-Group received an update on efforts made by the MSC Executive to evaluate the potential for efficiencies or alignment with other certification and ratings organisations, where appropriate.

Chain of Custody Sub-Group (Day Three)

This Chain of Custody Sub-Group was limited to (a) an update on an ongoing exercise to **benchmark the MSC Chain of Custody Standard** against others in the seafood sector and (b) strategies for mitigating food safety risks for products in the MSC supply chain. The next steps on the benchmarking exercise are to review any issues that have arisen, and for the MSC Executive to decide which should be prioritised for any potential revision during the next Chain of Custody Standard Review.

The Chain of Custody Sub-Group noted that the MSC CoC Standards do not currently include **food safety requirements** and TAB recommended the potential associated risks presented to the program be reviewed and any proposals be considered in this light. The Board would then need to confirm if any scope change was warranted.

Formal TAB Meeting (Day Four)

The Fisheries and Chain of Custody Sub-Groups reported back to the TAB, which noted the advice given by the working groups.

Schedules of activity were agreed for existing TAB working groups. The TAB expanded the existing ITM working group to include all accessibility initiatives (creating an Accessibility Working Group) and the Labour and Product Provenance Project working groups were placed in hiatus. An Ecosystem Performance Indicator Working Group was created to oversee the nature and scope of revisions, if any, to the Ecosystem performance indicators in the Fishery Standard Review.

The TAB reviewed proposals for changes to the MSC Fisheries Certification Process (FCP) related to (a) scope requirements related to **shark finning** and (b) the issue of **compartmentalisation**, in which certified and uncertified activities occur in the same trip. These topics have been subject to public consultation previously, and final FCP text will be made available for review of auditability over the summer.

What happens next?

Subject to final Board approval in February 2020, the revised Fisheries Certification Process will be prepared for publication in March 2020. The new requirements will be used for audit processes that begin from August 2020.

The TAB will next meet in December 2019. In addition to considering the final draft of the revised **Fisheries Certification Process** the TAB will review the draft Terms of Reference for the potential revision phase of the **Fisheries Standard Review**.

Research and investigation of **Fisheries Standard Review** topics began last year. As the review phase draws to a close, there will be targeted workshops on specific topics to aid in identifying which areas of the standard may need to be revised. Any revisions to the MSC Fisheries Standard resulting from the current review will be subject to public consultation throughout 2020 and 2021 and are expected to be introduced into the program following publication in late 2021.

Requests to observe future TAB meetings should be sent to Standards@msc.org.