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**Marine Stewardship Council**

# Fishery Improvement Action Plans – Guidance Document

How to use the Action Plan Templates

# Contents

# 1. Introduction

*The purpose of this document is to provide templates and operational guidance for developing a fishery improvement Action Plan. Such plans are intended to help potential Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification clients set out and implement practical actions aimed at enabling their fishery to meet MSC performance requirements in a specified timeframe.*

### Who is this guide for?

This document is for potential certification clients whose fisheries do not yet meet the requirements of the MSC Standard. It is directed at those who already have the results of a commissioned pre-assessment, or equivalent baseline review, against the Standard by an accredited third-party certification body or appropriately qualified consultants. Thus, as potential certification clients, users of this document are assumed to already know about general or particular areas of performance improvement needed to enable their fishery to pass a full assessment against the MSC Standard.

### A practical tool

The MSC's intention is that this guidance is easy to understand and practical. The MSC intends it to be a useful tool for potential certification clients, which outlines:

– The actions your organisation will implement to enable your fishery to pass the MSC Standard

– The people, other organisations or stakeholders involved in the project and their responsibilities

– The resources required

– The timescales and specific milestones that will help you measure progress towards your goals.

This document assumes you have some familiarity with the MSC certification and ecolabelling program, including some background on the MSC, as well as some awareness of the basic terminology and broad concepts relating to the certification process. Given MSC's stated purpose and intended audience of this guidance, the document's scope therefore does not include specific information about how individual fisheries should or can pass the Standard.

That information is contained within the MSC Standard itself and pre-assessment or consultant reports about your fishery. Together this information should be used by your organisation to help you decide which actions are most appropriate and the order in which they should be implemented.

## 2. How to use this document

*The focus of this guidance is entirely operational. It has been created to help you design and implement practical actions with your project partners and/or stakeholders to enable your fishery to pass a full assessment against the MSC Standard in the future.*

We have created electronic versions of the Action Plan Template which are available in Word and Excel at **www.msc.org/go/fisheries-improvement**. This will assist when cross-referencing planned tasks and actions with MSC performance indicators (PIs). Any of these may be adapted to suit your needs e.g. creating the Action Plan tables in Excel, or the cross-reference spreadsheet in Word. These tools are not official MSC scheme documents, nor are their use intended to be mandatory: just practical.

Throughout this guidance document you will find snapshots of the various tables and explanations for their intended use. Simply by working your way through each section you should be able to develop a comprehensive Action Plan that serves your needs and the needs of your project partners, participants and stakeholders.

The flow chart on page 3 outlines the main steps in an action planning process. This is followed by some brief background information about the MSC program and an overview of the templates. From page 7, there are detailed segments explaining the component parts of an Action Plan, and finally, from page 20, there are pointers to reference material and MSC contacts.
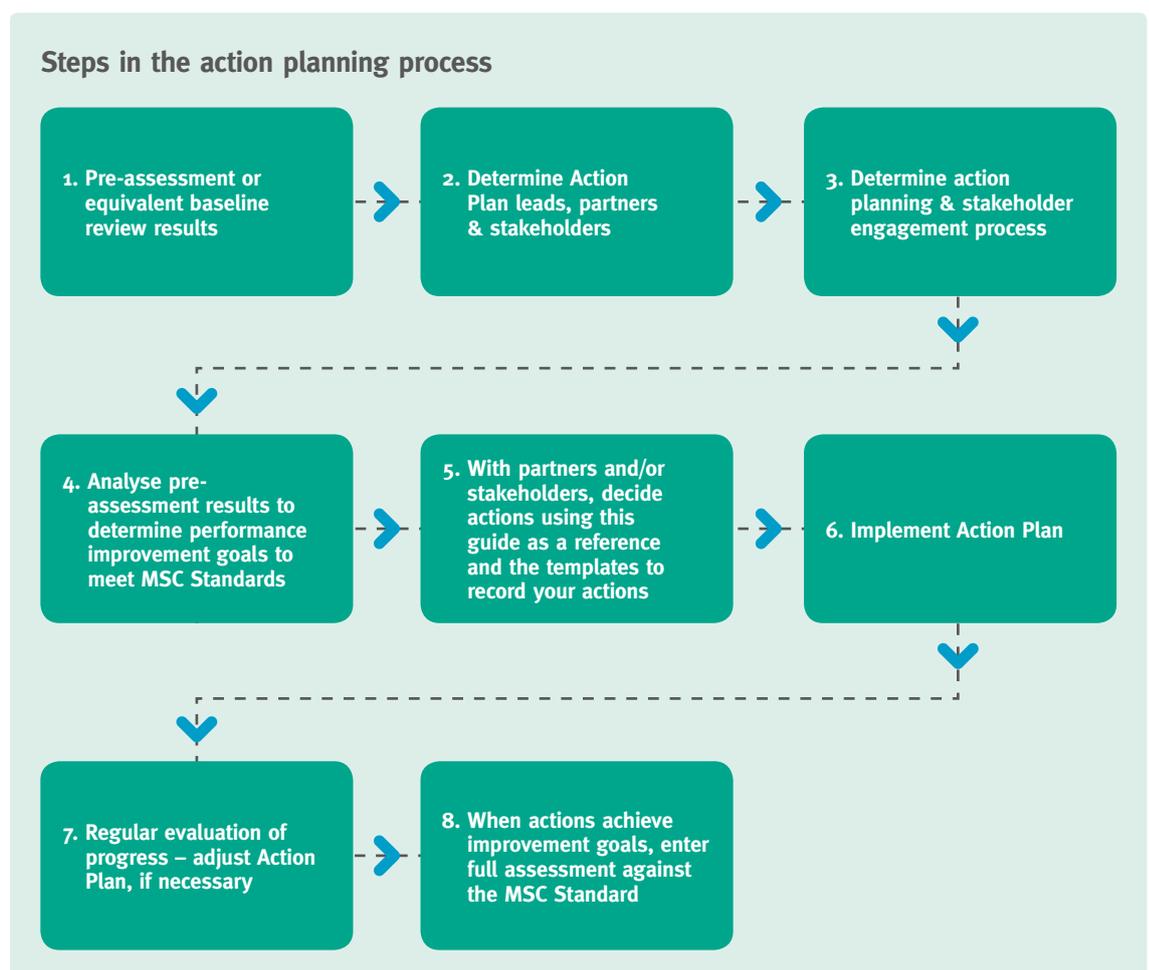
Additional guidance is provided throughout the document about the considerations that might influence your decisions in relation to actions you might take, priorities you assign to different actions and allocating resources to your fisheries improvement project.



The Indian oil sardine fisheries improvement project (FIP) working together to develop an improvement Action Plan.

@ MSC

## 3. Steps in the action planning process

*When developing an Action Plan, there are a number of steps that should be taken to ensure that the Action Plan is robust and will also be implemented successfully. The following diagram is a summary of the steps that should be taken in developing an Action Plan.*

### Steps in the action planning process

**1. Pre-assessment or equivalent baseline review results**

**2. Determine Action Plan leads, partners & stakeholders**

**3. Determine action planning & stakeholder engagement process**

**4. Analyse pre-assessment results to determine performance improvement goals to meet MSC Standards**

**5. With partners and/or stakeholders, decide actions using this guide as a reference and the templates to record your actions**

**6. Implement Action Plan**

**7. Regular evaluation of progress – adjust Action Plan, if necessary**

**8. When actions achieve improvement goals, enter full assessment against the MSC Standard**

# 4. Background to the MSC certification

*Fishery certification is a voluntary assessment to determine whether a fishery meets the MSC principles and criteria for sustainable fishing.*

## 4.1 How the MSC process works

As an independent, global, non-profit organisation, the MSC's mission is to use its ecolabel and fishery certification program to contribute to improving the health of the world's oceans by 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.

Under the MSC program, fisheries are certified and entitled to display the blue ecolabel if they meet the MSC Standard: the principles and criteria for sustainable fishing.

**The Standard comprises three core principles:**

**1. Health of fish stocks**

**2. Impact on ecosystems**

**3. Effective fisheries management.**

The actions that fisheries take to demonstrate they meet these three principles vary considerably and take into account the unique circumstances of each fishery.

Certification to the MSC Standard is a multi-step process conducted by independent certification bodies. The process usually begins with a pre-assessment to determine whether a fishery is ready for full assessment against the Standard and provides guidance about the issues that may need improvement in order to meet the MSC performance requirements.

Full assessment is a seven step process, which will not be described here (refer to the document *Get Certified!* for more information). However, it is important to note that a full assessment will be based primarily upon the MSC default assessment tree. This reference should also be the basis for the development of your Action Plan, as it provides the detailed performance requirements against which you will measure the outcomes of your plan.

Briefly, the assessment process involves scoring 31 PIs using narrative guides to the characteristics that will achieve particular scores (called scoring guideposts, SGs for short). In order to obtain MSC certification, the fishery needs to achieve a score of 60 or more for each PI. If a fishery achieves a score of less than 60 on any PI, certification will not be awarded. Additionally, the fishery must have an aggregate score of 80 or higher for each of MSC's three principles in order to be certified.

In some cases and for only five status-related (i.e. outcome-related) PIs, when sufficient quantitative data are not available to score a given PI using the usual set of SGs, the MSC Risk-Based Framework might be used. This is a set of assessment methods that enable certifiers to assess the risks a fishery poses to the sustainability (or status) of target, retained and bycatch species, as well as habitats and ecosystems. Detailed procedures for the applicability and use of the Risk-Based Framework are in the MSC certification requirements.

The Suriname Atlantic Seabob Fishery, where a well-planned Action Plan is leading to good progress being made as the fishery moves towards MSC certification.



@ MSC
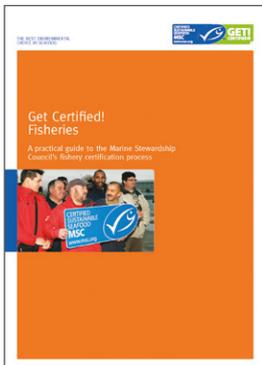


*Get Certified!* Fisheries

When a fishery scores less than 80 for a PI, but at least 60, the certifier will set one or more conditions for continuing certification. The certifier will specify an appropriate timescale for addressing each condition and should specify the outcome or targets the fishery should work towards. The certifier's role is to make clear the desired outcome rather than prescribe specific actions that should be taken. The decision is therefore the fishery's to make on how to achieve the desired outcomes.

In the context of your pre-assessment or baseline review, you should have a wealth of information relevant to the performance improvements required to meet the performance required by the MSC Standard. You will need to analyse these issues and link any improvements you decide upon directly to one or more of the 31 performance indicators set out in the default assessment tree. MSC scheme documents and useful reference material, including the *Get Certified!* Fisheries booklet, the default assessment tree and information about the Risk-Based Framework are listed in Section 8 of this guidance.

## 4.2 Standardised assessment tree for scoring fisheries (the "default assessment tree")

The following table sets out the components and default performance indicators contained in the MSC fisheries assessment methodology for scoring fisheries against the MSC principles and criteria for sustainable fishing. **www.msc.org/go/msc-default-assessment-tree**

Your pre-assessment report should give you an indication of the level of preparedness of your fishery with respect to each of the 31 PIs and therefore those performance indicators for which improvement actions need to be developed.

# 4. Background to the MSC certification *continued*

The following table sets out the components and default performance indicators contained in the MSC fisheries assessment methodology for scoring fisheries against the MSC principles and criteria for sustainable fishing.

| Principle | Component | Performance indicator |
|---|---|---|
| **Principle 1**<br>Target fish stock(s) | Outcome | 1.1.1 Stock status |
| | | 1.1.2 Reference points |
| | | 1.1.3 Stock rebuilding |
| | Harvest strategy<br>(Management) | 1.2.1 Harvest strategy |
| | | 1.2.2 Harvest control rules and tools |
| | | 1.2.3 Information and monitoring |
| | | 1.2.4 Assessment of stock status |
| **Principle 2**<br>Ecosystem | Retained species | 2.1.1 Retained species outcome |
| | | 2.1.2 Retained species management strategy |
| | | 2.1.3 Retained species information<br>and monitoring |
| | Bycatch species | 2.2.1 Bycatch species outcome |
| | | 2.2.2 Bycatch species management strategy |
| | | 2.2.3 Bycatch species information<br>and monitoring |
| | Endangered,<br>threatened<br>and protected<br>(ETP) species | 2.3.1 ETP species outcome |
| | | 2.3.2 ETP species management strategy |
| | | 2.3.3 ETP species information and monitoring |
| | Habitats | 2.4.1 Habitats outcome |
| | | 2.4.2 Habitats management strategy |
| | | 2.4.3 Habitats information and monitoring |
| | Ecosystem | 2.5.1 Ecosystem outcome |
| | | 2.5.2 Ecosystem management |
| | | 2.5.3 Ecosystem information and monitoring |
| **Principle 3**<br>Management system | Governance<br>and policy | 3.1.1 Legal and/or customary framework |
| | | 3.1.2 Consultation, roles and responsibilities |
| | | 3.1.3 Long-term objectives |
| | | 3.1.4 Incentives for sustainable fishing |
| | Fishery-specific<br>management system | 3.2.1 Fishery-specific objectives |
| | | 3.2.2 Decision-making processes |
| | | 3.2.3 Compliance and enforcement |
| | | 3.2.4 Research plan |
| | | 3.2.5 Monitoring and management<br>performance evaluation |

**Source:**
*www.msc.org/go/
msc-default-
assessment-tree*

# 5. Action Plan Template – a snapshot

There are three Tables in the Word template to help you develop and implement your Action Plan:

1. Action Plan overview
2. Action Plan details
3. Evaluation against Action Plan milestones

Detailed guidance about each of the Action Plan elements and how to complete the Tables is given in Sections 6 and 7 of this document.

**Table 1: Action Plan overview**

| Fishery name: | | Start date: |
|---|---|---|
| **Fishery location:** | **Fishing method:** | **End date** (anticipated): |
| **Project leaders** (organisation responsible for Action Plan): | | **Improvements recommended by:** |
| **Overview of the Action Plan** | | |

**Table 2: Action Plan details**

| Standard requirement | Actions | Resources required | Action lead | Action partners | Stakeholders | Timescale / milestones |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | | |
| 4. | | | | | | |
| 5. | | | | | | |

**Table 3: Evaluation against Action Plan milestones**

| Standard requirement | Actions | Timescale / milestones | Progress / outcome | Revised milestone |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | | | | |
| 2. | | | | |
| 3. | | | | |
| 4. | | | | |
| 5. | | | | |

# 5. Action Plan Template – a snapshot *continued*

We have also adapted an Excel spreadsheet summary template (available at **www.msc.org/go/ fisheries-improvement**), will help when cross referencing and linking tasks and actions in an Action Plan to the MSC PIs, which can be used to assign a priority ranking to each action. This may be useful if you have individual actions that may help your fishery meet multiple PIs. A snapshot of this is provided below.

| Action / task | Action lead and partners | Timescale |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Stock assessment** | | |
| 1.1 Develop stock assessment methodology | Client organisation; Research agency | 6 mths |
| 1.2 Conduct stock assessment | Research agency | 12 mths |
| 1.3 Commission peer review of stock assessment | Research agency; Management agency | 12 mths |
| 1.4  Review data collection and sampling protocols | Research agency; client organisation | 18 mths |
| **2. Habitats and ecosystems** | | |
| 2.1  Review habitat impacts | Fishery science consultant | |
| 2.2  Review of ecosystem literature and produce report | Fishery science consultant | |
| **3. Enforcement (MCS)** | | |
| 3.1. Formalise designated landing sites | Client organisation; Enforcement agency | |
| 3.2. Develop surveillance program at landing sites (e.g. random & targeted checks) | Enforcement agency | |
| 3.3  Employ and train additional enforcement officers | Enforcement agency | |
| 3.4  Review existing MCS strategy | Enforcement agency; management agency | |
| 3.5  Compile data on MCS activities (e.g. number of surveillance patrols, infringements) | Enforcement agency | |
| **4. Management and governance** | | |
| 4.1  Review of fisheries legislation, fines & penalties | Management agency; management partners / advisory group | |
| 4.2  Review of national and international management measure and their effectiveness | Management agency; management partners / advisory group | |
| 4.3  Document existing efforts to demonstrate effective process exists | Management agency; management partners / advisory group | |
| 4.4  Seek letter of support from stakeholders to encourage adoption of fisheries management plan | Client organisation; NGOs | |
| 4.5  Develop research plan | Client organisation; research agency; management agency; NGOs | |

*Notes: assumption is that 'client organisation' in this hypothetical case is a fishery group*
*(e.g. a fisher's association; industry group; or fishery community association)*

## Links to MSC performance indicators

| | P1. Target stocks | | | | | | | P2. Ecosystem components | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | P3. Management system | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1.1.1 Stock status | 1.1.2 Reference points | 1.1.3 Stock rebuilding | 1.2.1 Harvest Strategy | 1.2.2 Harvest control rules & tools | 1.2.3 Information & monitoring | 1.2.4 Assessment of stock status | 2.1.1 Retained species outcome | 2.1.2 Retained species management strategy | 2.1.3 Retained species information & monitoring | 2.2.1 Bycatch species status | 2.2.2 Bycatch species management strategy | 2.2.3 Bycatch species information & monitoring | 2.3.1 ETP species outcome | 2.3.2 ETP species management strategy | 2.3.3 ETP species information & monitoring | 2.4.1 Habitat outcome | 2.4.2 Habitat management strategy | 2.4.3 Habitat information & monitoring | 2.5.1 Ecosystem outcome | 2.5.2 Ecosystem management | 2.5.3 Ecosystem information & monitoring | 3.1.1 Legal or customary framework | 3.1.2 Consultation, roles & responsibilities | 3.1.3 Long-term objectives | 3.1.4 Incentives for sustainable fishing | 3.2.1 Fishery-specific objectives | 3.2.2 Decision-making processes | 3.2.3 Compliance & enforcement | 3.2.4 Research plan | 3.2.5 Monitoring & management performance evaluation |
| | H | M | | M | | | H | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | H | M | | M | | | H | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | H | M | | M | | | H | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | L | L | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | L | | L | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | M | |

(**Note:** *H = high priority, M = medium priority, L = low priority according to MSC pre-assessment*)

# 6. Action Plan elements

*There are important elements that go into producing a robust Action Plan. These need to be clearly defined using the Action Plan Template.*

## 6.1 General information

Table 1 of the Action Plan Template (see snapshot below) is to present high level, general information to identify the fishery and give a brief overview about the fishery improvement project. This will enable project leaders, participants, stakeholders and other outside readers to see at a glance what the Action Plan is about and who is responsible for its implementation.

The following list explains what to put in each box:

**Fishery name:** The name of the fishery to which the Action Plan applies. This might include the target species name(s) and/or the fishing method(s) (For example, the Mauritanian smooth-mouth sea catfish gillnet fishery).

**Fishery location:** If not already identified in the name of the fishery, the geographical location of the fishery, identifying either the region, ocean or sea and/or the country or countries that are within the fishery's boundaries.

**Fishing method:** If not already identified in the name of the fishery, the fishing method or methods used in the fishery.

**Start date:** The date upon which the Action Plan commences, i.e. the date actions and tasks begin to be implemented.

**End date:** The date project leaders anticipate the actions in the plan will be successfully completed.

**Project leaders:** The lead organisation(s) responsible for implementing the Action Plan. E.g. the organisation that is co-ordinating activities and taking responsibility to ensure that others involved in the project are meeting their commitments.

Just as is recommended in MSC's *Get Certified!* booklet, getting organised and having a project manager to lead your organisation's implementation of the Action Plan can make a huge difference to its success.

**Improvements recommended by:** The name of the organisation or individual(s) that conducted the pre-assessment (in the case of a certification body) or baseline review (in the case of independent consultants).

**Table 1: Action Plan overview**

| Fishery name: | | Start date: |
|---|---|---|
| Fishery location: | Fishing method: | End date (anticipated): |
| Project leaders (organisation responsible for Action Plan): | | Improvements recommended by: |
| Overview of the Action Plan | | |

## 6.2 Overview of the Action Plan

In Table 1 on the previous page, a large space is provided for a summary of the key elements of the Action Plan.

If the principal aim of the project is improving performance to enable the fishery to become certified against the MSC Standard, then the key elements should relate should relate to the PIs in the default assessment tree. Effectively, this means that the overview should contain enough information for members of the project team, stakeholders or other readers to understand the general activities and timescales involved in the fishery improvement efforts to achieve the principal aim of the project. To be of practical use it is recommended that the overview be short, communicating only summary information.

It may be more practical to complete this section after the full Action Plan has been developed. Thus ensuring the overview reflects the actual contents of the plan, taking account of specific milestones and responsibilities.

**For example:** The Mauritanian smooth-mouth sea catfish fishery commissioned a pre-assessment from [ABC Certifiers] in November 2009. The results indicated the fishery would fail to achieve the Standard set for principle 1 (target species) and principle 2, retained and bycatch species components. The key improvements required are: 1) providing an adequate stock assessment for the target stock(s), and 2) increasing the ability of assessors to more clearly determine the risks posed by the fishery to four retained (non-target) species and several bycatch species.

This Action Plan focuses on activities to address these issues. In the next six months, we will work with the Department of Fisheries Science to develop an adequate stock assessment methodology. Within 12 months, after the revised methodology is adopted, a preliminary stock assessment using the best available data and, taking into account uncertainties, will be conducted and peer reviewed.

To more clearly determine risks posed by the fishery on retained and bycatch species, a scientific workshop will be convened within three months of the commencement of this plan with relevant experts and stakeholders to discuss all relevant data and conduct a formal risk assessment using the MSC Risk-Based Framework. Depending on the outcomes of this process we may revise the Action Plan or proceed to full assessment following successful completion of the stock assessment.

The following Section (6.3) provides guidance about developing the specific content of your Action Plan.

# 6. Action Plan elements *continued*

## 6.3 Standard requirement

Table 2 of the Action Plan Template (see snapshot below) is where you
will describe in detail the specific tasks and activities of your Action Plan.

**Table 2: Action Plan details**

| Standard requirement | Actions | Resources required | Action lead | Action partners | Stakeholders | Timescale / milestones |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | | |
| 4. | | | | | | |
| 5. | | | | | | |

In the first column, entitled 'Standard requirement', you will specify the words that represent the Standard the fishery will be aiming to meet through the actions and tasks implemented in your Action Plan. Therefore, to complete this column you should transcribe the performance required by the relevant 80 SG in the fisheries assessment methodology default assessment tree.

Following the example under Section 6.2 of this document, if a key improvement identified in a pre-assessment report is to provide "an adequate assessment of the stock status", this means that the relevant PI in the default assessment tree is PI 1.2.4. The corresponding 80 SG therefore reads:

> "The assessment is appropriate for the stock and for the harvest control rule, and is evaluating stock status relative to reference points.

> "The assessment takes uncertainty into account.

> "The assessment of stock status is subject to peer review."

> PI 1.2.4, SG 80

Thus, the above words, including the identifying PI number, would be entered into the Standard requirement column of Table 2 of the Action Plan Template (noting that you may wish to adjust column widths and layout to accommodate all the relevant information).

In the next column (see Section 6.4) you will identify the actions you will implement in order to achieve the performance level set by the relevant 80 SG. Sometimes this might involve several actions aimed at a single PI. Alternatively, a single action may serve to meet the requirements of several performance indicators. As will be explained in Section 6.4.

**Standard requirement if using the Risk-Based Framework**
The required improvement might relate to one of the species-related outcome PIs[1] (see also Sections 4.1 and 4.2). In data deficient cases a 'Productivity Susceptibility Analysis' (PSA) may have been conducted as part of the pre-assessment process. Alternatively, it might be possible that the Risk-Based Framework will have to be used to score that element in a full assessment[2].

In such cases, the Standard requirement in this column should refer to the relevant attributes listed in the PSA sections of the Risk-Based Framework of the fisheries assessment methodology. There are seven productivity attributes and four susceptibility attributes.

[1] PI 1.1.1 target stock status; PI 2.1.1 retained species status; PI 2.2.1 bycatch species status.

[2] A pre-assessment from an accredited certifier who is trained in the use of MSC's Risk-Based Framework should make it clear whether this is a likely outcome in the event of insufficient data being available to determine the status of target, retained or bycatch species, or the status of habitats or ecosystems. If the report is not clear, we recommend you ask the certifier or consultant who prepared the report on your fishery to advise you on this point.

In effect, in cases where performance improvement is required because the fishery poses too high a risk to certain attributes affecting the sustainability of a species, the goal will be to reduce risks of the fishery to the particular attribute(s).

For example, a PSA may have been conducted on some of the bycatch species taken in your fishery. This could have revealed that one species scores highly (i.e. the risks are too high) on the selectivity attribute. The entry into the 'Standard requirement' column could therefore read:

> *"Reduce the risks posed by the selectivity of [xxx] fishing method to [abc] species."*

Taking action on such a performance improvement goal should therefore aim to reduce the risk score, thus resulting in a lower risk that the fishing method in use in the fishery poses an unacceptably high risk to the sustainability of the species in question.

**Additional guidance**
In practice, the pre-assessment report or baseline review commissioned on the fishery should contain information that indicates the issues that currently prevent the fishery from meeting the MSC Standard. This information might be very specific i.e. directly quoting the MSC PIs and/or SGs from the MSC default assessment tree. Alternatively, the information provided might be more general, making indirect reference to the components of the Standard and providing only generic 'clues' to the performance requirement.

In all cases, it is incumbent upon the fishery improvement project participants (especially the leaders) to analyse which MSC PIs are relevant to gain clarity about the specific Standard requirements they are aiming to improve upon. This means probing more deeply into the pre-assessment / baseline review report(s) and MSC methodologies to examine the issues raised and the specific wording of the SGs, which provide the operational interpretation of the Standard. Thus, the 60 SGs will tell you the minimum threshold that must be passed, whereas the 80 SGs will tell you the threshold for passing the Standard unconditionally.

Comparing the language used in these narrative performance requirements with the language used in the pre-assessment report or baseline review should enable you to determine the most appropriate PI and SGs for this part of your Action Plan. This should also enable you to identify any contributory factors that might also be relevant, which in turn might suggest the kinds of actions you might choose to take.

Given that you are embarking on developing an Action Plan, this probably means your fishery does not yet meet the MSC Standard and that one or more elements do not achieve the Standard set by the 60 SGs (meaning the fishery cannot be certified). Therefore, the primary aim is to ensure these elements pass the 60 threshold. However, we recommend that your plans aim to meet the requirements at the 80 SGs level to ensure that the aggregate scores under each principle also achieve 80 or higher. Without achieving those aggregate scores at the principle level, for all three principles, the fishery cannot be certified.

It is not compulsory to pass the MSC Standard unconditionally. The balance between aiming for scores of 60 or 80 on individual PIs is your choice, representing a calculated risk about whether the fishery is likely to achieve the aggregate scores to enable it to pass overall. You and your project partners will need to decide what makes sense in your system. You will also need to be aware that any PIs that fall between scores of 60 and 79 in a full assessment will have conditions attached to them and will need an Action Plan to deal with them in any case. It may be worth considering that the more actions undertaken in the fishery improvement stage prior to full assessment is likely to impact positively on your fishery's aggregate score at the principle level and therefore increase the fishery's likelihood of being certified.

The next section provides guidance about how to develop and implement actions to address the Standard requirements.

# 6. Action Plan elements *continued*

## 6.4 Actions to address Standard requirements

The actions column of Table 2 is where you will enter the tasks and actions that you will implement to address the Standard requirements you listed in the previous column. Frequently the Standard requirements (i.e. the 80 scoring guideposts) contain more than one factor of relevance to the PI. As demonstrated in the previous example relating to PI 1.2.4 on the adequacy of the stock assessment, we can see a number of factors that contribute to meeting the 80 SG. Each contributing factor has been underlined in the extract below:

*"The assessment is appropriate for the stock and for the harvest control rule, and is evaluating stock status relative to reference points."*

*"The assessment takes uncertainty into account."*

*"The assessment of stock status is subject to peer review."*

Any one of these factors might be significant to choosing actions. The pre-assessment report or baseline review should give you the information that will enable you to determine which of the factors might require action. So, for example, assuming we know other factors in the hypothetical Mauritanian smooth-mouth sea catfish fishery example, actions and tasks might include:

1.1. Develop a new stock assessment methodology appropriate for the Mauritanian smooth-mouth sea catfish fishery stock

1.2. Conduct the stock assessment

1.3. Commission a peer review of the stock assessment results.

As has been demonstrated, given the number of contributory factors, more than one action is linked to this Standard requirement. Equally, it is also worth noting that those actions (in this example) are also relevant to another significant performance indicator under principle 1, i.e. the one relating to actual stock status (PI 1.1.1). In our hypothetical fishery it is conceivable that the absence of an adequate stock assessment will have had important implications for the score assigned to the PI on stock status.

Without an adequate stock assessment, determining the sustainability of the stock is likely to be problematic, thus likely to generate a low or failing score against the Standard. Using this example, we can begin to see that sometimes some actions might also serve to meet the Standard requirements of more than one PI. Should the above actions be implemented, then the Standard requirements for PI 1.1.1 may also be met to a higher level, thus contributing to a higher aggregate score for principle 1.

Similarly, if we return to the underlined contributory factors, we can see that other PI scores may be affected if a new stock assessment methodology is developed and implemented:

– **PI 1.2.1 harvest strategy** – To score 80 or higher for 1.2.4 the stock assessment methodology needs to be adequate for the harvest control rule(s) applied in the fishery. It is conceivable that a new stock assessment methodology might inform managers and fishers about the adequacy of the harvest control rule and thus the performance of the harvest strategy itself. Again, this might lead to changes in the scoring for this particular performance indicator in a full assessment against the MSC Standard.

**Processes to help identify appropriate actions**
Experts or appropriately qualified fisheries consultants might be of help in leading or contributing advice about which actions to take or helping to develop the overall plan itself. Similarly, you may choose to host stakeholder workshops or consultations to seek not only their input, but also creative or innovative ideas that will work in your fishery system.

**Completing the Action Plan Template**
Give each action a number (like in the example on the previous page). Fill in the actions column of Table 2 of the template, against each Standard requirement list the individual actions with their corresponding number. Maintain the same number for each action throughout the plan.

**For example:**

| Standard requirement | Actions |
|---|---|
| **PI 1.2.4, SG80**<br><br>– The assessment is appropriate for the stock and for the harvest control rule, and is evaluating stock status relative to reference points.<br><br>– The assessment takes uncertainty into account.<br><br>– The assessment of stock status is subject to peer review. | 1.1. Develop a new stock assessment methodology appropriate for the Mauritanian smooth-mouth sea catfish fishery stock.<br><br>1.2. Conduct the stock assessment.<br><br>1.3. Commission a peer review of the stock assessment results. |
| **PI 1.1.1, SG80**<br><br>– It is highly likely that the stock is above the point where recruitment would be impaired.<br><br>– The stock is at or fluctuating around its target reference point. | 1.1. Develop a new stock assessment methodology appropriate for the Mauritanian smooth-mouth sea catfish fishery stock.<br><br>1.2. Conduct the stock assessment.<br><br>1.3. Commission a peer review of the stock assessment results.<br><br>1.4. Review the likely score for PI 1.1.1 in the light of the results of the stock assessment using the new methodology. |
| **PI 1.2.1, SG80**<br><br>– The harvest strategy is responsive to the state of the stock and the elements of the harvest strategy work together towards achieving management objectives reflected in the target and limit reference points.<br><br>– The harvest strategy may not have been fully tested but monitoring is in place and evidence exists that it is achieving its objectives. | 1.2. Conduct the stock assessment.<br><br>1.5. Review the harvest strategy in the light of the results of the stock assessment using the new methodology.<br><br>1.6. Adopt and implement a new harvest strategy if indicated by 1.5 above. |
| **PI 2.2.1**<br><br>– Reduce the risks posed by the selectivity of [xxx] fishing method to [abc] bycatch species. | 2.1 Design and test fishing gear aimed at reducing catches of [abc] species.<br><br>2.2 Analyse the effects in relation to bycatch species selectivity, as well as impacts on target and retained species catches.<br><br>2.2 Commission research into the potential effectiveness of non-fishing zones for reducing risks to [abc] species, including the effects on target and retained species catches. |

# 6. Action Plan elements *continued*

List the actions in order according to the priority of the Standard requirement (as indicated in the above example). Ideally pre-assessment reports or baseline reviews will have identified those PI or requirements that have the greatest bearing on aggregate scores against each principle under the Standard. You may decide to assign these issues high, medium or low priority in your plan. Cases where an action is needed to address multiple issues, or actions from which others cascade, or upon which the resolution of other issues depend, might indicate higher priority tasks and actions.

However, such decisions may also be influenced by your fishery's circumstances, the resources you have available to you and/or the participation of project partners and/or stakeholders.

**SMART actions**
When developing actions to meet the 80 SGs, in order for them to be as practical as possible for your purposes, apply the 'SMART' test to ensure that the actions are: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**greed, **R**ealistic and **T**ime bound.

**Specific** – be as clear and as succinct as possible, ensuring each action is particular to the Standard requirement you are aiming to achieve.

**Measurable** – is the action written in a way that makes it clear you will know when it has been completed, i.e. can you 'measure' its success?

**Agreed** – have crucial or appropriate project partners and/or stakeholders agreed to participate or otherwise facilitate the achievement of the stated action?

**Realistic** – is the action achievable, given a range of constraining or enabling factors?

**Time bound** – is there a realistic timeframe for the action? (See separate column of the Action Plan Template.)

**Cross-reference actions**
The cross-reference spreadsheet template described in Section 6.10 of this guidance document enables you to present the actions in simple list, cross-referencing each one to multiple PIs and assigning a high, medium or low priority to each. Thus you will have practical summary sheet that gives an overview of a complex Action Plan in a simple format.

## 6.5 Resources required

It is important to consider how much time a task or action may take in person-days, or indeed whether implementing the task may involve direct costs, such as employing consultants, external researchers, hosting workshops or purchasing equipment.

This column of the Action Plan Template enables you to provide an indication of the likely resources that may be involved in completing the action. This section should not include more general timeframe information such as how many months it may take to complete an action. That information can be inserted into the final column of the table under timescale / milestones.

## 6.6 Action lead(s)

A single organisation may have leadership over many or all aspects of the fishery improvement project. However, on individual actions or tasks, the overarching project leader may not be leading. This responsibility may rest with another person, group or organisation.

Leadership on a task means that an actual named person or group ensures that actions are undertaken as planned within agreed timescales. The action lead is also responsible for holding action partners to account. The person or group (e.g. working group, steering group or task force) undertaking this crucial role should be identified in this column.

## 6.7 Action partners

While the action lead may take responsibility for ensuring actions are undertaken as planned within agreed timescales, sometimes it may be the actual task of other actors in the fishery's system to implement the specific actions. These may be active partners in the fishery improvement project, in which case any and all action partners should be listed here against specific actions.

For example, the fishery certification client may be a local fisher association, but the action requires scientific expertise to develop an adequate stock assessment. While the action lead may be the project manager appointed by the fisher association, the scientists from the regional fisheries research laboratory are the ones that may have to develop the stock assessment method in collaboration with the client organisation. The research laboratory, indeed the individual scientists if known, should be listed as action partners, if they have become actively involved in helping to achieve the aims of the Action Plan by contributing their time, expertise or other resources.

## 6.8 Stakeholders

The MSC program depends on the input and involvement of stakeholders, i.e. those individuals or organisations that are affected by, or are interested in, the fishery's assessment and certification. The MSC Standard itself emphasises the importance of stakeholder engagement in the fishery management process. Thus, in any fishery improvement project stakeholders are considered to be important potential resources and contributors to the eventual success of an Action Plan.

Indeed, sometimes it may even be the responsibility of different stakeholders in the fishery's system to take action to improve an aspect of the fishery to meet the Standard, despite these stakeholders not being active partners in the fishery improvement project. In cases such as these, there may be additional actions that the project lead and/or partners may have to take to convince, influence, or otherwise effect in order to ensure the improvement action is completed.

In other cases, stakeholders may need to be consulted in order to complete an action or task effectively, or on the basis of a consensus in order for the ultimate outcome to successfully meet the Standard. If this is the case, relevant stakeholders should be listed here against any actions that specifically call for stakeholder consultation, participation, engagement or dialogue, in whatever form (e.g. workshops, meetings, etc).

**Stakeholders can include:**
– Government management agencies, including research, fisheries or environmental protection agencies.
– Commercial fishers, fishing sector groups, associations or other organisations.
– Commercial fishing industry groups.
– Recreational or sport fishers and their groups.
– Community groups.
– Environmental or conservation organisations.
– Commercial / post harvest sector.
– Scientists.

In this column of the Action Plan Template, include those stakeholders who are not already listed as project partners or co-leads, particularly if those stakeholders will influence the success or otherwise of the particular actions or tasks.

# 6. Action Plan elements *continued*

## 6.9 Timescale and milestones

Against every action, commit to an overall timescale to complete and achieve the outcome you have set yourselves. If appropriate, you may also wish to include intermediate milestones for component parts of the action.

For example, it may take six months from the beginning of the project to develop a new stock assessment methodology. However, within this timeframe, a milestone at the end of the first four months may be that all the relevant scientists have been consulted, data and background information pertinent to the methodology has been collated and the team (or scientist) is ready to begin developing the new model. We recommend that these are listed as individual milestones with specific dates attached, along with a specific completion date for the overall action.

## 6.10 Using the excel spreadsheet to cross-reference actions with PIs

If you have actions that meet multiple PIs, you may want to keep track of them by using the cross-reference spreadsheet we created in Excel (see snapshot in Section 5).

The cross-reference spreadsheet template enables you to present all the agreed actions in a simple list, cross-referencing each one to multiple PIs and assigning a high, medium or low priority to each. Each line also has space for a summary of action leads and partners and an indicative timeframe. This information can easily be transcribed from the Action Plan Template you have completed.

The Excel spreadsheet is offered as a practical summary sheet which provides an overview of the complex Action Plan in a relatively simple format. Use it only if you find it helpful.

| Actions | Timescale and milestones |
|---|---|
| 1.2. Conduct the stock assessment. | Overall timescale: Six months to 30 June 2010 |
| | Milestone 1: January 2010 – host preliminary workshop |
| | Milestone 2: February–April 2010 – consult relevant experts and stakeholders; collate available data |
| | Milestone 3: June 2010 – conduct assessment |

# 7. Evaluating Action Plan progress

## *You should regularly monitor and review progress of your implementation of the Action Plan.*

This should be a relatively straightforward process, guided by the information you have created in the 'Standard requirement' column (i.e. the outcomes you are seeking to achieve), the 'actions' column (i.e. the activities and tasks you are implementing to achieve the outcomes, and the 'Timescale / milestones' column (i.e. the overall timeframe and intermediate steps to fully completing the actions).

Table 3 of the Action Plan Template (see snapshot below) has been provided to help you systematically evaluate and/or report your progress against the timescales and milestones set out in the main body of the Action Plan.

If this additional template is practical and useful to you, simply transcribe (or cut and paste) the contents of the Standard requirement, actions and timescale / milestones columns contained in Table 2. Then use the progress / outcome column to report how well or completely the actions and tasks have been completed based on agreement from project participants. If necessary, discuss and revise the milestone or timescale. If not necessary, because actions themselves are revised or indeed complete, indicate such outcomes in the table.

**Table 3: Evaluation against Action Plan milestones**

| Standard requirement | Actions | Timescale / milestones | Progress / outcome | Revised milestone |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | | | | |
| 2. | | | | |
| 3. | | | | |
| 4. | | | | |
| 5. | | | | |

# 8. Reference material

## MSC principles and criteria for sustainable fishing

The MSC Standard has three overarching principles.

**www.msc.org/go/msc-environmental-standard-for-sustainable-fishing**

## MSC certification requirements

The MSC certification requirements provides a detailed operational interpretation of the MSC's principles and criteria for sustainable fishing to be used when assessing fisheries for MSC certification. The requirements set out the steps that accredited certifiers must take when they assess fisheries against the MSC Standard. It specifies:

– How to define a fishery (unit of certification)
– What can be involved in a pre-assessment
– The process for inviting comment at key stages of the assessment
– The contents of a draft and final certification reports
– How to conduct a surveillance audit.

**www.msc.org/go/msc-scheme-requirements**

## MSC Risk-Based Framework

The MSC Risk-Based Framework (RBF) is a set of assessment methods contained in the certification requirements. It is used in certain instances while carrying out an MSC fishery assessment when sufficient data are not available to score a given PI using the Standard set of SGs.

**www.msc.org/go/rbf**

## MSC chain of custody

The MSC chain of custody Standard for seafood traceability ensures that the MSC label is only displayed on seafood from a MSC certified sustainable fishery. If a fishery is certified as meeting the MSC environmental Standard for sustainable fishing, use of the MSC ecolabel on seafood products is permitted only where there has been independent verification that the product originated from a certified fishery. An independent certification against the chain of custody Standard provides this verification.

**www.msc.org/get-certified/supply-chain**

## Get Certified!

A 32 page, illustrated booklet providing guidance about the fisheries certification process.

**www.msc.org/go/get-certified-fisheries-pdf**

## Stakeholder's guide to the Marine Stewardship Council

An illustrated booklet providing guidance about how stakeholders can get involved in the fisheries certification process.

**www.msc.org/go/stakeholder-guide-to-msc**
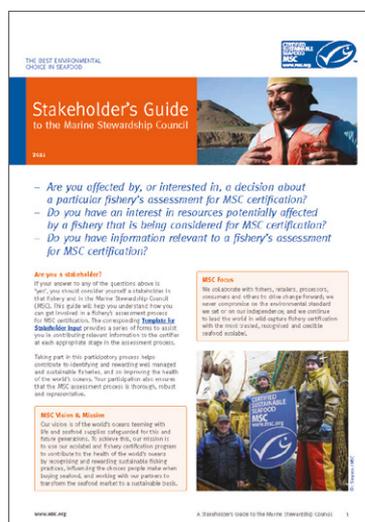
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