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Ocean Stewardship Fund – Science and Research Fund

Guidance for Applicants

Applications are welcome for research projects that aim to overcome the barriers fisheries face in maintaining MSC certification. While a fishery must be performing at a high level to be certified, there is often room for improvement on specific areas. These are referred to as conditions that the fishery must resolve in order to maintain their MSC certification and/or achieve best sustainability practice. These improvements are often only possible through carrying out essential scientific research.

The Science and Research Fund (SRF) particularly welcomes projects that focus on research themes set by the MSC for each application round. The SRF is part of the MSC's Ocean Stewardship Fund.

1) The SRF Research Theme in 2025/26

a) This year, the SRF welcomes research proposals that deliver research in harvest strategies and/or harvest control rules which is essential for maintaining MSC certification. We are particularly interested in proposals that apply existing tools such as MERA (method evaluation and risk assessment).

b) Protecting fish stocks is core to MSC's mission, but it can be challenging for many fisheries to develop and implement effective harvest strategies and control rules. This is an aspect of the MSC Fisheries Standard which potentially constitutes a barrier to continuing certification for many fisheries. It is also an area in which the outcome and benefits of any research carried out have a high likelihood of extending to other fisheries.

c) Proposals must:
   - i) have a research focus on harvest strategies and/or harvest control rules
   - ii) be linked to an MSC certified fishery or fisheries
   - iii) be directly linked to conditions of certification against v2.01 of the MSC Fisheries Standard
   - iv) produce a resource that MSC can disseminate and make available to other fisheries in the MSC Program as an example of good practice in harvest strategies/harvest control rules

d) Priority will be given to proposals that have the potential to benefit multiple fisheries and which also have at least some match funding in place.

e) Preference will also be given to projects that involve close collaboration and data-sharing between researchers and the fishery(ies) linked to the project. It is strongly advised that projects involve researchers based in the same country in which the fishery(ies) operates.

2) Who can apply?

a) The SRF is open to submissions from academic institutions, governmental and non-governmental organisations, independent researchers and MSC certified fisheries. There must be a named individual responsible for the project and the lead organisation on the application must be the grant holder if the application is successful.

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b) MSC employees, trustees, agents, current contractors, and relatives of employees or trustees are ineligible.

c) Applicants can only submit one application for consideration and must not have received SRF funding within the last three years before the time of application.

d) All submissions must be applicable to an MSC certified fishery or fisheries. The status of any certified fishery can be confirmed on the MSC's Track a Fishery database. Applicants are encouraged to explore whether their institution has any existing collaborations with MSC certified fisheries that might benefit from project support within the remit of SRF.

e) Applicants must be able to accept the OSF Privacy Policy, which can be found on the OSF Grants Portal by clicking on the circle icon in the upper right corner with the applicant's initial on it.

f) Applicants must also note that their role in the project may potentially preclude their involvement in the subsequent assessment of any beneficiary fisheries linked to their proposal. For example, if the applicant is appointed as consultant to the fishery client or management agency, this would constitute a "self-review" conflict of interest and thereby prevent their later involvement as a CAB Team Member or a PRC reviewer for the fishery(ies) in question.

3) What kind of projects will the SRF fund?

a) The priorities for funding in 2025/26 are outlined in Section 1.

b) Projects must start between April and June and be no longer than two years in duration.

c) Projects can include a range of activities, such as:
   i) addressing gaps in information requirements that could prevent recertification.
   ii) completing a study or implementing a data collection program to provide information needed (as identified above) enabling the fishery to be recertified. This could, for example, be implementing a data collection protocol.
   iii) developing and testing tools to support fisheries to address barriers to maintaining certification.

4) What does the SRF cover?

a) Up to £50,000 is available to support project costs, which can include (but are not restricted to):
   i) the cost of hiring a consultant to undertake all or part of the project
   ii) internal staff salary costs directly incurred in the delivery of the grant
   iii) costs involved with data collection
   iv) the cost of implementing a new assessment tool
   v) costs involved with holding a meeting or workshop such as travel, catering and venue hire
   vi) hire or purchase of essential equipment
   vii) essential fixed asset costs. Any fixed assets/equipment purchased with SRF funds must be used to support fisheries in accordance with the charitable purposes of the grant after the term of funding has ended.

b) MSC's Indirect Cost Recovery Rate for SRF grants is 12%; up to 12% of SRF grants can be recovered by grantees to support their overhead costs.

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5) What should the project description include?

a) All applicants are required to provide a full description of their project. This description must only focus on those activities that would be funded by the grant and include the following sections:

b) **Project title**
Please provide a project title that conveys the main aims and focus of the project in a clear and succinct way. The title also needs to include the name of the fishery or fisheries involved in the project.

c) **Project summary**
Applicants must provide a brief overview of their project that summarises all the key elements: the introduction, aim, method, expected results and timeline. The project summary should be written in such a way that reviewers will be able to read it as it stands and understand the purpose of the project.

d) **Introduction**
Please give brief details about the background and context of the project, the fishery or fisheries involved and the particular issues that the fishery(ies) face with respect to the MSC Standard and intends to address through this project.

e) **Aim of the project**
Please provide one clear aim for the project that describes the broad change it is intended to create. Applicants will be required to provide more detail on the outputs and outcomes of the project that will demonstrate how the project has achieved this aim in the "Project Outputs and Outcomes" section of the Application Form.

f) **Method**
Please describe in detail the activities, processes and methods proposed for implementation of the project. For each activity, the method must describe the materials and equipment that would be used, how/when/where they would be used, the measurements and statistical analysis that would be carried out and who would be carrying out each element of the work. Applicants should also explain why they have selected the approach and techniques they are proposing (citing supporting publications where applicable) and explain how their method will help the project meet its aim. Applicants should explain how their method is appropriate for the specific fishery (or fisheries) involved e.g., if the method is suited to the scale of the fishery. Applicants should further consider the timescale in which the project must be completed and any fishing seasons relevant to the research.

g) **Expected results**
This section should indicate what results or outcomes applicants expect to achieve with their project and link this back to the project aim. The materials and methods used in the project must be able to generate the types of outcome that will address the project aim.

h) **Timing of Interim Report**
SRF Awardees are expected to provide the MSC with at least one Interim Report approximately midway through the project and a Final Report at the end of the project (see Section 9 "What happens if an SRF application is successful?"). Applicants are invited to propose a timing for the Interim Report that would suit the project plan.

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i) **Risk Assessment**
Applicants must carry out a risk assessment of their proposal and provide a brief summary of their risk assessment in their application. This summary must outline any actions that the risk assessment identified as being at high risk of non-delivery. For each high-risk action, applicants must provide details of any specific measures they are taking to mitigate the risks involved and how they will be monitoring these risks during the course of the project.

6) How should the "Project Outputs and Outcomes" table be completed?

a) As part of their proposal, applicants are required to complete a table outlining all of the project outputs and outcomes that would be funded by the grant.

b) **Action Number**: Put simply, this is just the number assigned by the applicant to a particular area of work within the project e.g., 1, 2, 3 or 1.1, 1.2 etc. Applicants must use this number when referring to this Action throughout their TAF application, including within "Roles and Responsibilities", "Match Funding" and "Grant Budget".

c) **Action Name**: Applicants must provide a brief descriptor of each Action for reference in the rest of their proposal.

d) **MSC PI(s)**: Applicants must state the Performance Indicator(s) of the MSC Fisheries Standard that the Action is linked to.

e) **Output(s) of this Action**: Each Action should have at least one output that will be delivered by the Action. Outputs are essentially products or services such as a meeting, workshop, new tool, information manual, data analysis etc. If an Action contains more than one Output, applicants must separate the Outputs and enter only one Output per row in the "Project Outputs and Outcomes" table. This will help to facilitate monitoring of the grant if the SRF application is successful.

f) **Outcome(s)**: Each output will deliver outcomes for the project. Outcomes are desired changes that will occur in the short and medium term as a result of outputs achieved and these individual changes will indicate progress towards the overall aim of the project. An outcome should be easy to understand and defined clearly as a single change e.g., improved performance against a performance indicator, reduced bycatch etc. If an Action contains more than one Outcome, applicants must separate the Outcome and enter only one Outcome per row in the "Project Outputs and Outcomes" table. This will help to facilitate monitoring of the grant if the SRF application is successful.

g) **Date of Completion**: Applicants must specify a Date of Completion for each Action that will take place after the proposed Start Date of the SRF grant and before the proposed End Date (i.e. within a maximum of 2 years).

7) How should the "Roles and Responsibilities" table be completed?

a) Applicants must provide details of all the key personnel and organisations that would be involved in delivering the Actions proposed in their SRF application. If the Lead Organisation is registered in a country outside the area in which the fishery operates, they must consult or otherwise involve researchers, fishers and other relevant stakeholders based in the area of fishing operations where possible.

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b) **Name of Individual**

c) **Name of Organisation**: please provide the individual's job title if self-employed.

d) **Role in this project (including specific Actions)**: for each individual or organisation, applicants must outline their role in the project and specify which Actions they would help to implement with reference to the "Action Number" (see 6b). If the individual or organisation would be involved with all aspects of the project, then applicants should just enter "All Actions" instead.

e) **Expertise and previous experience relevant to this project**: applicants are also encouraged to include an institution profile URL where applicable. If an organisation is providing match funding, applicants must include this information in the "Match Funding" part of the SRF application (see section 8 "What information should be submitted in the "Match Funding" table?)

8) What information should be submitted in the "Match Funding" table?

a) If any match funding or in-kind support is being provided for implementation of the SRF project, applicants should list each commitment individually and provide details. This applies to both internal (including in-kind) support being supplied by the Lead Organisation as well as external support from other organisations.

b) Applicants should only include details of match funding that has already been secured and they must provide supporting evidence for each commitment listed in the "Match Funding" table. This supporting evidence should be uploaded in the "Supporting Documents" section of the SRF application.

c) **Action Number**: for each commitment, applicants must specify which Actions would be supported with reference to the "Action Number" (see 6b). If the commitment is to support the project as a whole, then applicants should just enter "All Actions" instead.

d) **Action Name**: this should align with the Action Name as specified in the "Project Outputs and Outcomes" table.

e) **Organisation**: both the Lead Organisation and third parties can be listed here if applicable.

f) **Match Funding**: applicants should specify the total value of each commitment and indicate any contributions that are in-kind where applicable.

g) Applications with a higher degree of match funding committed in proportion to the SRF funding being requested, will receive higher scores in the assessment.

9) How should the "Grant Budget" table be completed?

a) Applicants must provide a detailed summary of their SRF request for funding with respect to each Action in their proposal (see section 4 "What does the SRF cover?") The currency of the Budget will be the same as the currency supplied by applicants at the top of their application.

b) All costs must be defined (i.e. contingencies/unexpected costs are not acceptable) and they must be incurred between the proposed Start and End Dates of the grant. If there is a risk that a cost may be incurred outside this timeframe (e.g. publication of a scientific paper), applicants are advised not to include this item..

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c) **Action number**: for each request, applicants must specify which Actions would be supported with reference to the "Action Number" (see 6b). If the requested funding is to support the project as a whole, then applicants should just enter "All Actions" instead.

d) **Action name**: this should align with the Action Name as specified in the "Project Outputs and Outcomes" table.

e) **Cost type**: applicants must select one cost type from the dropdown menu i.e. "3rd party personnel" (e.g. consultant, external project manager, collaborator or partner providing a service), "Equipment (fixed assets)", "Consumables", "Travel", "Meeting" (e.g. venue hire, catering, AV), "Internal Staff Costs" and "Other" for types of cost not covered elsewhere on the list e.g. equipment rental fees, stipends for fisher participation, publication fees.

f) **Cost description**: please be as precise as possible i.e. include % FTE, daily fee rate, number of days, unit cost etc. where applicable.

g) **Phase 1**: please outline expected costs between the Start Date of the project and the Interim Report date proposed in the "Project Description" section of the application.

h) **Phase 2**: please outline expected costs between the proposed Interim Report date and the End Date of the project.

i) The total of Phase 1 and Phase 2 will be calculated automatically. 12% of the SRF grant will be allocated to support any overhead costs that would be incurred by conducting this project. This 12% for overheads is also calculated automatically and then added to the total of Phases 1 and 2 to constitute the grand TOTAL of SRF funding requested in the application. Applicants must note that this value must not exceed £50,000 or equivalent in other currencies.

10) What supporting documents are required?

a) The following documents must be submitted in English:

   i) **CV of the Applicant/Project Lead(s)**

   ii) **Letter of support from the MSC certified fishery or fisheries linked to the project**
   The fishery or fisheries linked to the project must submit a signed and headed letter of support to accompany the SRF application. This letter can be written by any individual who works on behalf of the fishery(ies) to support their MSC certification e.g., from a government agency, fishing industry association, fishery cooperative, local management authority, Certificate Holder or the fishery itself. Applicants can identify these organisations by visiting Track a Fishery and viewing the fishery's MSC certificate. The letter must include details of how the fishery or fisheries will benefit from the SRF research proposed. The author must outline their confidence in how the SRF project will improve progress against specific Performance Indicators in the MSC Fisheries Standard.

   iii) **Supporting evidence for each match funding commitment listed under "Match Funding"**
   For each commitment listed within the "Match Funding" section of the Application Form, supporting evidence must be provided. This can take the form of a Grant Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding or Letter of Commitment if available.

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iv) **Letter of endorsement from a previous or current funder (if applicable)**
If the applicant has received grant funding before, they are welcome to submit a signed and headed letter of endorsement from the funder outlining their views of the applicant and their previous performance.

b) The following documents may be submitted in the applicant's language of origin if they are not available in English:

i) **Copy of latest audited accounts**
Applicants must provide a copy of their Lead Organisation's latest audited accounts, which should include a statement from an independent auditor regarding their view of the organisation's assets, liabilities, financial position and internal controls.

ii) **Proof of legal status of Lead Organisation**
Applicants must provide evidence of the legal status of the Lead Organisation to ensure it has the capacity to enter into a legally binding grant agreement. This could be a letter of the organisation's legal registration with the relevant Government or a copy of an official document attesting that the organisation is a recognised University or has a main objective to carry out research.

iii) **Details of Lead Organisation's Board members/management team and length of service**
Applicants must provide the names, positions and length of service of all the executive and non-executive members of the Lead Organisation's Board.

c) If applicants are unable to provide any of the documents in 10b above, they can attach a statement explaining why and provide alternative information to evidence the financial stability of their application.

11) How are applications assessed?

a) SRF applications undergo a competitive review process. The SRF has limited funds at its disposal for each funding round and can only fund the strongest applications that meet the SRF criteria most closely.

b) All SRF applications are assessed using standardised appraisal criteria by the MSC review panel including:
i) clarity of project aims, outputs and outcomes
ii) research impact
iii) feasibility of research
iv) Principal Investigator credentials
v) research team credentials

c) In addition to the quantitative assessment, reviewers will consider the following as priorities for funding:
i) the strategic importance of the fishery(ies)
ii) potential to benefit multiple fisheries
iii) match funding, both in-kind and external, already secured
iv) communication potential
v) involvement of local stakeholders

d) There will also be an assessment of the Lead Organisation's financial health based on the documents listed under 10b.

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e) The decision of the MSC's Executive Committee in respect of making SRF grant awards is final.

f) The MSC reserves the right to request modifications to applications, in consultation with applicants, before reaching a decision regarding whether to fund an application.

g) To ensure the best quality review of applications, the MSC's assessments remain confidential.

12) What happens if an SRF application is successful?

a) Successful SRF applicants will be notified in March 2026 and will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement contract, which will set out the terms and conditions of the grant awarded.

b) The Grant Agreement will define the grant disbursement schedule and triggers required (i.e., interim and final reports) to release stage payments.

c) SRF Awardees will be expected to provide:
   i) a narrative/financial interim report approximately midway through the project including performance against agreed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – essentially the outputs and outcomes outlined in the Application Form
   ii) a final narrative/financial report at the end of the project including performance against agreed KPIs, summary of expenditure and any supporting communication assets such as images, videos etc.

d) SRF Awardees will also be expected to:
   i) share all project data, research and knowledge produced as a result of their project with local researchers, fishers, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders. This includes providing open access to any published research articles resulting from the project.
   ii) keep the MSC informed of their communication plans so that MSC can help maximise the reach of the research.
   iii) provide the MSC with timely contributions towards any Q&A, blog or social media posts relating to their project or the SRF as a whole.

13) How will the funding be disbursed?

a) The Grant Agreement contract will define the grant disbursement schedule and triggers required (i.e., interim and final reports) to release stage payments.

b) The grant disbursement schedule in the Grant Agreement will be informed by the phasing of costs supplied by the applicant within the "Grant Budget" section of the Application Form.

c) Grant payments will be issued in three stages:
   i) Upon signing of the Grant Agreement (Phase 1 from "Grant Budget")
   ii) Upon satisfactory receipt of the Interim Grant Report (Phase 2 from "Grant Budget")
   iii) Upon satisfactory receipt of the Final Grant Report (10% of Phase 1 + 2 total)

d) MSC will retain a minimum of 10% of the total grant for disbursement at the end of the project, upon receipt of a satisfactory Final Grant Report.

14) Dissemination of personal data

a) SRF applicants are strongly advised to read the OSF Privacy Policy before submitting their application. This can be found on the OSF Grants Portal by clicking on the circle icon in the upper right corner with the applicant's initial on it.

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b) All applications will be held by the MSC on secure servers in the European Union (the EU) or in the UK (on Microsoft Azure Servers (UK) and Amazon Web Services (AWS) Europe (London Region)).

c) If an application is successful, details concerning the Award, including the Awardee's name, may be made publicly available on the MSC's website and other media outlets, e.g., annual report, a press release.

d) Applicants have the right to obtain a copy of their personal data that MSC holds, and to require MSC to correct errors in the personal data if it is inaccurate or incomplete. They also have the right at any time to require that MSC deletes their personal data. To exercise these rights, or any other rights under applicable laws, please contact OSF@msc.org.

15) How to apply

a) Interested applicants must contact their local MSC representative to begin the application process. Applicants are strongly advised to reach out at the earliest opportunity to ensure all requirements are met in good time before the application deadline.

16) Further questions

a) Please email any further questions to OSF@msc.org.