OCEAN STEWARDSHIP FUND – SCIENCE AND RESEARCH FUND (SRF)

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

Applications are welcome for research projects that aim to overcome the barriers that fisheries face in maintaining MSC certification. The Science and Research Fund (SRF) particularly welcomes projects that focus on priority research areas as directed by the MSC for each application round. The SRF is part of the MSC's Ocean Stewardship Fund.

1) Aims of the SRF

a) To address research in the MSC's annual priority research areas. For the 2022/23 funding round, the priority research area is:

   i) **Bycatch reduction**

      (1) Bycatch is a global fisheries challenge that requires all ocean stakeholders to work together to develop effective reduction strategies. Bycatch, or unwanted catch, includes undersized or surplus individuals for which fisheries do not have quota; endangered, threatened and protected species; and unwanted "non-target" species. Globally, it is estimated that 9.1 million tonnes (10.1% of annual catches) are discarded, and at least 20 million individuals of endangered, threatened and protected species interact with fisheries.[1]

      (2) Fishing activity with unwanted catch can be deemed sustainable as long as affected fish populations remain healthy. MSC certified fisheries must provide evidence they are not significantly impacting marine species and are actively minimising unwanted catch.

      (3) The SRF is prioritising research projects this year that will help fisheries close conditions related to unwanted catch. This might include researching gear modifications, spatial closures, impact assessments or new research programs.

      (4) Priority will be given to projects that aim to develop low-cost solutions and which have strong match funding in place.

b) To deliver research essential for fisheries to maintain best practice and MSC certification, including projects focusing on conducting research needed to close conditions (see 2e for more details)

c) To address barriers to maintaining certification

d) To fund research that has the potential to benefit a range of fisheries and circumstances.

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[1] FAO – A third assessment of global marine fisheries (2019)

2) Who can apply?

a) The SRF is open to submissions from academic institutions, independent researchers and MSC certified fisheries. There must be a named individual responsible for the project.

b) 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.

c) 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.

d) 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) 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.

f) Projects must also have the potential to benefit multiple fisheries or find solutions that could be replicated by other fisheries leading to wider impacts.

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

h) Applicants must be able to accept the SRF Grant Agreement and OSF Privacy Policy, which can be found on the [SRF web page](#).

3) What kind of projects will the SRF fund?

a) The priority for funding in 2022/23 is projects focusing on bycatch reduction (see 1a for details).

b) Projects must be no longer than two years in duration and 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) costs involved with data collection

iii) the cost of implementing a new assessment tool

iv) costs involved with holding a meeting or workshop such as travel, catering and venue hire

v) hire or purchase of essential equipment

vi) essential fixed asset costs (up to £2,500 of the total grant request to cover essential assets such as a computer, software, fishing gear etc.).

b) MSC's Indirect Cost Recovery Rate for SRF grants is 5%; up to 5% of SRF grants can be recovered by grantees to support their overhead costs.

5) What should the project description include?

a) All applicants are required to provide a full description of their project, which must be no more than five pages in length. 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 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 Section E of the Application Form (see Section 6 of the Application Guidance for more details).

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

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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) **Timeline of proposed SRF-funded work**
Applicants should also provide a basic timeline that includes all the significant milestones of their project, from the planning stages through to completion. Overall, the project's duration should be no longer than two years. This timeline must be supported by a more detailed project time plan, attached to the application form (see Section 7 "What must SRF applications include" for details).

i) **Timing of Interim Grant Report**
SRF Awardees are expected to provide the MSC with at least one Interim Grant Report approximately midway through the project and a Final Grant 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 Grant Report that would suit the project plan.

j) **Other activities in this project that would NOT be funded by this SRF grant (optional)**
This section is optional and an opportunity for applicants to outline any activities taking place within the same project that would NOT be funded by the SRF grant. This information will be used to aid MSC's understanding of the project as a whole.

6) What should be the project outputs and outcomes?

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. There are two reasons for this: firstly, so that the reviewers are able to make an informed assessment regarding the feasibility of the project and its potential for impact; and secondly, to help applicants develop a monitoring and evaluation tool that they can then use if their application is successful. Within this table are the following elements:

b) **Activity 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. Please use this number to refer to this part of the project throughout the application, including the project budget and Excel budget calculator.

c) **Name of activity**
Applicants are also advised to provide a brief descriptor of their activity for reference in the rest of their proposal.

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

e) **Output(s) of this activity**
Each activity should have at least one output that will be delivered by the activity. Outputs are essentially products or services such as a meeting, workshop, new tool, information manual, data analysis etc.

f) **Outcome(s) (what will this activity achieve?)**
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.

7) What must SRF applications include?

a) Completed applications must be submitted in English to OSF@msc.org and include:

i) **A completed Application Form (which can be downloaded from the SRF web page)**

ii) **A signed Declarations Form (which can be downloaded from the SRF web page)**

iii) **Excel Grant Budget Calculator (which can be downloaded from the SRF web page)**

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

v) **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.

vi) **Detailed project time plan**
Applicants must provide a separate time plan for their project, which outlines all the activities in detail and when each activity will be carried out in the two-year grant period. The time plan must also include any significant milestones and the grant report schedule. It should further indicate how much of the project will be

completed in the first year of the grant versus how much will be completed in the second year.

vii) **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 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 organisation**
Applicants must provide evidence of the legal status of their 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 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 organisation's Board.

c) If applicants are unable to provide any of the documents in 8b above, they can attach a statement explaining why and provide alternative information to evidence the financial stability of their application.

8) How are applications assessed?

a) All SRF applications are assessed using standardised appraisal criteria by the MSC review panel. The decision of the MSC's Executive Committee in respect of making SRF grant awards is final. The MSC reserves the right to request modifications to applications, in consultation with applicants, before reaching a decision regarding whether to fund an application. To ensure the best quality review of applications, the MSC's assessments remain confidential.

b) Applications will be assessed on a range of criteria including:
i) fit to the SRF criteria (see Section 1 "Aims of the SRF")
ii) clarity of the project outcomes
iii) feasibility of implementation
iv) qualifications and track record of the project team
v) potential for wider impact (beyond a single fishery)
vi) demonstrated enthusiasm for external communications of the project

vii) evidence of matched funding and/or in-kind support
viii)	financial risk assessment.

9) What happens if an SRF application is successful?

a)	Successful SRF applicants will be notified in March 2023 and will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement contract, which will set out the terms and conditions of the grant awarded. The Grant Agreement will define the grant disbursement schedule and triggers required (i.e., interim and final reports) to release stage payments. A copy of the SRF Grant Agreement can be found on the SRF web page.

b)	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.

c)	SRF Awardees will also be expected to:
i)	share their research findings with a wider audience and keep MSC informed of their plans for such communication so that MSC can help maximise the reach of the research.
ii)	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.

10) 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 Budget provided in the Excel Grant Budget Calculator.

c)	Grant payments will be issued in three stages:
i)	Upon signing of the Grant Agreement
ii)	Upon satisfactory receipt of the Interim Grant Report
iii)	Upon satisfactory receipt of the Final Grant Report

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.

11) Dissemination of personal data

a)	SRF applicants are strongly advised to read the OSF Privacy Policy (which can be found on the SRF web page) before submitting their application.

b)	All applications will be stored on MSC's secure servers and internally reviewed to help MSC make a decision. 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.

c) 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.

12) Further questions

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