



CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD

Marine Stewardship Council

MSC Chain of Custody Standard: Group Version

Version 1.0, 20 February, 2015



About the Marine Stewardship Council

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is a global organisation that sets standards for sustainable fisheries and supply chain traceability (Chain of Custody).

Vision

The MSC's vision is of the world's oceans teeming with life, and seafood supplies safeguarded for this and future generations.

Mission

The MSC's mission is to use our ecolabel and fishery certification programme to contribute to the health of the world's oceans by recognising and 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.

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The official language of this standard is English. The definitive version is maintained on the MSC's website www.msc.org. Any discrepancy between copies, versions or translations shall be resolved by reference to the definitive English version.

The MSC prohibits any modification of part or all of the contents in any form.

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Introduction

A. Responsibility for this standard

Responsibility for this standard is held by the Marine Stewardship Council. Readers should verify that they are using the latest copy of this (and other related documents). The definitive version of the standard is maintained on the MSC's website at www.msc.org.

Versions issued

Version No.	Date	Description of amendment
1.0	20 February 2015	First publication

B. About the MSC CoC Default Standard

This document contains mandatory requirements for a group of supply chain companies seeking MSC Chain of Custody (CoC) certification. Non-mandatory guidance has been developed to help interpret and apply the requirements in this standard.

C. General introduction

Chain of Custody certification

CoC certification provides credible assurance that products sold with the MSC ecolabel or trademarks originated from a certified fishery and can be traced throughout the supply chain to a certified source.

Companies certified against the MSC CoC Standard are audited by a third-party accredited certification body and are subject to periodic surveillance audits over the three year period of a CoC certificate.

Use of MSC's Chain of Custody by other standard-setting organisations

The MSC CoC Standard is made available for use by selected organisations that operate certification schemes. At the time this standard was issued, the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) has elected to use the MSC CoC Standard for all certified seafood products originating from ASC-certified farms. This allows supply chain companies to handle both MSC-certified and ASC-certified seafood with a single CoC audit, although separate CoC certificates are issued, and each standard has distinct trademarks. If other certification schemes choose to also use the MSC CoC Standards in the future, this information will be published on the [MSC website](http://www.msc.org).

D. Scope and options for Chain of Custody certification

Any organisation trading or handling products from a certified fishery or farm is eligible to have Chain of Custody (CoC) certification. CoC certification is a requirement for each organisation in the supply chain taking legal ownership of certified products that wishes to make a claim on the certified source, up until the point where products are packed into consumer-ready-tamper-proof-packaging.

The MSC has one Default Chain of Custody Standard and two variants: one for Group organisations and one for Consumer-Facing Organisations (CFOs). Further information on eligibility for each version can be found in the **MSC CoC Certification Requirements (section 6.2)** and in the introduction to each standard.

Scope of CoC Standard: Default Version

This standard is applicable to any organisation that has a single site (physical location) handling or trading certified products. The Default CoC Standard is also applicable for any organisation that has numerous sites handling certified products, but where each site is individually audited against the CoC Standard. In this case a single certificate will be issued, called a multi-site certificate. Examples of companies that might be certified against the Default CoC Standard include a single site trading company, or a processor with several factory locations.

Some clauses of the standard (such as purchasing from certified suppliers) may not apply where the organisation is a farm or a fishery.

CoC Standard: Group Version

The Group version of the CoC Standard applies to any organisation handling certified products at many sites, where each site is not individually audited by the certifier. This can be more efficient than multi-site certification for organisations with many sites, or groups of organisations that join together. The organisation designates a central office function that establishes internal controls and is responsible for making sure every site complies with the CoC Standard. The certifier audits the central office and a sample of sites, instead of auditing every site. A single CoC code and certificate are shared across the group. Examples of organisations that might be

Introduction *continued*

certified against the Group CoC Standard might include a large wholesaler with several dozen warehouse locations, or a restaurant chain (having decided not to be certified against the CFO Standard).

Some clauses of the standard (such as purchasing from certified suppliers) may not apply where the organisation is a farm or a fishery.

CoC Standard: Consumer-Facing Organisation (CFO) Version

The CFO version of the CoC Standard applies to any organisation that serves or sells seafood to the final consumer (retail or foodservice) and meets other specific eligibility criteria. Consumer-Facing Organisations (CFOs) can be single sites or have numerous locations, and one CoC code is issued for all sites under the organisation's management system that handle or trade certified products. Similarly to Group CoC, the certifier audits a sample of the total number of sites in the certificate. Examples of CFOs include restaurants, restaurant chains, fishmongers, retailers with fish counters, and caterers.

E. Eligibility for CoC Standard: Group Organisation Version

Organisations are eligible to be certified against the Group version of the CoC Standard only if all the following criteria are met:

- The proposed group's central office is a legal entity with whom a contract can be made.
- All sites undertake substantially similar activities as defined by MSC Chain of Custody activities; or if they do not, the group can be stratified for sampling..
- The entire group operation is within one geographic region; or if they are not, the group can be stratified for sampling.
- The same written language is used at all sites and can be read by all site managers or, if translations are provided, adequate document control procedures are in place to ensure version consistency across different languages.
- The proposed group's central office is capable of objectivity in audit and decision making.
- The proposed group's central office can demonstrate through their application an understanding of the Group CoC Standard such that it is likely that they will be able to qualify for certification.

Note: Some organisations will be eligible to use the Default, Group and/or CFO version of the CoC Standard. Organisations are advised to check their eligibility against all CoC certification options (i.e., Default, Group, CFO) available in section **6.2 of the CoC Certification Requirements** before discussing the best option with their certifier.

F. Effective date

The effective date for version 1.0 of the Group CoC Standard is 1st September 2015. All CoC audits carried out on or after this date against the Group CoC Standard must use this version of the standard.

G. Review date

The next planned review of this standard will commence in 2017. The CoC Standard review is conducted in accordance with the ISEAL Standard Setting Code.

The MSC welcomes comments on the CoC Standard at any time and input will be incorporated into the next review process. Please submit comments by mail or **email** to the contact details provided in this document.

More information about the MSC policy development process and MSC Standard Setting Procedure can be found on the **MSC Policy website** and **MSC website**.

H. Normative documents

Concepts, terms and phrases are defined in the MSC & MSC I Vocabulary.

Principle 1

Certified products are purchased from certified suppliers

- 1.1 The organisation shall have a process in place to ensure that all certified products are purchased from certified suppliers.

Guidance 1.1

Certified products refer to any seafood that originates from certified fisheries or farms and is identified as certified.

This excludes seafood products in ‘consumer-ready tamper-proof’ packaging (i.e., sealed and labelled products that will be sold to final consumers in the same form, such as individual cans of tuna). For a full definition of consumer-ready tamper-proof, refer to section **6.1 of the CoC Certification Requirements**.

A certified supplier can be a certified fishery or farm, or a supplier with a valid Chain of Custody (CoC) certificate. Where products are not purchased (e.g., for fisheries or farms that harvest directly) this clause will not apply.

- 1.2 Organisations handling physical products shall have a process in place to confirm the certified status of products upon receipt.

Guidance 1.2

Documentation received with certified products needs to clearly identify the product as certified. This could include delivery notes, invoices, bills of lading, or electronic information from the supplier. This is to help ensure that if a supplier replaces certified seafood with non-certified seafood (e.g., if stock runs out), this will be detected by the receiving company.

If a supplier uses an internal system (such as barcodes or product codes) to uniquely identify certified products on documents, the receiving company needs to understand the supplier’s description in order to confirm the product is certified.

If associated records do not clearly identify products as certified, it is not sufficient to rely only on physical product labelling (e.g., an MSC ecolabel on a box) to confirm the certified status.

- 1.3 Organisations with certified products in stock at the time of the initial certification audit shall be able to demonstrate that these products were purchased from a certified supplier and comply with all relevant sections of this standard before they can be sold as certified.

Guidance 1.3

Certified product in inventory at the time of initial certification will need to be traceable back to a certified supplier or fishery / farm as per **principle 4**. The organisation will also need to demonstrate that any certified product in inventory is identifiable and segregated as per **principles 2 and 3**.

Principle 2

Certified products are identifiable

- 2.1 Certified products shall be identified as certified at all stages of purchasing, receiving, storage, processing, packing, labelling, selling and delivery.

Guidance 2.1

It is recommended that certified products are identifiable as certified on the physical product as well as on the accompanying traceability records. This can be done by placing a sign or label on the package, container, or pallet.

Organisations can use a variety of methods to identify certified products, including acronyms (e.g., 'MSC'), the CoC code, or another internal system of identification.

Where it is impossible or impractical to label physical products (e.g., fish in a defrosting tank) the organisation will need to demonstrate how the product can be linked with associated traceability or inventory records that specify the certified status.

- 2.2 If products are sold as certified, they shall be identifiable as certified on the line item of the related invoice, unless all products on the invoice are certified.

Guidance 2.2

Identifying certified products on the line item of the invoice can be done in a variety of ways; for example, using the initials MSC or ASC in the product description, using the CoC code, or using an internal unique product code that corresponds to a certified product.

If all items on an invoice are certified, it is acceptable to only have certified identification (e.g., the CoC code) at the top of the invoice. This requirement aims to help make it clear to a buyer and to the certifier which products on any given invoice were sold as certified.

- 2.3 The organisation shall operate a system that ensures packaging, labels, and other materials identified as certified can only be used for certified products.
- 2.4 The organisation shall only promote products as certified or use the ecolabel, logo, or other trademark(s) if it has been granted approval to do so under the terms of the licence agreement (ecolabel@msc.org).

Guidance 2.4

Use of the acronyms (e.g., 'MSC' or 'ASC') or the full name of the standard (e.g., Marine Stewardship Council) on products or traceability records in a purely business-to-business nature to identify products is permitted without a license agreement.

Any other use of the ecolabel, logo, or other trademarks requires a license agreement with MSC, the MSC's licensing function.

During an audit, the organisation may be asked to show evidence of approval to use trademarks. This can be done through showing the valid license agreement and / or evidence of approval emails received from MSC.

Principle 3

Certified products are segregated

- 3.1 There shall be no substitution of certified products with non-certified products.
- 3.2 Certified and non-certified products shall not be mixed if the organisation wishes to make a claim about these certified products, except as in **3.2.1**.
 - 3.2.1 If non-certified seafood is used as an ingredient in certified products, the organisation shall follow the MSCCI Certified Ingredient Percentage Rules, available on the **MSC website**.

Guidance 3.2.1

In some specific cases, non-certified seafood can be used as an ingredient in certified products. However, special restrictions apply, which are included in the MSCCI Certified Ingredient Percentage Rules.

- 3.3 Products certified against different recognised certification schemes that share MSC CoC shall not be mixed if the organisation wishes to sell the product as certified, unless:
 - 3.3.1 The organisation has specific permission from MSCCI, or
 - 3.3.2 The same product is certified against multiple recognised certification schemes that share MSC CoC.

Guidance 3.3

This applies to any other standard, such as the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), which uses the MSC CoC Standard for supply chain traceability. MSC-certified fish and ASC-certified fish cannot be mixed at any point in the supply chain if they are to be sold as certified.

Clause **3.3.1** refers to organisations that have specific permission from MSCCI to combine MSC and ASC-certified seafood in consumer-facing products with both trademarks. A current list of other recognised schemes sharing the MSC's CoC Standard can be found on the **MSC website**.

Principle 4

Certified products are traceable and volumes are recorded

- 4.1 The organisation shall have a traceability system that allows:
- 4.1.1 Any product or batch sold as certified to be traced back from the sales invoice to a certified supplier.
 - 4.1.2 Any products identified as certified upon receipt to be traced forward from point of purchase to point of sale.

Guidance 4.1.2

Clause 4.1.2 does not apply if a company receives certified material from a supplier but never identifies this as a 'certified' product upon receipt (e.g., if a supplier ships an MSC certified product but the customer didn't order it as certified).

Any product identified as a certified item upon receipt needs to be traceable through to final sale, even if it is not eventually sold as certified.

- 4.2 Traceability records shall be able to link certified product at every stage between purchase and sale, including receipt, processing, transport, packing, storage, and dispatch.
- 4.3 Records of certified products shall be accurate, complete, and unaltered.
- 4.3.1 Where records are changed, these changes shall be clearly documented including the date and name or initials of the person making the changes

Guidance 4.3.1

Where information or records provided by the organisation during audits or other requests is not consistent with information provided at a different point in time, the certifier may issue non-conformities. If records are altered by the organisation to reflect necessary adjustments (such as returned orders), these changes should be clearly recorded.

- 4.4 The organisation shall maintain records that allow quantities of certified products bought and sold (or received and dispatched) to be calculated, with the exception of 4.4.1 below.

Guidance 4.4

Clause 4.4 applies to any products identified as certified or eligible to be sold with the certified trademarks. If seafood is purchased as certified but then converted to a non-certified status (and will never be sold as certified), then records would only need to show the volumes of product that were converted to a non-certified status. Further volume records (e.g., for subsequent processing of non-certified items) do not need to be maintained.

Organisations selling / serving to final consumers do not need to record volumes sold, but do need to record certified volumes purchased or received. All records should be maintained for 3 years as per clause 5.3.

- 4.4.1 Volumes of certified product sold or served to final consumers do not need to be recorded.

Principle 4 *continued*

Certified products are traceable and volumes are recorded

4.5 If processing or packing / repacking occurs, records shall allow conversion rates for certified outputs from certified inputs over any given batch or time period to be calculated.

4.5.1 Conversion rates for processing of certified products shall be justifiable and accurate.

Guidance 4.5.1

The intent of this clause is to prevent cases where conversion rates are extremely high or low and could indicate potential for substitution of certified and non-certified product. Normal fluctuations in conversion rates due to product quality, seasonality, processing efficiency, etc. are expected.

To verify cases where conversion rates are potentially allowing room for mislabelled product, the certifier may check records against product specifications, similar products being processed, or the organisation's historical processing records.

4.6 The organisation shall only sell as certified the products covered by its scope of certification.

Guidance 4.6

The requirements for changes to scope – that cover new species, activities or product certified against other recognised certification schemes that share MSC CoC – are given in **5.2.1.3**, **5.2.2.1** and **5.2.2.2**.

Principle 5

The organisation has a management system

5.1 Management and training

- 5.1.1 The organisation shall operate a management system that addresses all requirements in this standard.

Guidance 5.1.1

The management system includes the systems, policies and procedures used to ensure that the organisation complies with the CoC Standard. The extent of documentation required for the management system may vary, depending on the size of the organisation, the type of activities, the complexity of processes, and the competency of personnel.

For very small or straightforward operations, no written documentation may be needed as long as the responsible staff understand and can implement procedures related to the CoC Standard.

- 5.1.2 The organisation shall ensure that responsible personnel are trained and competent in order to ensure conformity with this standard.

Guidance 5.1.2

Responsible personnel refers to individuals within an organisation who are responsible for making decisions or carrying out procedures related to the MSC CoC Standard.

Most organisations will need to conduct some type of training to ensure that employees understand CoC requirements and follow internal procedures to keep certified products segregated, identifiable, and traceable. However, for companies with simple processes, it may be adequate to provide an employee handbook, instructions, and / or posters in food preparation areas.

- 5.1.3 The organisation shall maintain records that demonstrate conformity with this standard for a minimum of 3 years, or for the full duration of the certified products' shelf life if longer than 3 years.

Guidance 5.1.3

Records that demonstrate conformity with the CoC Standard typically include purchase and sale records of certified products, internal traceability and production records for certified products, and internal procedures or training records.

- 5.1.4 The organisation shall appoint an individual (MSC contact person) who will be responsible for all contact with the certifier and for responding to any requests for documentation or information related to CoC conformity.

Guidance 5.1.4

The MSC contact person is responsible for communicating with the certifier and ensuring the organisation responds to any requests for information or documentation. If the contact person changes, the certifier needs to be notified as per clause 5.2.1.

Principle 5 *continued*

The organisation has a management system

5.2 Reporting changes

5.2.1 The organisation shall inform their certifier in writing or by email within 10 days of the following changes:

5.2.1.1 New MSC contact person within the organisation, as specified in **5.1.4**

5.2.1.2 Certified products received from a new certified supplier.

5.2.1.3 New certified species received.

Guidance 5.2.1.3

Notification by email or writing needs to be sent to the certifier within 10 days of receiving a new certified species or within 10 days of receiving the first delivery of certified products from a new supplier.

5.2.2 The organisation shall receive written approval from their certifier before making the following changes:

5.2.2.1 Undertaking a new activity with respect to certified products, which is not already included in the scope of certification.

Guidance 5.2.2.1

New activities include for example trading, distribution, secondary processing, and storage. A full list of activities can be found in Table 5 of the **MSC CoC Certification Requirements**.

5.2.2.2 Extending the scope of CoC to sell or handle products certified against different recognised certification schemes that share MSC CoC.

Guidance 5.2.2.2

For example, if the current CoC certificate covers only MSC-certified products, the organisation would need to receive approval from the certifier before selling ASC-certified products as certified.

5.2.2.3 Using a new subcontractor that does contract processing or packing/ repacking for certified products.

Guidance 5.2.2.3

If the organisation wishes to add a new storage subcontractor, this will need to be updated on the record of subcontractors as per **5.3**, but the certifier can be notified at the next audit (no prior approval is needed).

Principle 5 *continued*

The organisation has a management system

5.3 Subcontractors, transport and contract processing

- 5.3.1 The organisation shall be able to demonstrate that all subcontractors handling certified product comply with the relevant requirements of this standard.
- 5.3.2 The organisation shall maintain an up-to-date record of the names and addresses of all subcontractors handling certified products, excluding transport companies.
- 5.3.3 The organisation shall inform any non-certified contract processors that they will be required to have an onsite audit by the certifier to verify compliance with relevant sections of the CoC Standard prior to use of the contract processor and at least once per year afterwards.
- 5.3.4 If subcontracted storage facilities are used, the organisation shall have the ability to request certified product records from subcontractor storage facilities and to allow certifiers access to certified products at any point in time.

Guidance 5.3.4

A signed agreement is not needed for storage subcontractors, provided the organisation has the ability to request records (i.e. receipt and dispatch records) from the subcontracted storage facility.

The organisation needs to also be able to grant the certifier access to the physical certified product at any point in time, even if it is currently being held in offsite third-party storage. If access to the storage site is restricted for any reason, the certified product may need to be taken offsite to be inspected by the certifier if there are product integrity concerns.

- 5.3.5 The organisation shall have a signed agreement with all subcontractors that transform, process, or repack certified products, which covers the following points:
- 5.3.5.1 The subcontractor has systems in place to ensure traceability, segregation, and identification of certified products at every stage of handling; and
- 5.3.5.2 The subcontractor will allow the MSC, the certifier, and the MSC's accreditation body to have access to the premises and any records related to certified products upon request.

Guidance 5.3.5.2

Signed agreements are needed for any contract processor or repacker, even if these subcontractors have their own CoC certification.

Principle 5 *continued*

The organisation has a management system

- 5.3.6 The organisation shall not knowingly ship or receive product transported on, or received from vessels listed on Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMO) blacklists.

Guidance 5.3.6

The intent of this requirement is to help ensure that any certified company using subcontracted transport, or receiving certified fish directly, does not utilise vessels that have been engaged in illegal, unreported, or unregulated (IUU) fishing activity. The RFMOs maintain up to date lists of IUU vessels on their websites. Several consolidated lists exist, for instance <http://iuu-vessels.org/iuu>.

- 5.3.7 Organisations that use contract processors or perform contract processing of certified products shall maintain records of all contract-processed certified products, including:
- 5.3.7.1 Volumes and product details received;
 - 5.3.7.2 Volumes and product details dispatched;
 - 5.3.7.3 Dates of dispatch and receipt.
- 5.3.8 Certified contract processors shall record the name and CoC code for all certificate holders for whom contract processing of certified products has been provided since the previous audit.

5.4 Non-conforming product

Guidance 5.4

Non-conforming product relates to any product that is identified as certified or labelled with trademarks, but which cannot be proven to come from a certified source. Non-conforming product could be discovered internally by staff, by the supplier, or in some cases could be detected based on information received from the certifier, the MSC, or other parties.

Where a certified product is ordered but the supplier delivers non-certified product, and this is discovered on receipt and the product is returned, the non-conforming process is not applicable.

- 5.4.1 The organisation shall have a process for managing non-conforming product that includes the following requirements:
- 5.4.1.1 Immediately cease to sell any non-conforming product as certified, until the certified status has been verified in writing by the certifier.
 - 5.4.1.2 Notify the certifier within 2 days of detecting the non-conforming product and provide the certifier with all necessary information to verify the origin of the non-conforming product.
 - 5.4.1.3 Identify the reason the product is non-conforming and implement measures to prevent re-occurrence where necessary.
 - 5.4.1.4 For any non-conforming product which cannot be verified as coming from a certified source, re-label or repack this product to ensure it is not sold as certified.

Principle 5 *continued*

The organisation has a management system

Guidance 5.4.1.4

If the product cannot be verified as coming from a certified fishery or certified farm, it cannot be sold as certified or with trademarks.

- 5.4.1.5 If non-conforming product has already been sold or shipped as certified, notify all affected customers (excluding final consumers) within 4 working days of detecting the issue.
- a. This communication shall include the circumstances of the non-conforming product and all details of the affected products or batch(es).
 - b. Maintain records of these notifications.

Guidance 5.4.1.5

Final consumers affected by non-conforming product do not need to be notified.

5.5 Requests for traceability and supply chain assurance

- 5.5.1 The organisation shall cooperate with all MSC and certifier requests for traceability documents or sales and purchase records for certified products.

- 5.5.1.1 Documents shall be provided within 10 days of request.

Guidance 5.5.1.1

Financial details may be removed but records need to be otherwise unaltered. Records are to be submitted in English if so requested by the MSC.

If an extension is required, a request can be made in writing to the MSC, and if it is not approved, the original 10 day deadline must be met. If data is not submitted to the MSC within specified timeframes, the MSC may request that action be taken by the certifier, including issuing of non-conformities.

- 5.5.2 Organisations shall allow the MSC, the certifier or a representative from the accreditation body to collect samples of certified products from their site for the purposes of DNA or other product authentication testing.

- 5.5.2.1 Where a product authentication test identifies the product as a different species or as originating from a different catch area than as identified, the organisation shall:

- a. Investigate the potential source of the issue.
- b. Present the certifier with findings from this investigation and, where non-conformities are found, a corrective action plan to address these.
- c. Cooperate with further sampling and investigation.

Principle 5 *continued*

The organisation has a management system

5.6 Specific requirements for under-assessment product ¹

Guidance 5.6

This section only relates to fisheries, farms, or named members of a fishery / farm client group. Under-assessment product refers to fish or fish products harvested during the assessment process, but before the fishery or farm is certified. Under-assessment product must be harvested after the specified Eligibility Date, which can be found on the **MSC** or **ASC** websites.

5.6.1 Organisations shall only be eligible to purchase under-assessment product if they are:

5.6.1.1 A fishery or aquaculture farm undergoing assessment; or

5.6.1.2 A named member of the client group for a fishery or aquaculture farm undergoing assessment.

Guidance 5.6.1.2

Only fisheries, farms or named members of the client group are eligible for taking ownership of under-assessment product. No other CoC-certified companies further down the supply chain are eligible to buy under-assessment product, although it can be sold between members of the fishery / farm or client group.

Organisations which are eligible for under-assessment product as per **5.6.1** can use subcontracted storage facilities to handle under-assessment product, as long as the fishery / farm or client group member retains ownership until such time as the farm or fishery is certified.

5.6.2 Organisations handling under-assessment product shall comply with the following requirements:

5.6.2.1 All under-assessment products shall be clearly identified and segregated from certified and non-certified products.

5.6.2.2 The organisation shall maintain full traceability records for all under-assessment product, demonstrating traceability back to the unit of certification and including the date of harvest.

5.6.2.3 Under-assessment products shall not be sold as certified or labelled with the ecolabel, logo, or trademarks until the source fishery or farm is certified.

Guidance 5.6.2.3

When the farm or fishery is officially certified, the Public Certification Report will be posted online on the **MSC** or **ASC** website.

¹ Derogation. Requirements in Section 5.6 shall become effective for all CoC certified organisations and applicants as of 1 September 2015. After 1 September 2015 companies will have to comply with these new requirements to buy under-assessment product. Any company that has under-assessment product in stock as of 1st September 2015 will be permitted to keep this inventory and can sell eligible under-assessment products as MSC or ASC-certified only when the fishery / farm is certified.

Principle 6

Additional requirements for Group CoC

6.1 Group Control

- 6.1.1 The organisation shall designate a central office (group management) function which can ensure that all sites on the group certificate conform with the MSC Group CoC Standard.

Guidance 6.1.1

The central office is the organisation, legal entity, individual, or other function that will manage the group certificate. This function provides the means for ensuring that all sites meet the CoC Standard, that internal controls (such as internal audits) are carried out, and any non-conformity is addressed.

- 6.1.2 The organisation shall be able to demonstrate that procedures covering the MSC Group CoC Standard are implemented across all sites on the group certificate.

Guidance 6.1.2

Implementation can be demonstrated either through written documentation and/or evidence of existing procedures and management systems (these may not need to be MSC specific). Procedures will typically describe how the central office and sites will work together to ensure that all sites meet the Group CoC Standard.

For example, procedures may describe how traceability and identification of products occurs at site level, and identify specific roles and responsibilities. The organisation may not need to develop new, MSC-specific procedures in all cases if CoC requirements are met by existing systems.

- 6.1.3 The central office shall demonstrate its control over sites in one of the following ways:

6.1.3.1 The sites are fully owned by the central office; or

6.1.3.2 The sites are franchises of the central office; or

6.1.3.3 The central office has a signed agreement or contract with each of the sites requiring the site to:

a. Conform to the MSC Group CoC Standard.

b. Abide by decisions made by the central office, certifier, and accreditation body, including issuing of non-conformities and corrective actions.

Guidance 6.1.3

The organisation needs to maintain adequate controls to ensure that all sites within the group comply with relevant sections of the Group CoC Standard. This control can be demonstrated in different ways, depending on the type of group and the nature of the relationship between the central office and sites.

- 6.1.4 The organisation shall appoint one person (the MSC representative) who is responsible for ensuring the group's conformity with the Group CoC Standard.

6.1.4.1 The name, position and contact details of the MSC representative shall be documented and communicated to the certifier.

Principle 6 *continued*

Additional requirements for Group CoC

Guidance 6.1.4.1

This individual can be the same as the MSC contact person as per **clause 5.1.4** or a different individual.

6.1.5 The organisation shall document the roles and responsibilities of the MSC representative, internal auditors, and other responsible personnel at the central office and site level.

6.1.6 The organisation shall maintain up-to-date training records for all responsible personnel as per clause **5.1.2**.

Guidance 6.1.6

Records can be kept by the central office or at the site level, but the organisation will need to produce these records for review when requested by the certifier.

6.1.7 The central office shall sign a contract with the certifier and shall be responsible to the certifier for the following related to the central office and all sites:

6.1.7.1 Conformity with the Group CoC Standard.

6.1.7.2 Fulfilment of any conditions (on sites or the central office) raised by the certifier.

6.1.7.3 Payment of all certification costs.

6.1.7.4 All communication with the certifier (excluding expedited or unannounced site audits).

6.2 Site register and adding new sites

6.2.1 The organisation shall maintain a register of all sites in the group certificate, including:

6.2.1.1 Name or position, and email or phone for a designated contact at each site who is responsible for ensuring that the site conforms with the Group CoC Standard.

6.2.1.2 Physical and postal address of each site.

6.2.1.3 Date of joining and (if applicable) leaving the group certificate.

6.2.2 The organisation shall:

6.2.2.1 Provide the certifier with the site register before the initial audit;

6.2.2.2 Keep the site register up-to-date

6.2.2.3 Notify the certifier within 10 days of any sites being added or withdrawn, by sending the certifier details of the new or withdrawn sites as described in clause **6.2.1.1**.

6.2.2.4 Ensure that if the number of new sites added since the last audit will increase the total number of sites by more than 10%, or the new sites propose to carry out different activities, written consent from the certifier is obtained before new sites can be added.

Principle 6 *continued*

Additional requirements for Group CoC

Guidance 6.2.2.4

If the number of sites added since the most recent certifier audit is more than a 10% increase above the total number of sites at the time of that audit, the certifier needs to give consent via email or writing.

Certifier approval is also needed if sites are added that carry out new activities (such as processing). The certifier may decide to conduct a remote or onsite audit if warranted.

If the number of sites to be added is less than 10% of the total number of sites at the last certifier audit, the organisation needs only to inform the certifier of these changes in writing, as per **6.2.2.3** (prior approval from the certifier is not needed).

- 6.2.5 The organisation shall have a process for verifying that any new sites are able to conform with the Group CoC Standard before adding them to the certificate.

Guidance 6.2.5

This process could be carried out through an internal audit, remote audit, or another way of assessing the sites' conformity with relevant CoC requirements. This process will also ensure all staff at the new site are trained and competent in applying CoC requirements as outlined in section **5.2**.

- 6.2.6 When sites are withdrawn from the group certificate, the organisation shall have a process to notify the site that it can no longer continue to use the ecolabel, logo, or other trademarks, including on packaging and menus.

Guidance 6.2.6

The organisation is expected to take action to ensure that sites no longer in the group certificate will not continue to use the ecolabel, logo or other trademarks. This may include removing unused packaging, menus, or signage and verifying during the next visit to the site that the ecolabel or logo are no longer used.

6.3 Use of the ecolabel, logo, and other trademarks

- 6.3.1 The organisation shall ensure that all sites using the ecolabel, logo, or other trademarks are covered by a valid license agreement.

Guidance 6.3.1

There can be one licence agreement with the central office that covers all sites, or each site (or group of sites) may have their own licence agreement with MSC.

Principle 6 *continued*

Additional requirements for Group CoC

6.4 Internal audits

6.4.1 Before the initial certification audit, an onsite internal audit shall be conducted for each site to ensure conformity with the Group CoC Standard, with the exception of **6.4.1.1**.

6.4.1.1 Sites do not require an internal audit if they only handle certified products in sealed containers, do not physically handle certified products, or handle exclusively certified seafood.

Guidance 6.4.1.1

Internal audits before certification are recommended, but not required, for sites that only handle products in sealed containers, such as wholesaler, storage, or distribution sites. Sealed containers refer to boxes, bags, pallets, or other containers that are secured and are not opened or altered during handling. Pallet-level containers may be broken down, provided that individual sealed boxes or containers are not altered.

6.4.2 Internal auditors shall be able to demonstrate competence in carrying out internal audits, including knowledge of the Group CoC Standard, internal audit processes, identification of non-conformities, and issuing of corrective actions.

Guidance 6.4.2

Internal auditors need to demonstrate a good understanding of CoC requirements as well as auditing processes. Internal auditors can be members of the organisation's staff or from an external organisation.

6.4.3 Internal audits shall verify that each site is in conformity with the Group CoC Standard and that relevant internal policies are implemented.

Guidance 6.4.3

It is the responsibility of the central office to ensure effective internal audits take place. Internal audits can be carried out by external auditors who are not group employees, provided they cover all MSC requirements. These audits do not need to be MSC-specific but must be able to evaluate conformity with the Group CoC Standard.

6.4.4 The organisation shall ensure that all corrective actions resulting from internal audits are verified as completed and effective before the initial certification audit.

Guidance 6.4.4

Any non-conformity found during internal audits before certification need to be closed out before the initial certification audit can proceed. If these same problems are detected by the certifier during the certification audit the certifier can raise additional non-conformities.

6.4.5 The organisation shall conduct an internal audit of all certified sites at least annually after initial certification, excluding sites that handle only certified seafood.

Principle 6 *continued*

Additional requirements for Group CoC

- 6.4.6 The organisation shall maintain records of internal audit reports, including the audit date, internal auditor, and any non-conformities and corrective actions.
- 6.4.7 If during an internal audit the organisation discovers that the site is not in conformity with relevant sections of the Group CoC Standard, the internal auditor or central office shall:
- 6.4.7.1 Document the non-conformity and corrective actions issued.
 - 6.4.7.2 Ensure corrective actions have been fully completed within the following time periods:
 - a. Maximum 30 days for any non-conformities which could lead to a risk of non-certified product being sold or labelled as certified.
 - b. Maximum 90 days for all other non-conformities.

Guidance 6.4.7.2

Corrective actions need to be effective at addressing the non-conformity and any underlying causes (for example, inadequate employee training or site-level procedures that aren't fully implemented).

6.5 Internal group reviews

- 6.5.1 The central office or sites shall review at least annually records showing total quantities of certified product purchased and sold for all sites on the group certificate, excluding any quantities of certified product sold to final consumers.
- 6.5.1.1 Any sites handling exclusively certified seafood or selling/serving certified seafood only to final consumers can be excluded from this review.

Guidance 6.5.1

This requirement helps to ensure that sites haven't sold more certified seafood than they purchased. This relates to **clause 4.4**, but because only a sample of sites in Group CoC are audited by the certifier, it is the group's responsibility to review records for all sites.

Records can be reviewed for each site individually or for the entire group, and can be done by staff at the site level or central office. If sites are selling to final consumers, sales volumes do not need to be recorded. However the organisation will still need to review input records to ensure that certified product was purchased / received if sites were using the trademarks.

- 6.5.2 After certification, the organisation shall complete an internal group review at least annually to verify conformity with the Group CoC Standard and assess the effectiveness of the group's management system.

Principle 6 *continued*

Additional requirements for Group CoC

Guidance 6.5.2

The internal group review is intended to ensure that the group's policies and procedures are functioning well and that all sites continue to conform with the Group CoC Standard. Any problems or non-conformities that have been discovered at site level need to be reviewed to identify whether they also require changes to the group's management system.

- 6.5.3 The internal group review shall include:
- 6.5.3.1 An assessment of the organisation's ability to conform with Group CoC requirements.
 - 6.5.3.2 A review of the latest version of the Group CoC Standard, including any changes since the previous review and how these changes will be incorporated into procedures.
 - 6.5.3.3 A review of internal and certifier audit reports from the previous year, including non-conformities identified, corrective actions taken, and whether non-conformities have been closed.
 - 6.5.3.4 A review of any complaints received relating to the CoC program and actions taken as a result.
 - 6.5.3.5 Identification of any systemic issues or recurring site-level non-conformities, and proposed changes to the organisation's management systems to address these issues.
 - 6.5.3.6 Records that all relevant sections of **6.5.3** have been completed.

Find out more about the changes
to the Chain of Custody Program:
www.msc.org/chainofcustody

Further queries, please contact:
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