In-Transition to MSC Program

Independent verification and support for fisheries improving towards MSC certification

Marine Stewardship Council
The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is committed to working with all fisheries to support their progression to sustainability.

Small-scale fisheries and those in the Global South may face obstacles to achieving sustainability. The MSC’s Pathway to Sustainability supports these fisheries in their efforts to make their fishing activities more sustainable. One of the Pathway tools that can help fisheries move towards sustainability is the In-Transition to MSC (ITM) program.

This guide will introduce you to the ITM program and explain the steps required for your fishery to become eligible for the program.

For more information about the ITM program, to check if your fishery is within scope of the program, or how to enter the program please contact us at ITM@msc.org
Supporting fisheries committed to achieving MSC certification

The MSC Pathway to Sustainability is a collection of tools, guidance and support for small-scale fisheries and those in the Global South to help them access the MSC program.

Fisheries that are committed to achieving MSC certification often need to make numerous improvements before they are able to meet the requirements of the MSC Fisheries Standard. Many fisheries working towards MSC certification find it helpful to be part of a Fisheries Improvement Project (FIP) to implement the improvements needed.

The In-Transition to MSC program

Fisheries in FIPs can also take part in the In-Transition to MSC (ITM) program. The ITM program aims to support fisheries that are committed to achieving MSC certification and are making improvements to their environmental sustainability.

Entering the program will require independent verification of your fishery’s eligibility and continual progress. All verification is carried out by accredited independent organisations known as Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs).
Why should my fishery join the ITM program?

The ITM program can help your fishery prepare for full MSC assessment and eventual certification. There are many benefits to MSC certification, including enhancing your fishery’s reputation and gaining access to new markets.

Being part of the ITM program is a good way to show your fishery’s commitment to the MSC program and to demonstrate the progress that you are making to potential funders and supporters of fisheries in credible improvement projects.

Once in the ITM program, your fishery will be eligible to apply for funding from the MSC’s Transition Assistance Fund to support the implementation of an improvement action plan.

Above all, your fishery will become part of a collective effort to ensure healthy oceans for future generations.

Why should my fishery commit to getting MSC certified after the ITM program?

While in the ITM program, fisheries are not able to gain access to the supply chain and market in the same way as MSC certified fisheries. Only products from MSC certified fisheries are eligible to enter MSC Chain of Custody certified supply chains, use the MSC ecolabel and make business-to-business sustainability claims.

How can my fishery join the ITM program?

The ITM program is for fisheries committed to achieving MSC certification. To join, your fishery must have the intention to enter full assessment within three months of completing the program.

To be eligible for the ITM program, your fishery also needs to:

- be small-scale or located in the Global South
- meet the scope criteria of the MSC Fisheries Standard¹
- have recently completed an MSC pre-assessment
- develop an improvement action plan (sometimes known as a FIP workplan)

¹Visit msc.org/for-business/fishery-certification-guide to find out about the scope criteria, as set out in the MSC Fisheries Certification Process (msc.org/fishery-certification-requirements)
How will my fishery’s eligibility and progress in the ITM program be verified?

A CAB must confirm your fishery’s eligibility to enter the ITM program and verify continued progress as prescribed by the ITM Requirements and Guidance. This requires a contract between your fishery and an accredited CAB. A list of CABs accredited by Assurance Services International (ASI) to perform MSC assessment work can be found here: asi-assurance.org/s/find-a-cab – (search for ‘MSC Fisheries’).

Once your fishery is confirmed as being eligible, the CAB will inform the MSC.

Every year the CAB will review your fishery’s progress and determine whether it is on track to achieve the expected score changes for the performance indicators (PIs) that scored below 80 in the pre-assessment.

Progress verification may include site visits and consultation with stakeholders if the CAB thinks this is necessary.

Your fishery can stay in the ITM program for a maximum of five years, but this can be shorter, depending on the improvements that need to be made.

What happens if my fishery falls behind on progress during ITM?

If your fishery gets behind on overall progress, it means that you did not reach the expected score changes for more than half of the PIs as set out in your improvement action plan.

If your fishery’s progress is behind for two years in a row the CAB will carry out an additional verification within six months to see if you are back on track.

If your fishery is still behind on progress after the additional verification, it will be suspended from the ITM program.

Suspended fisheries can re-enter the program but will not be granted additional time.

Visit msc.org/fips
What does the ITM program involve?

Listed below are the steps of the ITM program and the different tools which fisheries must use throughout.

1. **Undergo an MSC Pre-assessment**
   - Must be carried out or verified by an accredited CAB.
   - Completed within the last three years.
   - Tools: Current version of the MSC Pre-assessment Reporting Template using the full scoring tables.

2. **Develop an Improvement Action Plan**
   - Plan aims to achieve at least a conditional pass against the MSC Fisheries Standard within five years.
   - Must be verified by an accredited CAB.
   - Fishery must identify an ITM Project Manager to coordinate the implementation of improvements.
   - Tools: MSC Improvement Action Plan Reporting Template.

3. **Implement Action Plan and Track Progress**
   - Progress reviewed annually by CAB for a maximum of five years.
   - ITM Project Manager provides the CAB with evidence of progress, including an updated BMT score, justification for score changes, and information needed to fill in the ITM Progress Reporting Template.
   - Tools: MSC Benchmarking and Tracking Tool (BMT), ITM Progress Reporting Template.

4. **Transition to full MSC Assessment**
   - Fishery has achieved all intended score improvements.
   - Fishery should enter full assessment within three months of completing of the ITM program.
   - A full MSC assessment is carried out by an accredited CAB.
   - Tools: Get Certified! A guide to the MSC fishery assessment process.
## ITM Toolbox

There are several MSC tools that must be used by your fishery to meet the eligibility criteria for the ITM program and track the progress required to achieve MSC certification. These tools are listed below.

More information on the MSC improvement tools can be found at: [msc.org/fishery-improvement-tools](https://msc.org/fishery-improvement-tools)

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<tr>
<th>TOOL</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MSC Pre-assessment Reporting Template</strong></td>
<td>The MSC Pre-assessment Reporting Template must be used by fisheries undertaking a pre-assessment.</td>
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<td>A pre-assessment is a provisional assessment against the MSC Fisheries Standard, based on a limited set of information provided by the fishery. It provides a baseline score of how the fishery performs relative to each of the 28 Performance Indicators (PIs).</td>
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<td>A pre-assessment also serves as a gap analysis showing potential obstacles to achieving MSC certification and can help to identify any areas that need improvement.</td>
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<td><strong>MSC Improvement Action Plan Reporting Template</strong></td>
<td>Fisheries should use the MSC Improvement Action Plan Reporting Template to develop their improvement action plan. This ensures quality and consistency in developing action plans for fisheries in the ITM program.</td>
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<td>An MSC improvement action plan (or workplan) is a detailed schedule of improvement actions linked to MSC PIs and designed to close gaps in the environmental performance of the fishery. It should include details on the resources required, the parties responsible for each action, the timescale on which the changes are expected, and how progress is monitored.</td>
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<td><strong>Benchmarking and Tracking Tool (BMT)</strong></td>
<td>The BMT is an Excel-based tool that benchmarks a fishery against the MSC Fisheries Standard at a specific point in time. This allows a fishery to track its progress against all MSC PIs for the duration of the period that the fishery is in a FIP.</td>
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<td>The BMT generates a BMT index that reflects how near or far the fishery is from meeting the Standard. The initial BMT index is based on the MSC pre-assessment scores.</td>
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<td>Fisheries should use information from their pre-assessment and improvement action plan to calculate the initial BMT index and expected BMT scores for each year of the ITM period.</td>
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<td><strong>ITM Progress Reporting Template</strong></td>
<td>The ITM Progress Reporting Template details the information needed by the CAB to verify the progress of your fishery.</td>
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<td>The template should be completed by the CAB with help from the ITM Project Manager as described by the ITM Program Requirements and Guidance.</td>
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How can my fishery apply to enter the ITM program?

If your fishery meets the eligibility criteria and you are interested in applying to enter the ITM program, please contact us at ITM@msc.org.

Applying for funding from the MSC

Any fishery that has been verified to meet the ITM entry requirements is eligible to apply for funding from the Transition Assistance Fund (TAF), which is a component of the MSC’s Ocean Stewardship Fund (OSF).

Please note that this is a separate application process from entering the ITM program, and applications will be subject to a review process.

Funding from TAF can be used to cover costs associated with implementing fishery improvements identified in the action plan and does not cover verification costs.

For further information on the application process and how to apply, please visit msc.org/transition-assistance-fund