



## Summary of Questions and Answers

This document combines and summarises the Q&A sessions from the webinar **'MSC Fisheries Standard Version 3: Consultation on revisions to the Fisheries Standard Toolbox'**, held on Wednesday 23 July 2025.

[A recording of the webinar presentation is available.](#)

Please contact [fisheries@msc.org](mailto:fisheries@msc.org) with any questions.

### **How will the MSC be carrying out these revisions? How does the new approach differ from previous policy development cycles?**

We've tried to learn a lot of lessons from what has worked really well and what hasn't worked so well in the past, including in the Fisheries Standard Review that led to version 3, but also in the processes that we've undergone since then.

In particular, we've had really positive experiences working with an external expert review panel to develop the current evidence requirements framework proposals. That's a team of five experts who've come together and effectively discussed all of the issues that we heard and developed proposals and then worked with external assessors and conformity assessment bodies to test those.

Drawing on that, what our plan is for the Fisheries Program Revisions is to effectively create a series of panels that will use an iterative policy development approach to develop requirements, test them, and then consider the impacts and then hand those back to the original panel. We'll have a product development expert panel, an impact assessment expert panel, a testing expert panel, and then we'll also have a working group focused entirely on engagement and communication to make sure people are brought along with that process.

All of the panels will involve a combination of internal and external experts just to really draw on stakeholder experiences from the very start.

### **Will the Standard version 3.1 continue to be an option for fisheries to use?**

Yes - if fisheries wish to, i.e. if they have favourable preassessments against version 3 or if they're already under assessment or certified against version 3 or version 3.1 they're absolutely welcome to continue to use it.



What I would say is once we have the updated version we will be trying to encourage as many fisheries as possible to use it just to hopefully get to a point where we don't have fisheries sitting across multiple versions of standard because it can be quite complex to deal with. But absolutely it's still available for use.

**What level of coverage for electronic monitoring or observer thresholds are needed for fisheries at SG80?**

For all fisheries there is no specific monitoring threshold that we set out. So we don't say you need to have 10% or 5%. We just need to say that you need a system in place that will verify the data that you're self-reporting. So that should include some kind of at sea component if there are operations occurring at sea. So unless you're a shore-based fishery.

Ultimately, we don't specify a specific threshold. It will be down more to the assessment teams to consider whether the data that you have is adequate to provide an estimate of your fishery impacts. So, if you only have 1% coverage and it's maybe occurring on a very different part of the fleet than how the rest operate, it might not be adequate in itself. So it's still worth considering those monitoring needs. But there's no specific coverage thresholds set out for most fisheries.

**There is reporting of catch to management authorities including both retained and discarded catch. Does the management authority include industry bodies or does it mean the regulatory authority?**

Typically when we're talking about management bodies or authorities, we're talking about a regulatory government authority, but it's a good question and maybe one to feed into a response on the public consultation because I'm sure there are situations where that data may be collected by an industry body first.

**For fisheries thinking about entering or engaging with MSC through the Improvement Program. what are their options? Can they engage through version two, three or should they wait for this iteration of the standard?**

Fisheries in the Improvement Program can absolutely engage in version 2 or version 3 at the moment and there are a number of different factors that might factor into that decision as to whether they would prefer to start engaging with version 2 at the moment or begin on version 3. The positives with engaging with version two is that it's a known entity. We know how it works. There's lots of experience out there applying it. And that in itself isn't currently under review. That said, by that 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2030 deadline, you'll



need to be on the updated version. And version three of the standard will align much more closely with that.

There are a lot of really great things in version 3 that aren't changing, things like the requirements to have ghost gear assessed. Those requirements are staying. I think if an improvement program fishery is entering on version two, they should definitely be mindful that there are elements they'll need to work towards to meet that updated version at a later point.

If you're in a position where you're not sure what's best for you, reach out to your local MSC outreach rep. We can have conversations with you and talk you through the potential pros and cons of each option.

**Under the new standard, how should CABs score a fishery when observer data and self-reported data, i.e. logbooks on catches conflict?**

Part of the considerations that Catherine outlined within the evidence requirements framework is this consideration of accuracy of data for the available information sources. So, like with the previous ERF, one of the things we ask there is about consistency. So there are a number of criteria we ask about the consistency of data, how complete it is, how objective it is, any potential for bias, things like that.

This consistency piece is really important. So if you have multiple sources of information and there's a conflict between those, that can be tricky to deal with. We don't specifically say if there's a conflict that means you can't reach SG80. What we're looking more for is an understanding of where those conflicts exist, whether they're systematic. So whether self-reporting is always under reporting on catch compared to independent monitoring and then if that is the case, whether there's anything in place to mitigate that. If the assessment is being done primarily on independent monitoring data, even though there's a conflict, this could perhaps it's okay. Do you still feel you can estimate the impacts or do you feel that actually there's a lot of data missing and then it's potentially more tricky and perhaps that fishery needs a condition or it may not even pass depending on the situation.

**How will the MSC use the information gathered through this public consultation?**

Between now and the 10th of September, we're hoping to get as many responses to the survey as possible to the public consultation - we are really keen to hear from as many people as possible.



After the 10<sup>th</sup> September, we will be pulling that data together and we'll be looking firstly at the general sentiment around our proposals – i.e. whether stakeholders broadly agree or disagree generally with the changes – but then really importantly at this stage we've also asked people completing the survey for specific comments around each proposal. We'll be closely considering any individual comments and feedback on areas for improvement, for example suggestions of how wording could change. We'll also consider whether there is anywhere that stakeholders don't feel that the bar that is set is appropriate.

All of this information will be presented to these new expert panels that will be formed as part of the Fisheries Program Revisions, and we'll work with these groups as well as those that have been involved in developing the evidence requirements proposals up until now to effectively consider what the feedback means and what needs to change.

We'll be looking out for any feedback on issues with language, with clarity, with complexity, and also considering things like how much time it's going to apply and whether people feel the bar that we've set with the prescriptive thresholds have landed in the right place. Then we'll be updating proposals going forward.

So, this is really the first time we're putting the proposals out there into the public and it's an opportunity for everyone to engage and tell us what they think. We'll develop the requirements after this and there will be another round of public consultation once they've been refined, and we'll be doing further testing and mock assessments to make sure we really understand the impacts and what these mean.

**Is there going to be any movement away from favourable conservation status as a benchmark for endangered, threatened and protected species in the new iteration so that ETP outcome scoring isn't relying on a PSA so productivity susceptibility analysis?**

I can't say at this point exactly what our revisions will look like but this is definitely one of the issues that we've heard about and that we'll be considering as part of the process for Fisheries Program Revisions. So, we know that there are a number of issues that have come up around ETP and out of scope species. Some of those relate specifically to the fact that out-of-scope species are now automatically categorized in with ETP, but we'll be exploring all of these issues including the increased triggering of the RBF and making sure that we develop something that that works better.

**Can fisheries engage on version 3.1 but use variation requests to apply version two on performance indicators on parts of the standard that are currently being revised?**

We are always open to receiving variation requests and we consider them on their merits. So for anyone that doesn't know, a variation request allows you to vary slightly from a requirement that is set out usually in the certification process but sometimes in the standard as well to allow for a specific scoring situation. So yes, we're open to receiving these.

We have explored them in the past and I think in particular where we're working towards improving requirements and fisheries want to use an overall higher bar that is set out with version 3, we're definitely open to exploring those - just get in touch.

**Will the MSC be attending any external meetings to discuss this such as the NGO tuna forum?**

Yes absolutely. Polly Burns, who's heading up our team will be attending the NGO Tuna Forum I believe as well as other MSC colleagues. I'm attending a workshop in Tokyo, where we're running a round table to discuss this with stakeholders over there and we'll also be holding workshops in the US, so absolutely we'll be discussing this at any possible opportunity.

**Will there be any oversight process on the whole to ensure CAB consistency of scoring on P2 and P3 performance indicators and conditions?**

There will be oversight of the process as a whole. One of the things we're really trying to do is treat our whole standard and fishery certification process etc. as a product so that we don't fall into traps we've fallen into before where actually we deal with individual topics or projects and then end up with things that don't quite work very well together or don't work particularly effectively side by side. So, in terms of oversight of the project as a whole, we have a steering committee set up internally to ensure we're keeping oversight of everything that's going on.

**Regarding the Risk-based framework. Can data in a data deficient situation triggering the risk based framework under Principle One also includes stock assessment with reference points that have not been updated in the last five to 10 years?**

That's a really good question. I have to say it might stretch the limits of my RBF and Principle 1 knowledge. My understanding is that currently the triggering requirements or

the triggering criteria - which are the requirements that set out when you use the default tree versus the risk-based framework - are that you need a stock assessment with reference points.

I don't believe there's a specific timeline set for that, but I'd suggest if this is a question that that's important to work you're doing at the moment or you're interested in finding out more, reach out to [fisheries@msc.org](mailto:fisheries@msc.org) and they can they can get back to you.

I would say that the triggering criteria are one of the things that we might be looking at as part of the Fisheries Program Revisions just to make sure they're really clear and set appropriately.

**How do we define observer coverage? Is it the number of vessels belonging to a fleet segment, the number of trips, the number of days, days at sea, number of tows?**

There were a number of findings that I couldn't report on just because of time today from that MRAG UK study, but one of the things that really highlighted is how hard it is to specifically define coverage and the fact that this varies around the world. So, absolutely a crucial question. At the moment, we talk about the proportion of catch events.

So again, thinking about our proposal to remove that 100% at the SG 100 level. We know that there are a lot of fisheries that have observers on 100% of trips but actually they won't necessarily be capturing data on 100% of catch events. Observers still have to sleep and eat and often fishing continues during that process. So that factored into our rationale there. But, at the moment, our proposal is to maintain the percentage as the percentage of catch events rather than trips or anything else.

**What would be the MSC understanding of independent verification of catch? Would that also include bycatch and discard data for example?**

So crucially because of that scoring element approach that I spoke to - which means that when an assessor is working through the standard they're considering the impact on each of the different species - any verification that would meet SG80 would need to be sufficient to verify data of things like discards or kind of bycatch occurring at sea.

So for fisheries where that is a risk, which is a majority of fisheries in the MSC Program - excluding for example some of the coastal shellfish fisheries that we have in the program - you will need some form of at-sea verification. So typically, that will mean an observer program or an electronic monitoring program that uses cameras. But like I

alluded to, the term verification allows some flexibility. So, if you have a different method, like they do in Norway where they use a portion of the fleet to collect data and they verify using that - that might also suffice. Or for example, if you have regular scientific surveys that go out and mimic the actions of the fishing fleet and you can use that data to do some kind of verification that that could potentially also suffice as well. So, it allows a little bit more room but still typically will require some kind of at-sea program to verify that data.

**Can you talk a bit more about the MSC's justification for reducing the high seas monitoring requirement from 30 to 20%, but 80% of the tuna caught globally already requires 100% independent monitoring because it is caught by purse seiners. The baseline has already been set at 100% for the large majority of RFMO high seas catch.**

The earlier MRAG UK study that I talked about gave us a lot of information on the current practices around the world on what's required by RFMOs. What we found in terms of setting a specific threshold was quite tricky here because - like you say - actually most purse seine fisheries are currently required to have 100% so they would not have struggled with 30% at all. However, what we saw is that a lot of longliners are currently operating on requirements of 5% or 10%, rather than around 30%. The question we're looking at here is therefore what's an appropriate level to ask for those longliners to push up to based on the general scientific information that's available and ongoing movements within RFMOs.

So this is where we came to that second point where we had a lot of conversations and we looked at papers that had been submitted to RFMOs, in particular advocacy that was going on from fisheries and NGOS's within RFMOs to try and push observer coverage up. We found typically that that was revolving around a 20% figure.

So for us, right now, we think it makes sense to align with that. Of course, in a perfect world, we would love to see 100% monitoring on all vessels, but the practicalities of the scaling up of operations, and asking fisheries to do that in a short period of time, makes that unrealistic for fisheries at this particular time.

**Could the proposals change the level of performance for the fisheries?**

Yes, definitely in the Toolbox Review with regards to the evidence requirements framework, the thresholds are the most obvious example: if we ask for 20% instead of 30%, that is slightly less that we're asking for from fisheries. So yes, in that context and with the Fisheries Program Revisions as well, we are open to changing what we often



call “the bar” – the performance expectations that we set for fisheries - where we need to if there have been unintended consequences.

So for some of those areas, it might just be a slight change in process or requirements, but there is also potential that the sustainability bar might change where we don't think it's currently fit for purpose.

**What is considered appropriate at-sea verification? Depending on what this will be, there will be significant challenges in meeting this across the whole fleet especially those fleets that have a diverse range of vessels. Would this include the likes of remote electronic monitoring cameras?**

Remote electronic monitoring cameras would absolutely meet the requirement, but they wouldn't be the only way to do so. At-sea verification, like I alluded to before, could include human observers, which a lot of fisheries have, but it could also include other methods. So, at-sea scientific surveys that can provide data that verifies that what's being self-reported is broadly in line with what is caught within fisheries could perhaps form that verification.

Ultimately it will be down to the assessment team to make that decision as to whether they believe that there's data that verifies what's being self-reported. So, thinking about what Catherine said with the evidence requirements framework, there might be some consideration about the accuracy of those data sources, how representative they are across the fleet. So if you have a really diverse fleet and actually the data you have to verify only covers a very small portion that act very differently to the rest of the fleet, that probably wouldn't be sufficient. But again, this is where we really ask our expert assessors to apply their judgment and make that call as to whether something's sufficient or not.

Similarly, a landings program, perhaps where enforcement officers do inspections as catches are landed, is definitely independent data but again assessors would need to ask the question of what it can verify. So it will verify what's being landed, but it won't provide any verification of the other catch that's occurring at sea. So if you're operating in a fishery where there are discards, for example, you'd need some form of at-sea verification to provide that independent data to verify that whatever is being reported as discarded is actually the case.





**Are you using high seas fisheries as the definition of RFMO managed fisheries for the observer requirements? I asked because there are fisheries that are RFMO managed but the fleets remain in domestic borders.**

That's a really crucial point. So here we've used high seas fisheries, so fisheries that are operating in areas beyond national jurisdiction, as the cutoff. We know that there are some fisheries that operate at the edge of those boundaries. But for us it was just about drawing a line somewhere and we know that fisheries generally should have that understanding of whether they are operating within their coastal EEZ waters or whether they're operating on the high seas.

So it is specifically high seas fisheries rather than just any fishery operating that's managed by an RFMO.

**How would MSC treat a time limited observer program? For example, collecting data in a coastal small boat fishery for one to three days in a fishing season as opposed to an ongoing program/indefinite observer coverage. Would this be sufficient to meet the revised requirements?**

We're not going to set out specific requirements for every specific type of situation. So, for this, it would be up to the assessment team to check what data is being collected and say if that is sufficient to verify what's being self-reported. And again, this question of potential for impact might come into it. If you're talking about a very small, coastal fishery, there might not be a lot of potential to have observers on board and there might be limited risk of bycatch.

So, in those situations, a reduced monitoring operation could be sufficient, but it won't be written like that into our standard. It will be about the assessment team considering whether that data is sufficient to verify what's being self-reported.

**Do you expect that changes relating to the scoring regarding monitoring requirements might actually prevent realizing positive uptakes of measures with respect to environmental effects for example for ETP species or catch?**

We hope not. We're definitely open to feedback in terms of where we're setting the bar here and that's why we're going out to public consultation. So, I think anyone that has concerns in terms of this potentially undermining data collection efforts please do share them.

I think for us, as we alluded to before, especially with the monitoring thresholds what we have a situation where some high seas fisheries have 100% coverage where they're



operating purse seiners and a lot of other fisheries are operating more around 5%. Our hope is that by making that thresholds 20% instead of 30%, which is slightly more realistic to achieve, instead of fisheries just dropping out of the program they'll be able to stay in the program and continue to improve and reach that 20%. In that respect this is intended to continue to incentivize and push forward better data collection on interactions with ETP species etc. But absolutely, we're asking for feedback on this, so if you have any concerns please do fill out the consultation and let us know.

**Please contact [fisheries@msc.org](mailto:fisheries@msc.org) with any questions.**