



32nd Meeting of the Marine Stewardship Council's Technical Advisory Board

Public Summary

Meeting Dates: May 26th – 28th, 2020

Virtual meeting

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 research or consultation is required. Project pages on msc.org will be updated to reflect final decisions, including rationales.

In view of the current challenges and widespread travel restrictions in place due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the MSC's Technical Advisory Board (TAB) convened for its 32nd meeting as a virtual meeting, focusing on a small number of time-critical topics where the TAB's engagement and input to MSC's policy development and provision of advice to the MSC Board was required.

The TAB meeting was attended by [all members of the TAB](#) excepting Mr Adam Swan and Dr Juan Carlos-Seijo, who gave their apologies.

The following observers were present for the meetings: Ms Gabrielle Anhalzer (SCS Global Services) (day 1 & 2), Ms Polly Burns (Lloyds), Dr Antonio Hervas (Accreditation Services International), Dr Andrew Hough (Association of Sustainable Fisheries).

Mr Tor Larsen represented the MSC's Stakeholder Advisory Council (STAC) and Dr Werner Kiene (MSC Chair) attended on behalf of the MSC Board of Trustees. Mr Jean-Jacques Maguire (MSC Board member) also attended (day 2 & 3). 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.

Introductory items

During the session the TAB received an update from the MSC Chief Executive; an overview from Mr Larsen of the deliberations of the MSC's STAC, which had met the previous week; and an overview of intersessional TAB and TAB working group activities.

Managing the impact of Coronavirus on the MSC program – assurance and compliance

The TAB noted that the Coronavirus pandemic was having a significant effect on the global seafood industry, impacting global fishing activity; causing a significant decline in sales of fresh seafood and an increase in demand for frozen, canned and preserved seafood; and causing significant disruption to the hospitality industry and their supply chains.

The TAB received a detailed update on **MSC's response to managing the impacts of the pandemic on the MSC and on MSC Fisheries and Chain of Custody (CoC) certificate holders**, including the potential impact on compliance with the Standards, and the ongoing work to identify, monitor and analyse the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on these certificate holders.

The TAB undertook a broad discussion about managing these impacts, including how MSC would **seek to innovate to address some of the challenges identified**. In response to the significant

changes in demand for seafood from wet counter and food service to frozen and canned, MSC had conducted a survey about markets and fisheries as a “barometer test” and would continue to keep a close eye on this issue.

Levels of disruption varied across the world as different countries were at different stages of experiencing the pandemic, and responses to handling the pandemic also varied considerably. The TAB considered it was important for MSC to **understand how MSC certified fisheries were responding to the pandemic**, including taking account of the potential impact of the modification or cancellation of monitoring surveys and other data collection activities on the quality of assessments.

The TAB discussed some of the concerns expressed by the CAB community in relation to the MSC’s decision in March 2020 to offer a **six-month certificate extension for all Fishery and CoC certificate holders**, noting that the CAB community would welcome a more tailored, risk-level approach to managing these types of situations in the future.

The situation with the pandemic remained dynamic and work on managing impact was ongoing. TAB agreed with an MSC Executive proposal to **appoint two TAB sponsors (one from Fisheries and one from CoC) to support and advise on any intersessional work** MSC undertook in relation to the pandemic.

Harvest Strategy

The TAB followed up on the March 2020 decision of the MSC Board of Trustees to **extend the scope of the Fisheries Standard Review project on Harvest Strategies to include consideration of intent level changes**. The reason for considering such changes was the lack of adoption of stock-wide, best-practice harvest strategies for some shared and highly migratory stocks.

The TAB reviewed some **potential options for scoring and condition setting** in the cases when a unit of assessment took only a proportion of the total catch from a shared or highly migratory stock.

The TAB concluded that **further work was needed to develop these options**, and that **other options should be investigated**. TAB agreed with an Executive proposal to **establish a working group** to advise the MSC on identifying, developing and assessing the strengths and weakness of alternate options.

MSC Habitats Tool

The TAB was joined by two scientists from Bangor University who provided an update on the development of the **MSC Habitats Tool**. The Habitats Tool had been **developed to provide consistent evidence-based support for scoring Performance Indicator 2.4.1**.in cases where a unit of assessment uses mobile bottom-fishing gears. The Tool uses maps of fishing areas and habitat types, along with information on gear type and the effects of the gear on seabed fauna to estimate the current status of each habitat impacted by the unit of assessment and the time it would take to recover. This information is then converted to scores.

The TAB received updates from the Bangor University team on the status of the project. With the Tool (version 3), user manual and a training workshop completed the team was calibrating the Tool. The TAB discussed the **calibration process** and suggested sources of data that may be used for calibration, as well as the **role, hosting and maintenance of the Habitats Tool**.

Fisheries Standard Review (FSR)

In February 2020, the MSC Board of Trustees confirmed which areas of the current FSR would be open to potential revision, and what would not change. Following this, the activity undertaken by the MSC had switched focus from problem definition, research and analysis, to **public consultation, option development and impact testing**. The 2020 consultation window started in April 2020 (continuing until July 2020) and the TAB was provided with a detailed update on the **communications and engagement process with stakeholders**. Significant adjustments had been

made to how MSC engaged with stakeholders due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The MSC had taken the decision to **host all FSR consultation events planned in 2020 on online platforms**. Alongside these web-based consultation events, the MSC was commissioning and reviewing consultant reports, completing data analysis and the drafting of guidance and requirement text to support the identification and testing of potential options to revise the Standard in line with the policy direction approved in early 2020.

The TAB discussed MSC's adaptation of its consultation and engagement activities and registered its support for the approach being taken.

The TAB supported **ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the consultation process over the next six months**, as well as ongoing monitoring of the overall pace of the FSR procedure for stakeholders given the challenges many of them faced in terms of capacity and financial pressures due to the Coronavirus.

What happens next?

The TAB will next meet in December 2020. The TAB will review work progressed following Board decisions in respect of the Fisheries Standard Review.

Requests to observe future TAB meetings should be sent to tanya.van.niekerk@msc.org and need to be received at least one full month before the meeting.