



# In-Transition to MSC Program

Independent verification and support for fisheries improving towards MSC certification

**Marine Stewardship Council**

Some fisheries face particular obstacles to achieving sustainability.

As part of the MSC's Pathway to Sustainability, the In-Transition to MSC (ITM) program supports these fisheries in their efforts to make their fishing activities more sustainable. Through the program, fisheries benefit from access to MSC tools and expertise, providing a credible fast track to certification.

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 — including how to check if your fishery is within scope, and how to enter the program — please contact your local MSC office.



## Supporting fisheries committed to achieving MSC certification

The MSC Pathway to Sustainability is a collection of tools, guidance, and support that helps fisheries to access the MSC program.

Fisheries that are committed to achieving MSC certification often need to make 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 performance.

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 credible way to show your fishery's commitment to the MSC program and to demonstrate your progress to stakeholders.

All ITM fisheries that are aligned with the most recent version of the ITM requirements are listed on [the MSC's Track a Fishery website](#).

Once in the ITM program, your fishery will be eligible to apply for financial support from the MSC's Ocean Stewardship Fund. This includes [transition assistance funding to support the implementation of an improvement action plan](#).

Above all, your fishery will become part of a collective movement 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 MSC certified, and not able to use the MSC ecolabel. A fishery must complete its journey to certification before it can claim to be sustainably managed, according to the principles of the MSC Fisheries Standard.

## How can my fishery join the ITM program?

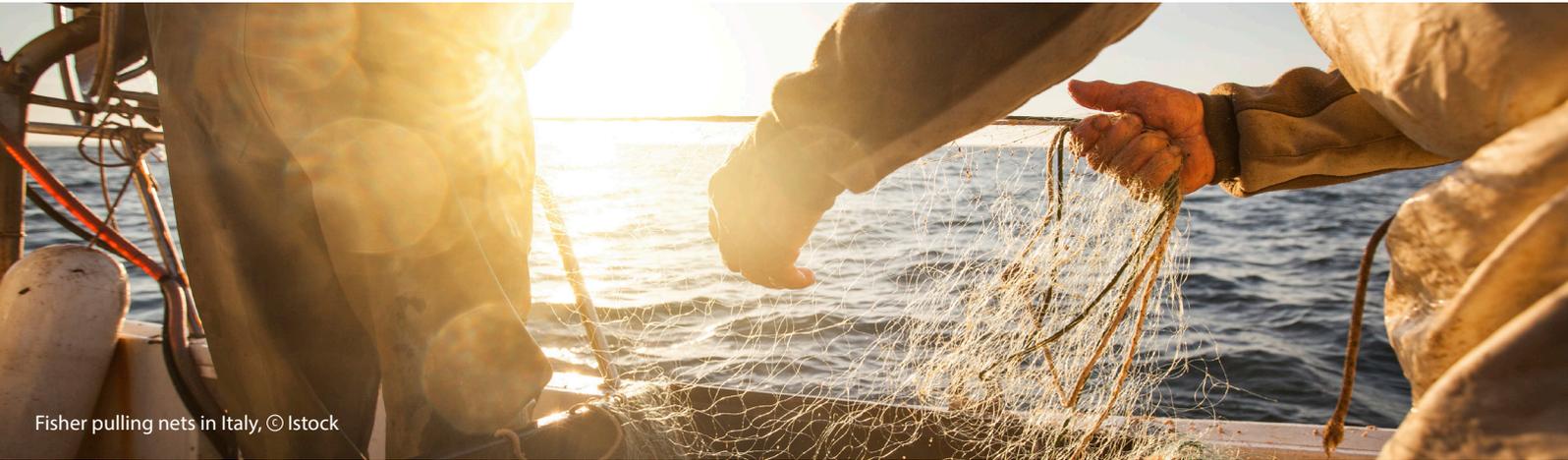
The ITM program is for fisheries committed to achieving MSC certification. To join, your fishery must have the intention to enter full assessment within five years.

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

- meet the MSC scope, as set out in the [MSC Fisheries Standard](#)<sup>1</sup>
- have recently completed an MSC pre-assessment, or have a valid MSC assessment report
- develop a credible improvement action plan (sometimes known as a FIP workplan).

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<sup>1</sup>As set out in the [MSC Fisheries Certification Process](#)



Fisher pulling nets in Italy, © Istock

## 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 to perform MSC assessment work can be found [on the MSC website](#).

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

The CAB will review your fishery's progress regularly, and determine whether it is on track to achieve the expected score changes for the performance indicators that scored below 80 in the pre-assessment or 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 its progress?

If your fishery does not make the expected progress over two progress verifications in a row, it must withdraw from the ITM program.

Fisheries can re-enter the program if they have addressed the cause of their withdrawal, but they will not be granted additional time.

## What does the ITM program involve?

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

**1**

### UNDERGO AN MSC PRE-ASSESSMENT OR ASSESSMENT

- Must be carried out or verified by an accredited CAB.
- Completed within the last three years.

**2**

### DEVELOP AN IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

- Plan aims to achieve a 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.

**3**

### IMPLEMENT ACTION PLAN AND TRACK PROGRESS

- Progress reviewed regularly 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 the 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 the ITM program.
- A full MSC assessment is carried out by an accredited CAB.

## ITM tools

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.

[Read more about the fishery improvement tools.](#)

TOOL	DESCRIPTION
<p><b>MSC Pre-assessment Reporting Template</b></p>	<p>The MSC Pre-assessment Reporting Template must be used by fisheries undertaking a pre-assessment.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p><b>MSC Fishery Improvement Action Plan Reporting Template</b></p>	<p>Fisheries should use this template to develop their improvement action plan. This ensures quality and consistency in developing action plans for fisheries in the ITM program.</p> <p>An MSC improvement action plan is a detailed schedule of improvement actions linked to MSC performance indicators, and is 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.</p>
<p><b>Benchmarking and Tracking Tool (BMT)</b></p>	<p>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 performance indicators for the duration of the period that the fishery is in a FIP.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p><b>ITM Progress Reporting Template</b></p>	<p>The ITM Progress Reporting Template details the information needed by the CAB to verify the progress of your fishery.</p> <p>The template should be completed by the CAB with help from the ITM Project Manager as described by the ITM Program Requirements and Guidance.</p>



Blue Swimming crab vessel in Indonesia ©Felix Sugianto

## 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 your local MSC office.

## Applying for funding from the MSC

ITM fisheries with verified action plans can apply for support from [the Transition Assistance Fund](#), part of the MSC's Ocean Stewardship Fund. This can help to cover the costs of implementing improvements as well as the costs association with progress verification.

Priority is given to small-scale fisheries and fisheries in developing economies.

The fund has a separate application process. Unlike ITM, applications can only be made during a limited annual period, and are subject to a review process.

For further information about accessing Ocean Stewardship Fund support, [contact your local MSC office](#).

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