



Evolution of the Marine Stewardship Council Pathway to Sustainability Approach

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June 2021



This report has been commissioned by ISEAL as part of their Improvement Projects program, funded by The Walton Family Foundation and The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

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Glossary

BMT	Benchmarking and Tracking Tool
CAB	Conformity Assessment Body
FIP	Fisheries Improvement Project
ITM	In-Transition to MSC
MSC	Marine Stewardship Council
OSF	Ocean Stewardship Fund
PI	Performance Indicator
UoA	Unit of Assessment
UoC	Unit of Certification

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Jointly published by the Marine Stewardship Council www.msc.org and ISEAL www.iseal.org

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Image: Tuna fish underwater © Rich Carey
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Introduction

In 2019-20, 17.4% of the global marine catch was engaged with the Marine Stewardship Council program, and more than 18,000 different products were sold worldwide with the MSC ecolabel. However, only 3.3% of the certified fisheries are from the Global South and 16% from small-scale fisheries. Small-scale and Global South fisheries face numerous challenges to achieve MSC certification, from the lack of catch monitoring to a weak enforcement of the law to name just a few.

In [our current strategy](#), we have committed to increasing the proportion of developing world and small-scale fisheries in our portfolio. To achieve this, we have developed tools to incentivise their engagement with our program, in particular in the very early stages of their improvements journey. Fisheries that are committed to achieving MSC certification often need to make numerous improvements before they are able to meet the requirements of the [MSC Fisheries Standard](#).

We have been supporting those improvement efforts in different ways. This report reviews the evolution of the MSC’s engagement with fisheries in the pre-certification space and shares the most valuable lessons gathered along the way. We illustrate our narrative with examples of MSC Pathway tools and their use in MSC Pathway projects across the world.

In the first part of the report, we describe the main stages of the evolution of MSC’s Pathway to Sustainability to date. The second part presents a temporal analysis of the improvements made across MSC Pathway projects, where the MSC pre-certification strategy has been tested and improved. The final part of the report attempts to identify the conditions

that enable MSC Pathway tools and Pathway projects to be successful in leading fisheries management improvements.

We have used data from our MSC Pathway projects, pre-assessment reports, improvements action plans and, when available, different versions of the Benchmark and Tracking tools for hundreds of fisheries worldwide. In parallel, we conducted interviews to collect qualitative information from MSC staff and provide a narrative to accompany the data analysis. In the final part of the report, we also used the ISEAL (2020) paper on [Choosing effective Strategies to drive Sustainability Improvements: decision making framework](#) to reflect on the different approaches that the MSC has adopted to support improvements in fisheries.

The project aims at providing review of the evolution of the MSC Pathway to Sustainability from the origin of the concept until now. We hope that our experience will bring an insightful perspective to other ISEAL members that are already implementing, or thinking about developing, their own pre-certification improvement strategy.

1. Engagement with non-certified fisheries in improvement towards the MSC

1.1. The MSC Fisheries Standard

The [MSC Fisheries Standard](#) is used to assess if a fishery is well-managed and sustainable. The Standard reflects the most up-to-date understanding of internationally accepted fisheries science and management.

The MSC Fisheries Standard is comprised of three core principles:

1) Sustainable fish stocks

- 2) Minimising environmental impact
- 3) Effective fisheries management.

Certification to the MSC Fisheries Standard is voluntary. It is open to all fisheries who catch marine or freshwater organisms in the wild within scope of the [MSC program](#). Fisheries are assessed by accredited independent certifiers – known as Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs). Fisheries are assessed against 28 performance indicators (PIs), grouped under the three principles of the MSC Fisheries Standard (Figure 1).

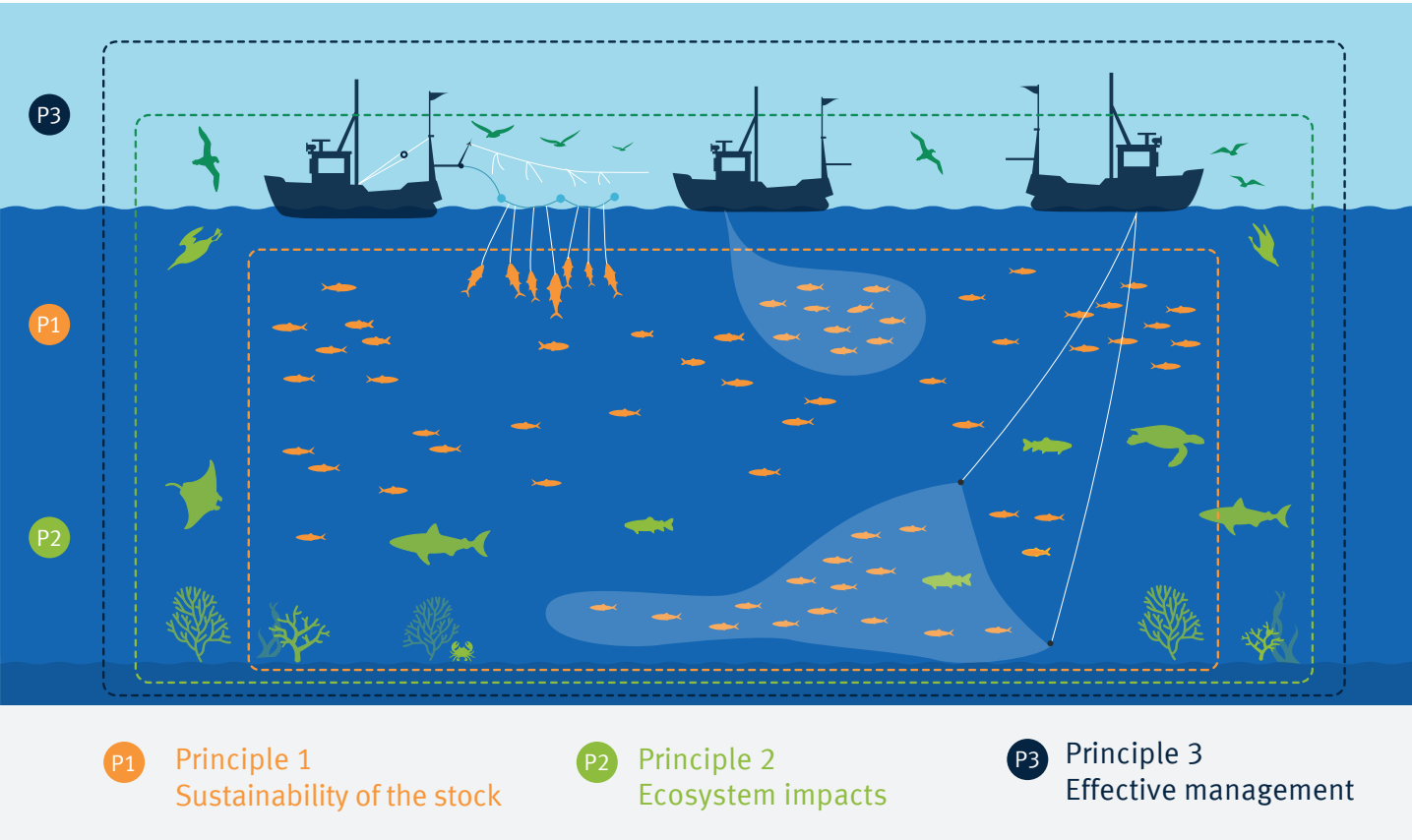


Figure 1. The three principles of the MSC Fisheries Standard © MSC

Each of the 28 PIs is scored on a graded scale, with the 60, 80 and 100 levels defining key sustainability thresholds (Figure 2a). These thresholds correspond to levels of quality and certainty of fisheries management practices and their likelihood to deliver sustainability. For a fishery to be certified as sustainable against the MSC Fisheries Standard, the PIs that make up each

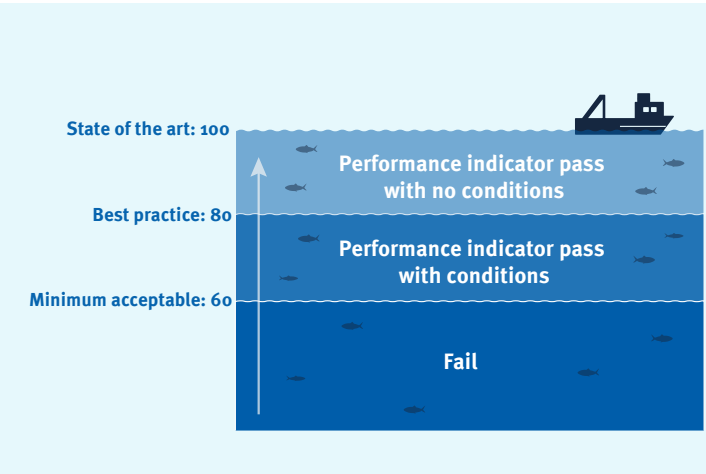


Figure 2a. The MSC Fisheries Standard performance indicator score © MSC

1.2. The MSC definition of credible Fisheries Improvement Projects (FIPs)

Since the MSC Fisheries Standard was created in 1998, we have engaged with non-certified fisheries embarking on an improvement journey. When the first fisheries entered the program in 2000, we worked closely with stakeholders ahead of the assessment process, providing technical insights related to the newly created Standard. We continue to work closely with fishery clients worldwide to provide [guidance on the assessment process](#) in multiple languages.

Many fisheries join a Fisheries Improvement Project (FIPs), multi-stakeholder initiatives that aim to improve their sustainability. The FIP model has gained popularity as a collaborative way to improve fishing practices, boosted by commitments from many seafood buyers to align their sourcing policies with sustainable fisheries and those working towards sustainability. Many FIPs choose to use the MSC Fisheries Standard as a framework for benchmarking the environmental performance of their fishery and, based upon that benchmark, to write a

principle need to score at least an average of 80, and none of the PIs can score below 60 (Figure 2b). The sustainability thresholds were derived from the experience of fisheries managers, scientists and other stakeholders worldwide. The MSC’s scoring system has been developed over the past twenty years with the help of hundreds of international fisheries and environmental experts.

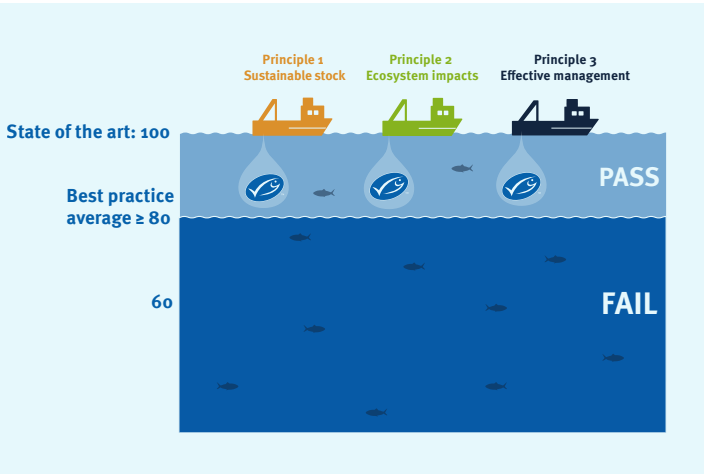


Figure 2b. The MSC Fisheries Standard Principle score © MSC

detailed plan of action to improve performance up to the level of sustainability. FIPs provide a formal process for fisheries to use the MSC Fisheries Standard as a framework for general improvements towards sustainable management. However, being in a FIP does not necessarily lead to certification as an end goal. Although the Fisheries Standard was created for certification purposes, its use to improve fisheries management in general is aligned with [MSC’s vision](#) of “the world’s oceans teeming with life, and seafood supplies safeguarded for this and future generations”. The MSC also developed tools to support fisheries committed to improving their environmental performance. Those tools would later be called “Pathway tools” – see section [1.3. MSC Pathway Tools](#) - and would be the backbone of the MSC Pathway to Sustainability strategy. As the number of FIPs increased rapidly over the world, [it became challenging for the wider audience, including seafood buyers, to verify the quality of the process](#), from the pre-assessment against the MSC Fisheries Standard to the evaluation of progress and the impact of improvements on the water. The MSC aimed to address concerns by providing guidance to help stakeholders

distinguish transparent FIPs that demonstrate measurable improvement and are operated in a credible manner. The MSC also developed a [definition of a Credible FIP](#):

- Completion of an MSC pre-assessment
- Development of an improvement action plan
- Regular reporting on progress
- A mechanism to verify progress
- A clear timeline with an end date that should generally not exceed five years
- Commitment to MSC certification

1.3. The MSC Pathway Tools

When developing a FIP, the different participants should have a good understanding of the issues that a fishery faces and where it falls short of meeting the MSC Fisheries Standard. This will ensure that an improvement action plan can be developed to address all the identified issues. There may be situations where certain issues are prioritised and addressed first. The issues should link to one or more of the MSC performance indicators so that improvements can be tracked against the Standard and progress can be made towards sustainability. The [MSC Pathway Tools](#) have been created to ensure that fisheries have the necessary guidance and resources to develop credible FIPs.

These Pathway tools have been used successfully by a wide range of fisheries either in MSC supported initiatives such as Pathway Projects (see Section 1.4.) or independently by fisheries committed to improve their environmental performance and eventually get certified such as the [Suriname Seabob fishery](#).

1.3.1. MSC pre-assessment report template

In 2009, the first MSC Pathway tool was developed: the MSC pre-assessment report template, quickly followed by the action plan template and guidance (see section 1.3.2.). We regularly review and update these templates. A pre-assessment provides a provisional assessment of a fishery against the MSC Fisheries Standard based on information provided by the fishery and, when possible, the knowledge gained from the interviews conducted at a site visit. The pre-assessment report template gives the structure that should be followed for credible FIPs, including: a description of the Unit of Assessment, a score and a rationale for each PI and a recommendations section. That information is the backbone for developing an improvement action plan.

An MSC pre-assessment uses the 28 performance indicators to provide a baseline determination of how the fishery performs relative to each of the indicators within the MSC Standard. This allows a fishery to identify any areas that need to be improved. The pre-assessment result gives an indication of the scoring range for each of the PIs. The process of undertaking an MSC pre-assessment is described in the [MSC Fisheries Certification Process](#). The MSC recommends pre-assessment to be undertaken by independently accredited CABs. There are specified competencies and training requirements that accredited CABs are required to meet to provide a higher level of assurance about the quality of the assessment outcome. However, the fishery client decides who carries out the pre-assessment. At the very least, the person undertaking an MSC pre-assessment should have a good understanding of the MSC Fisheries Standard and the Fishery Certification Requirements. While MSC pre-assessments provide a good indication of where the fishery sits against the MSC Standard and is adequate for benchmarking a fishery in a FIP, it does not have the rigour and robustness of an MSC full assessment. To confirm the performance of the fishery against the MSC Standard, the fishery would need to undergo a full assessment to achieve MSC certification once the FIP is completed.

1.3.2. MSC improvement action plan template

An MSC pre-assessment provides an overview on how a fishery performs against the MSC Standard. This allows for gaps in performance to be identified. As a next step, an MSC improvement action plan provides a roadmap to follow to achieve at least a conditional pass against the MSC Fisheries Standard within five years. The MSC improvement action plan template guides fisheries committed to reach that goal. Actions developed as part of these workplans should be designed to ensure that progress can be made to reach the relevant scoring levels, within a suitable and pre-determined timeframe. The action plan should include an indication of the expected changes in scoring categories for PIs over the period of its implementation. Along with defining milestones, other components to support the successful undertaking of an action need to be considered within the action plan. This may include assigning clear responsibilities, budgets and a list of evidence to demonstrate progress.

The person developing an action plan needs to have a good understanding of both the MSC Fisheries Standard and the fishery itself. It may be someone who is involved with the fishery as a co-ordinator, manager, consultant or champion of the project. The use of the MSC improvement action plan template is facilitated by a [guidance brochure](#).

The information contained in the pre-assessment and the action plan provides the basis to populate the initial layer of information of the MSC Benchmarking and Tracking tool.

1.3.3. MSC Benchmarking and Tracking Tool (BMT)

Another noteworthy Pathway tool is the [MSC Benchmarking and Tracking Tool](#) (BMT). It was designed in 2010 to allow fisheries to benchmark the environmental performance of their improvements against the MSC Fisheries Standard. Users can track the fisheries status and the expected progress. The tool provides a method of consistently reporting information about status of fisheries improvements and generates a visual summary dashboard of information to help interested parties understand how the fishery is progressing. The use of the BMT is supported by a [guidance brochure](#).

Before using the BMT, the fishery needs to understand where the gaps are in its performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard. Once the issues have been identified, an action plan can be developed to address the issues and improve the fishery towards sustainability.

Benchmarking

The initial BMT index is based on the MSC pre-assessment results. Each of the scoring categories that are assigned to a performance indicator (PI), will also be assigned a corresponding BMT score:

MSC score	BMT score
≥80	1
60 - 79	0.5
<60	0

Figure 3. MSC scoring categories and benchmarking and tracking scores

The BMT index is simply an average of all the BMT scores assigned to the PIs, and will be a number between 0-1. A BMT index of ‘1’ would mean that all PIs of the fishery are at least at the 80 level, whereas a BMT score of ‘0’ would mean that all of the PIs are less than the 60 level. As the BMT index moves closer to ‘1’, it means that the fishery is moving towards all of the PIs being at least at, or near, the 80 level.

In addition to producing a BMT index, the BMT also reports on the number of PIs that fall into each scoring category. This allows for BMT users to see the difference between fisheries which may have the same BMT index, but with differences in the number of PIs in each scoring category. All of this information is summarised in the BMT dashboard, which is produced automatically once the BMT has been filled in with the information from a pre-assessment report.

Tracking

The BMT can then be used to track progress as improvements are made in the fishery. Improvements can be tracked by using the action plan developed to improve the fishery towards meeting the MSC Fisheries Standard. Within the action plan, clear milestones need to be included along with the expected date that the milestone will be reached. There may be several milestones for each action, and multiple actions required to increase the scoring level for a PI. The action plan should clearly identify when PI scores are likely to increase due to the completion of activities in the action plan.

By defining clear milestones, and how and when achievement of the milestones will lead to an increase in scoring level for a PI, it will be possible to estimate the expected changes in the BMT index over the course of implementation of the FIP. These expected improvements in the fishery can be captured and reported using the BMT. It can also be used to show when the fishery expects to improve to a level consistent with the MSC Fisheries Standard (Figure 4).

As the action plan is implemented and activities completed, the tool can be updated to track whether or not the milestones are reached. The BMT dashboard provides a snapshot of the actual and expected progress of a FIP, as well as displaying whether the FIP is on track according to planned progress (Figure 5).

Principle	Component	Performance Indicator	Pre-Assessment Year 0	Actual Year 1	Actual Year 2	Actual Year 3	Actual Year 4	Actual Year 5	Expected Year 1	Expected Year 2	Expected Year 3	Expected Year 4	Expected Year 5
1	Outcome	1.1.1 Stock status	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		1.1.2 Stock rebuilding	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	Management	1.2.1 Harvest Strategy (Action 1)	<60	<60	60-79	60-79	---	---	60-79	60-79	≥80	≥80	≥80
		1.2.2 Harvest control rules and tools (Action 2)	<60	<60	<60	<60	---	---	<60	<60	60-79	60-79	≥80
		1.2.3 Information and monitoring	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		1.2.4 Assessment of stock status	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
2	Primary species	2.1.1 Outcome	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		2.1.2 Management (Action 3)	60-79	60-79	60-79	60-79	---	---	60-79	60-79	≥80	≥80	≥80
		2.1.3 Information	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
	Secondary species	2.2.1 Outcome	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		2.2.2 Management (Action 3)	60-79	60-79	60-79	60-79	---	---	60-79	60-79	≥80	≥80	≥80
		2.2.3 Information (Action 4)	60-79	60-79	60-79	60-79	---	---	60-79	60-79	≥80	≥80	≥80
	ETP species	2.3.1 Outcome (Action 5)	60-79	60-79	60-79	60-79	---	---	60-79	60-79	≥80	≥80	≥80
		2.3.2 Management (Action 5)	60-79	60-79	60-79	60-79	---	---	60-79	60-79	60-79	≥80	≥80
		2.3.3 Information (Action 5)	60-79	60-79	60-79	60-79	---	---	60-79	60-79	≥80	≥80	≥80
	Habitats	2.4.1 Outcome	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		2.4.2 Management	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		2.4.3 Information	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
	Ecosystem	2.5.1 Outcome	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		2.5.2 Management	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		2.5.3 Information	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
3	Governance and Policy	3.1.1 Legal and customary framework	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		3.1.2 Consultation, roles and responsibilities	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		3.1.3 Long term objectives	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
	Fishery specific management system	3.2.1 Fishery specific objectives	60-79	60-79	60-79	60-79	---	---	60-79	60-79	60-79	60-79	≥80
		3.2.2 Decision making processes	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		3.2.3 Compliance and enforcement	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
		3.2.4 Management performance evaluation	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	---	---	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80	≥80
	Total number of PIs equal to or greater than 80		18	18	18	18			18	18	24	25	27
	Total number of PIs 60-79		7	7	8	8			8	8	3	2	
	Total number of PIs less than 60		2	2	1	1			1	1			
	Overall BMT Index		0.80	0.80	0.81	0.81			0.81	0.81	0.94	0.96	1.00

Figure 4. BMT Dashboard of a fishery in Project UK

	Pre-Assessment		BMT Index				
		Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
PRINCIPLE 1	Actual	0.60	0.60	0.70	0.70		
	Expected		0.70	0.70	0.90	0.90	1.00
PRINCIPLE 2	Actual	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75		
	Expected		0.75	0.75	0.91	1.00	0.94
PRINCIPLE 3	Actual	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.93		
	Expected		0.93	0.93	0.93	0.93	1.00
OVERALL	Actual	0.80	0.80	0.81	0.81		
	Expected		0.81	0.81	0.94	0.96	1.00

Fig 5a. Actual versus Expected BMT Index table of a fishery in Project UK

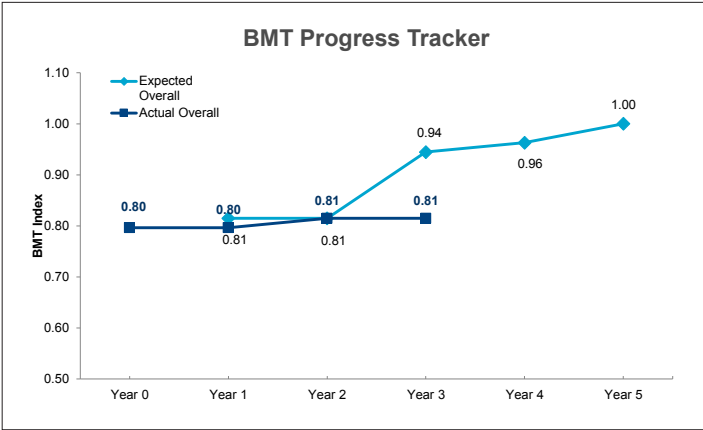


Fig 5b. Actual versus Expected BMT Index progress tracker of a fishery in Project UK

1.3.4. Capacity Building Program

The main component of the [MSC Capacity Building Program](#) is the Capacity Building Toolkit. It is a comprehensive guide for fishery clients, managers, scientists, consultants and other stakeholders engaged with fisheries working towards MSC certification. It provides practical information on the MSC Fisheries Standard, showcases examples of best practice based on already certified fisheries, describes what information will be checked during an assessment and outlines possible actions that could be implemented during a FIP. The Capacity Building Toolkit is an invaluable resource for those working with Fishery Improvement Projects as they work towards MSC certification.

Although the toolkit can be downloaded from the MSC website, we recommend that stakeholders attend our comprehensive five-day workshop for guidance on how to use it. We also offer regular workshops to a range of stakeholder groups including government, industry, universities and NGOs, as well as fisheries experts and consultants, who wish to gain expertise of the MSC requirements.

As part of the Capacity Building Program, we offer different level of training to equip stakeholders with the knowledge and skills required to implement a successful FIP. The different MSC trainings enable fisheries scientists and experts to increase their knowledge and understanding the MSC Fisheries Standard and the Pathway Tools.

1.3.5. In-Transition to MSC

The most recently created MSC Pathway Tool is the In-Transition to MSC program, which supports fisheries of any size in the Global South and small-scale fisheries in the Global North that are committed to achieving MSC certification. An accredited conformity assessment body (CAB) will verify a fishery’s progress on an annual basis, helping the fishery stay on track to achieve the improvements needed to meet the MSC Fisheries Standard.

Fisheries are expected to remain in the In-Transition to MSC program for a maximum of five years and enter full MSC assessment within three months of completing the program.

Fisheries in the In-Transition to MSC program are eligible to apply for funding from the [MSC’s Transition Assistance Fund](#) component of the [Ocean Stewardship Fund](#), to support the implementation of their action plans. However, fisheries will not be eligible for MSC Chain of Custody certification, product labelling or business-to-business claims until they are fully certified. The program is currently in a pilot phase and a list of verified fisheries is published on the MSC website.

The [In-Transition to MSC Requirements and Guidance document](#) gives an outline of the procedures used by CABs to confirm compliance with entry requirements for the program and verify continuous progress.

1.4. The MSC Pathway Projects

A Pathway project is any project that uses MSC’s Pathway tools in a strategic way to engage with multiple fisheries at once. Pathway projects can be based on single species in a defined area, or a pre-determined multi-species collection in a defined area. The intended impact extends beyond the immediate project and it has the purpose of influencing management at a more holistic level beyond fisheries that may initially pursue MSC certification. A Pathway project is characterized by a collective ownership and has the potential to become an enabling platform to generate improvements, beyond the scope of the project itself.

The objective of each Pathway project is to achieve outcomes across the following objectives:

- Engage fisheries with potential of working within the sphere of influence of the MSC market-based program (“pull” or “market leverage”). This means engaging fisheries that have a good potential of advancing over time to MSC certification, directly or through potential FIPs leading to full-assessment,

- and are able to harness the opportunities presented by MSC market interest.
- Engage fisheries with potential of using the MSC framework as a mechanism to transition to sustainability. This means engaging fisheries for which there may not necessarily, or initially be MSC market interest, but for which there may be other drivers for improvement along the MSC sustainability pathway (such as financial investment, development support, stakeholders’ motivation, or other non-market incentives).
 - Support government and other stakeholder efforts to build an enabling environment for sustainable fisheries management.

The Pathway project model is a collaborative approach divided into five Stages (Figure 6) that uses the Pathway tools described above:

- Mapping to obtain information about fisheries in a determined geographic or management area, including: species, gear types, fleet size, landing volumes and stakeholders involved in the management and supply chain.
- Pre-assessments of a group of fisheries selected by an Advisory Group created in Stage 1 depending on their potential MSC market, the interest of authorities and the enabling environment.
- Action plans developed to define the improvement actions that should be carried out to improve the environmental performance of the pre-assessed fisheries.
- Action plans implemented.
- Full assessment against the MSC Fisheries Standard



Figure 6. The stages of the Pathway project approach © MSC

In 2012, the first two MSC Pathway projects were launched: [Project UK](#) and Western Australia. By 2019, we had been involved in 19 Pathway projects worldwide. The Pathway project methodology allows us to scale up our impact in the pre-certification stage. It also became an efficient way to make economy of scales by reducing the unit price of pre-assessment and to take a more jurisdictional approach, as fisheries within the same Pathway project share several aspects that must be considered and assessed when scoring the PIs.

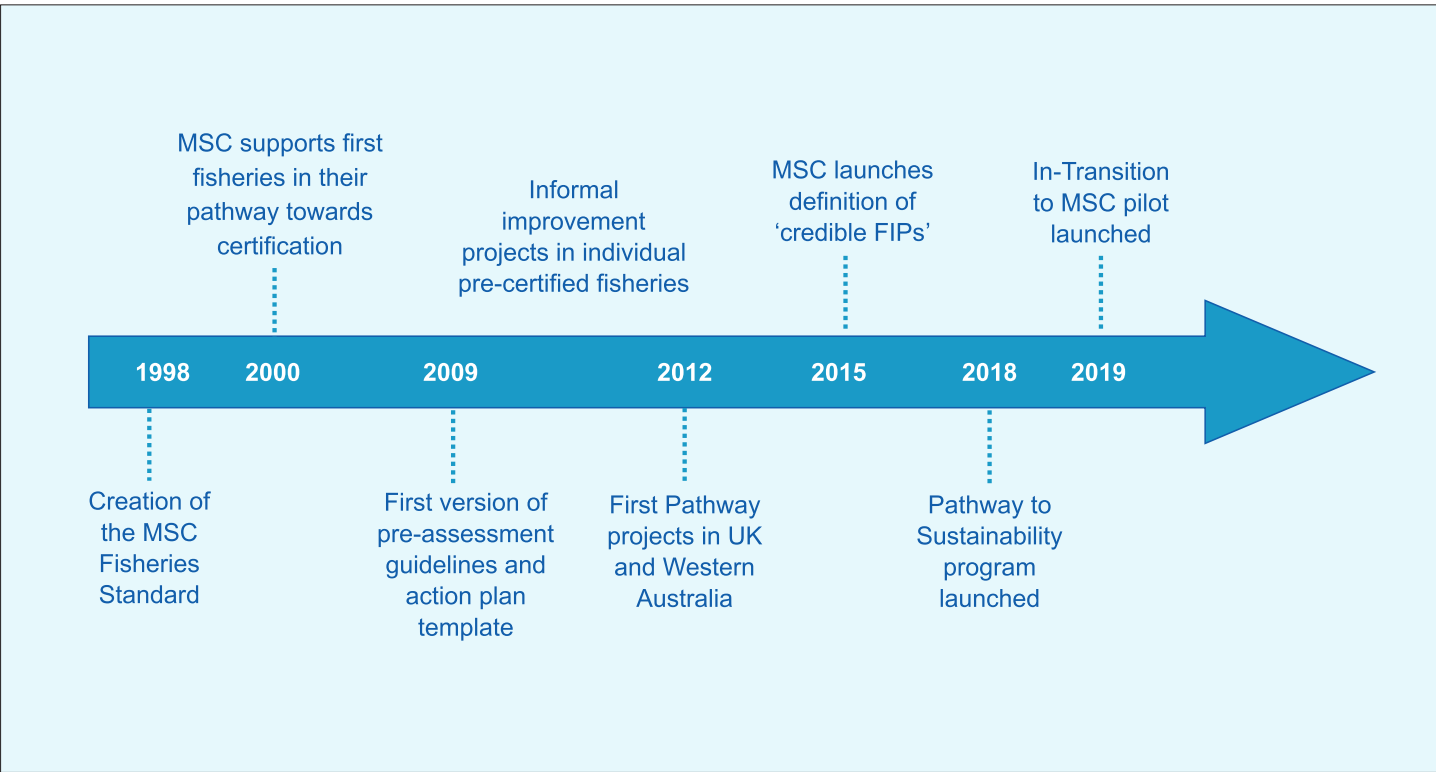


Figure 7. The main milestones in the MSC Pathway to Sustainability over time

1.5. The MSC Pathway to Sustainability

In 2018, a new [MSC Pathway to Sustainability program](#) was formalised providing a framework for the [MSC Pathway tools](#) to be used and MSC Pathway projects to be implemented. The program aims to support fisheries in their efforts to improve the environmental performance of their fishing practices.

It also offers a mechanism that can be employed by government and other stakeholders in their efforts to build an enabling environment for sustainable management of fisheries consistent with the MSC Standard.

2. Case studies

In this section, we focus on a selection of MSC Pathway projects and analyse the improvements that have been made over time through the use of Pathway tools described in the previous section. The projects have been selected based on their level of progress to ensure that enough data are available to conduct an analysis of the improvements.

2.1. Project UK

2.1.1. Background

Project UK’s first chapter was named Project Inshore. It was launched on the World Oceans Day in 2012 as a collaboration between the MSC and Seafish – the public body which supports the seafood industry in the UK – and the Shellfish Association of Great Britain. It was officially renamed [Project UK](#) in 2019. The funding for the project has come from a diverse range of sources notably the seafood supply chain (largely UK retailers and processors), who pay annual contributions, as well as the European Maritime Fisheries Fund, Fisheries Innovation Scotland, and Fishmonger’s Hall.

During the first years of the project, an extensive range of fisheries around the coast of the United Kingdom

were mapped and pre-assessed against the MSC Fisheries Standard (Stage 1 and 2, see Figure 6).

Six of those fisheries were initially selected by the supply chain to develop and implement an improvement action plan, with another six forming the Round 2 FIPs (Stage 3 and 4, see Figure 6). The goal of the Project UK FIPs is to be able to pass full MSC certification with no conditions at the end of the five-year action plan. Due to their importance to the UK market, the following fisheries were selected:

- Crab, lobster and monkfish fisheries in the South West (Round 1, launched in 2017)
- Plaice and lemon sole fisheries in the North Sea (Round 1, launched in 2017)
- Scallop and Nephrops fisheries in the North Sea, West Scotland and the Irish Sea (Round 2, launched in 2019)

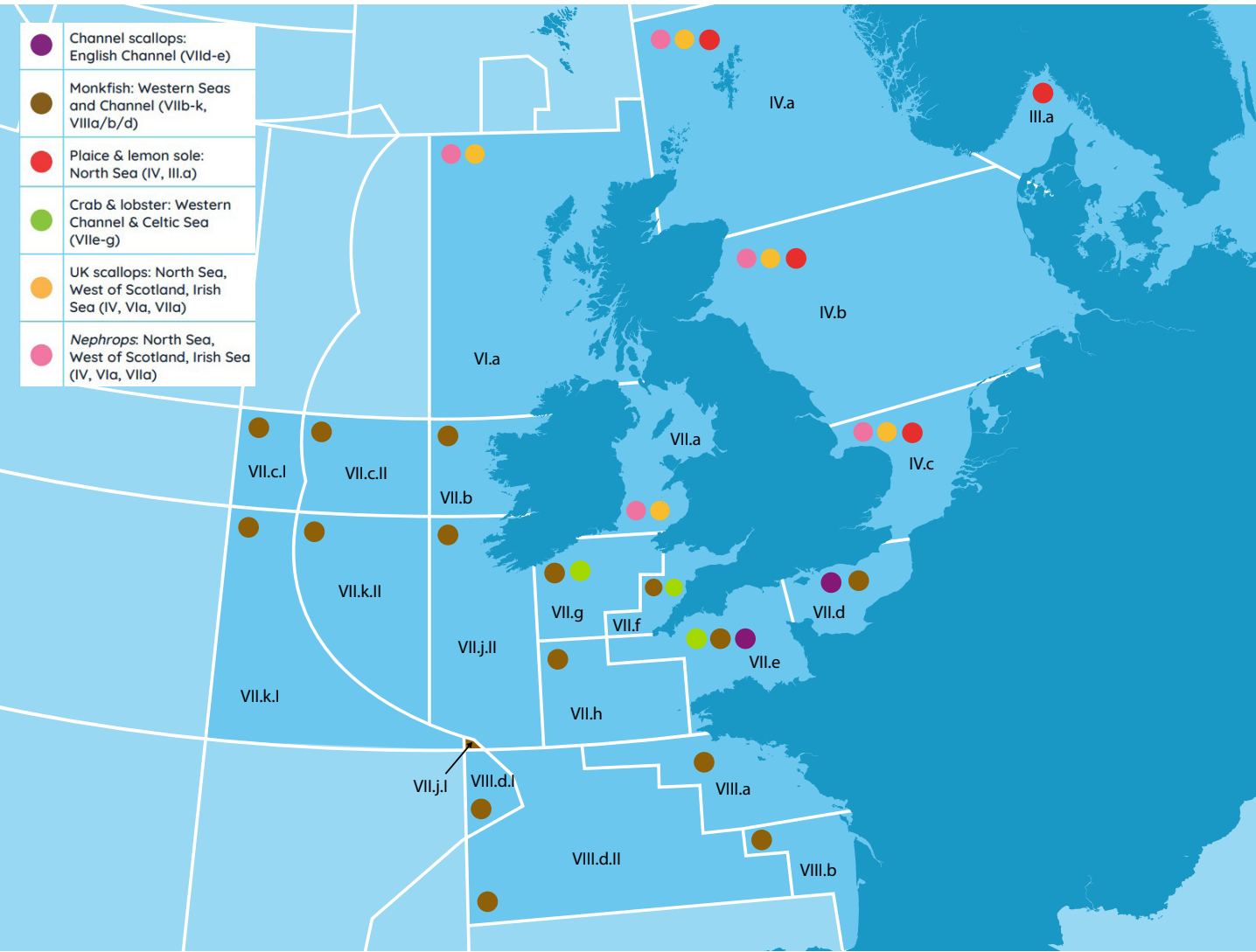


Figure 8: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) areas covered by Project UK © Mindfully Wired, Project UK annual report 2019/20

Those twelve fisheries are grouped into eight credible FIPs. For each FIP, an independent consultant advises the stakeholder steering group to set clear milestones for all the actions within the fishery’s improvement action plan. These groups are designed to inform, guide and implement the work identified within their fishery’s action plan. Progress is tracked and updated annually through the MSC’s Benchmarking and Tracking tool.

Steering groups are made up of representatives from the fishing industry, scientists, NGOs, retailers and the supply chain. The governance of Project UK is based on the collaborative nature of the project and the overlap of stakeholders that participate in more than one FIP. The MSC is the secretariat and facilitator of Project UK.

The results of each stage of the project were originally made available on the [Seafish website](#), and more recently on the newly launched [Project UK website](#). As part of Project UK, the FIPs are addressing a total of 61 individual actions. All the actions are listed and updated on [fisheryprogress.org](#). For the first time, in 2020 Project UK published an overarching [annual report](#) and shared with a wider audience the progress of the improvements implemented by the eight FIPs. Project UK reports on different platforms, like fisheryprogress.org, to ensure that the work is transparent, and the steering groups are held accountable for maintaining progress.

2.1.2. Results

Project UK’s FIPs are divided into two rounds, based on the year that they were launched – 2017 for Round 1 and 2019 for Round 2. Round 1 fisheries have been in a FIP for four years and their actual progress against their expected progress can be visualised using the BMT. We have analysed the progress made by Round 1 fisheries using the

data of the BMT for the eight Units of Assessment (UoAs). The Project UK Round 2 fisheries improvement timeline has not been running long enough to exhibit similar progress. Figure 9 shows that all the eight Round 1 UoAs have improved their environmental performance since they started their FIP. The expected BMT score for all of them by the end of their FIP is 1.

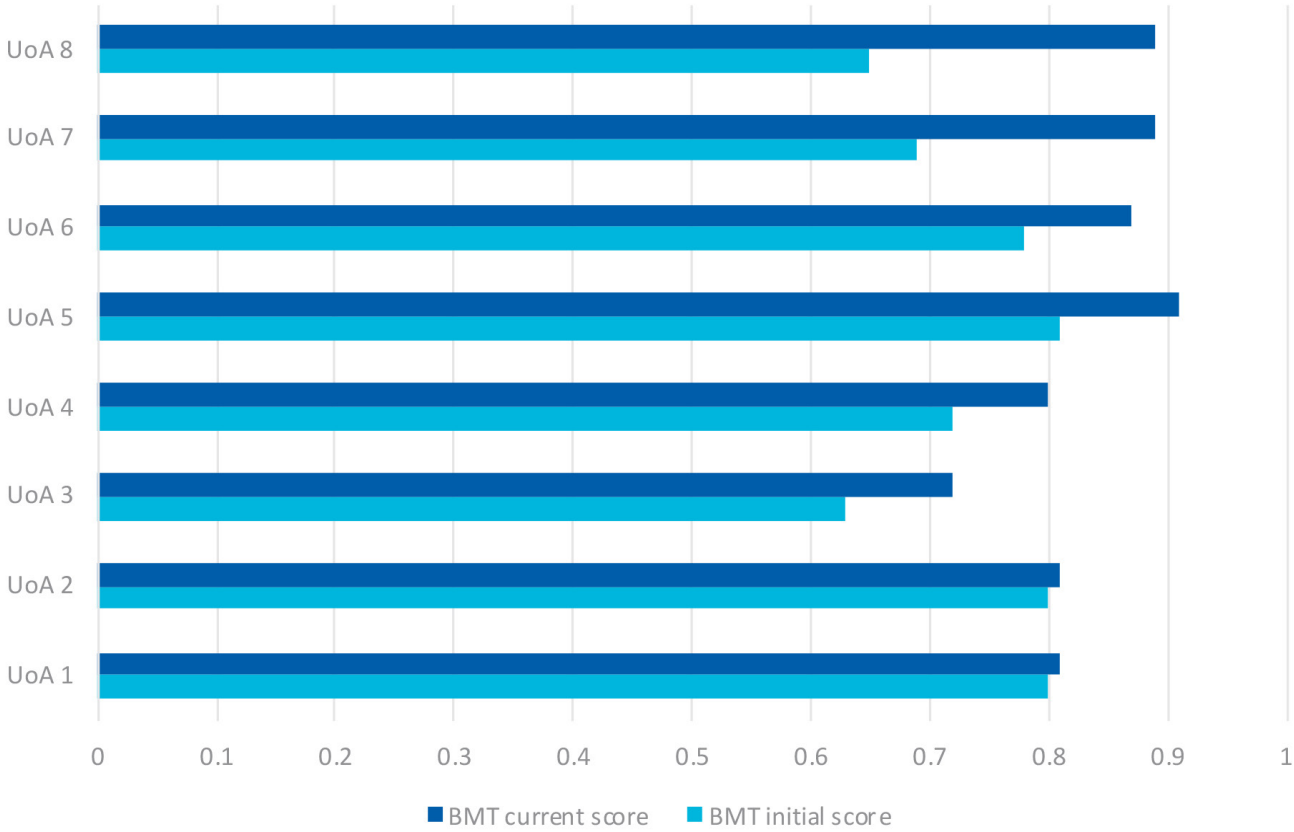


Figure 9. Evolution over the last four year of the BMT scores for the eight Units of Assessments – Round 1 Project UK

2.2. Western Australia

2.2.1. Background

A few months after Project UK’s first chapter was launched, another Pathway project was created in Western Australia. This initiative was led by the Western Australian (WA) Government in collaboration with the WA Department of Fisheries, the commercial fishing body [WA Fishing Industry Council \(WAFIC\)](#), recreational fishing body [Recfishwest](#) and the MSC.

The State Government provided AUD \$14.5 million in funding to give all WA commercial fisheries the

opportunity to be assessed against the MSC Fisheries Standard. A portion of those funds has been allocated to pre-assess 50 eligible fisheries and to implement improvements towards full assessment. The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) is also providing funding support to support WAFIC to assist in industry communication and engagement.

The WA State has a long history of sustainable fishing. The Western Rock Lobster Fishery was the first in the world to attain the MSC certification in 2000. This fishery will undergo its fourth reassessment in 2021. Due to the methodology to assess and certificate fisheries, the 50 fisheries are divided into 110 Units of Certifications (UoCs)¹, as shown in Figure 10.

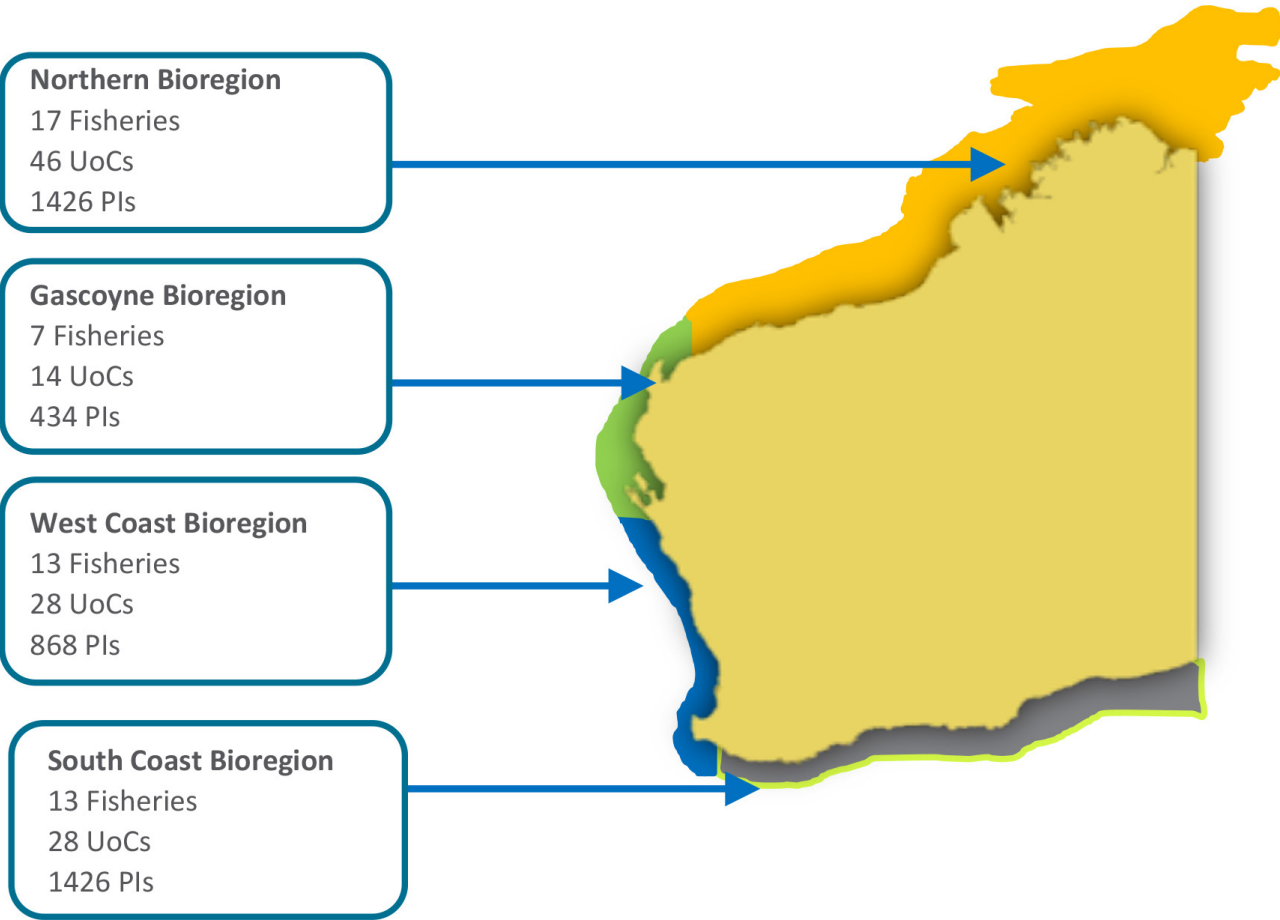


Figure 10. Map of the Western Australia fisheries © Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development of Western Australia

1. A Unit of Certification is the target stock(s) combined with the fishing method/gear and practice (including vessel/s) pursuing that stock. When the term “unit of certification” is used for fisheries that are in assessment, it refers to the “unit of assessment” or “unit of potential certification”. Note that other eligible fishers may be included in some units of certification but not initially certified (until covered by a certificate sharing arrangement).

2.2.2. Results

To make the Pathway Project more efficient to implement, the pre-assessments were divided into the four Bioregions (Figure 10). The Gascoyne pre-assessments were completed in 2013, followed by the Northern Bioregion pre-assessments in 2014, and finally the South and West Coast Bioregions in 2015. The partition of the fisheries by bioregion allowed the highest performing fisheries in each group to announce their full assessments immediately after improving the gaps identified during their pre-assessments.

In October 2014, Exmouth Gulf prawn, Shark Bay prawn and Peel Harvey crab and mullet fisheries announced their full assessment.

A total of 3,350 PIs were scored across the four bioregions of WA. The pre-assessments for the 110 Units of Certification identified gaps at jurisdictional scale and therefore across multiple fisheries. The improvements required included setting harvest control rules and improving bycatch monitoring.

2.3. Medfish Spain & Medfish France

2.3.1. Background

The Mediterranean Sea is a hotspot for biodiversity, but there is little data available on fish stock. However a study has shown that 63% of the Mediterranean fish stocks assessed are fished at biologically unsustainable levels. In comparison, [34% of stocks are fished at an unsustainable rate worldwide](#). The Mediterranean is home to many small-scale fisheries, some of which catch multiple species with a variety of different gears on the same trip. These fisheries often lack accurate data and an appropriate level of organization to ensure efficient management.

In September 2015, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the MSC jointly launched the [MedFish project](#) to carry out an analysis of French and Spanish Mediterranean fisheries using the MSC Pathway project approach. This was the first time an independent evaluation of Mediterranean fisheries’ sustainability performances was conducted. The project uses a collaborative bottom-up approach, empowering fishers and managers to make the improvements necessary to improve the environmental performance of the fisheries.

Several funders have supported Medfish project: Adessium Foundation, MAVA Foundation, Fondation Daniel & Nina Carasso, Resources Legacy Fund. In both countries, a large range of stakeholders are involved in the project, from fishing committees to producer organisations, but also retailers, research institutes and central and regional administrations.



Figure 11. Distribution of the initial Medfish project fisheries within the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCN) Geographical Sub-Areas (GSA). © MedFish Impacts Report (2018)

2.3.2. Results

During the first year of the project (Stage 1 – Mapping), all the fisheries operating in the French and Spanish Mediterranean Sea were identified and listed. Of these fisheries, 100 (50 in each country) were then characterised in detail, including: fishing gears, catch composition, related stock status,

interactions with vulnerable species, impacts on habitats, and the management system.

In the second year, seven fisheries in each country, diverse in scale, gear, management, target species and location, were pre-assessed by two different CABs using the MSC pre-assessment template. More than half of the 14 fisheries’ total

performance indicators needed improvements to meet the requirements of the MSC Fisheries Standard (Figure 12). Figure 13 shows that most of the improvements needed to meet the MSC Fisheries Standard relate to Principles 2 and 3, which have the highest number of PIs. Although fewer improvements

were required under Principle 1, these improvements presented the greatest challenges. The results identified the main cross-cutting challenges faced by the fisheries regarding data availability and reliability. It also provided opportunities to identify and implement solutions at a jurisdictional level.

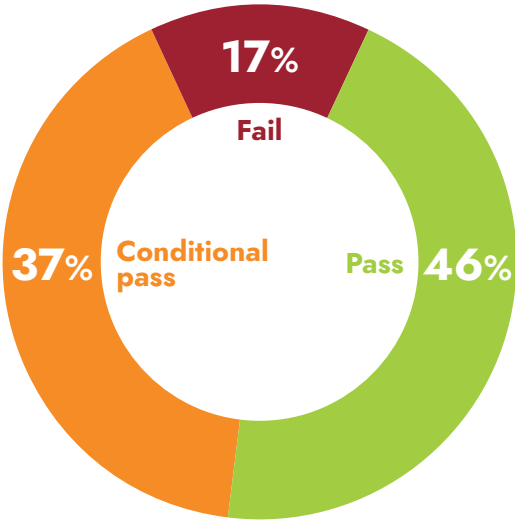


Figure 12. Percentage of MSC performance indicators by scoring level (percentage of the total number of PIs for the 14 fisheries that received a “fail,” conditional pass” or “pass” scoring level in the pre-assessments.

Based on the pre-assessment results, Stage 3 consisted of developing improvement action plans for each fishery during participatory workshops. Those action plans are reviewed regularly and adjusted. Once significant actions are implemented, the BMT for those fisheries will be updated to reflect the progress made to date. A second round of fisheries were added to the project in 2019, with two new fisheries in France and three in Spain entering Stages 2, 3 and 4. Six fisheries in France have entered Stage 4 and are implementing their action plans. While in Spain, three fisheries are also in Stage 4, and three more fisheries should reach that stage in 2021. The aim is to ensure that by the end of the project in 2022, fisheries stakeholders and partners will be well equipped to lead on the remainder of their action plan implementation.

The documents of the mapping, pre-assessments and action plans can be downloaded from the [Medfish website](#). The information present in the pre-assessment reports and the action plans documents for all the fisheries currently included in the Medfish project has been processed and is publicly available in an [online database](#).

Medfish was conceived as a regional project to support fisheries sustainability in the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, it aimed to inspire replication in other countries of the region. So, it was a significant achievement when two new Pathway

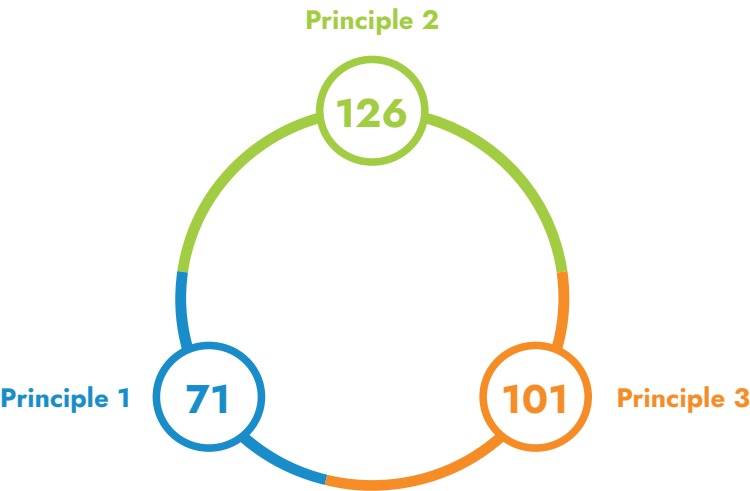


Figure 13. Aggregated number of indicators in need for improvements (“fail” or “conditional pass” scoring levels) per MSC Principle across 14 pre-assessed fisheries

projects were launched in Italy ([BluFish](#)) and in Greece ([HellasFish](#)). The four projects in the Mediterranean Sea share, not only fishing resources, but also a legal framework and stakeholders. They are now working closely on crosscutting challenges and taking collective actions when it is possible.



Figure 14. Percentage of MSC performance indicators by scoring level (percentage of the total number of PIs for the 14 fisheries that received a “fail,” conditional pass” or “pass” scoring level in the pre-assessments.

2.4. Fish for Good Mexico

2.4.1. Background

[Fish for Good](#) is a four-year project initiated in 2017 by the MSC and funded by the Dutch Postcode Lottery. It comprises three Pathway projects in [Indonesia](#), [Mexico](#) and [South Africa](#) aiming to guide fisheries on their journey towards sustainability, by giving them the support and tools to improve their environmental performance. The project takes place in developing countries that have a significant and diverse fishing industry, in term of sizes of the fleets, species and gears. The oceans surrounding those countries are amongst the most biodiverse of the world. It is implemented in collaboration with key partners on the ground.

It is the first time that three MSC Pathway projects have been funded simultaneously, moreover in developing countries. It is part of efforts that we are undertaking to increase our presence and support in the Global South.

The Mexican chapter of the project has shown the most progress to date. The impact that the project had at a national level in Mexico, beyond the boundaries of the fisheries originally involved, is also an interesting outcome that we explore further.

Mexico is home of the first fishery to become MSC certified in the Global South – the Baja California Rock Lobster. To date, six fisheries² have been MSC certified in Mexico and two of them have withdrawn from the programme. Therefore, national fishing industry stakeholders are aware of the MSC certification programme, though their level of knowledge varies. There are currently 23 FIPs in Mexico registered in [FisheryProgress.org](#), which makes it the country with most FIPs registered in the online platform. The project is implemented in the North-western part of Mexico, where 70% of the seafood is produced nationally (Figure 15). MSC joined forces with [Pronatura Noroeste](#), a renowned Mexican NGO with 20 years of experience working with fisheries in the region, as the implementing partner for Fish for Good.



Figure 15. Geographic scope of the Fish for Good project in North-western Mexico with the seven pre-assessed fisheries ©Pronatura Noroeste

2. Due to the way fisheries are assessed and certified, the six fisheries are divided into 10 UoC in Figure 16.

2.4.2. Results

During the mapping stage, 31 fisheries in the northwest of Mexico have been characterised according to their economic value, market potential, food security, area(s) fishers, gear(s) used and catch volumes. An advisory group composed of stakeholder representatives was created and seven fisheries were selected to be pre-assessed against the MSC Fisheries Standard. For those fisheries that previously been pre-assessed, a verification and an update of their pre-assessments were carried out by a CAB. Action plans were then collectively developed, or if they already existed, reviewed and updated.

Pronatura Noroeste then conducted a [comparative analysis](#) of pre-assessed and certified Mexican fisheries against the MSC Fisheries Standard, in partnership with WWF and Sustainable Fisheries Partnership. It comprises 10 evaluated and certified UoC, and 24 pre-assessed fisheries (Figures 16 and 17). The comparison of the scorings identified aspects of the Mexican fishery management system that need improvements to drive fisheries towards sustainability. Given the diversity of fisheries, Pronatura Noroeste considers that the results of the analysis are applicable to the Mexican fisheries management system as a whole.

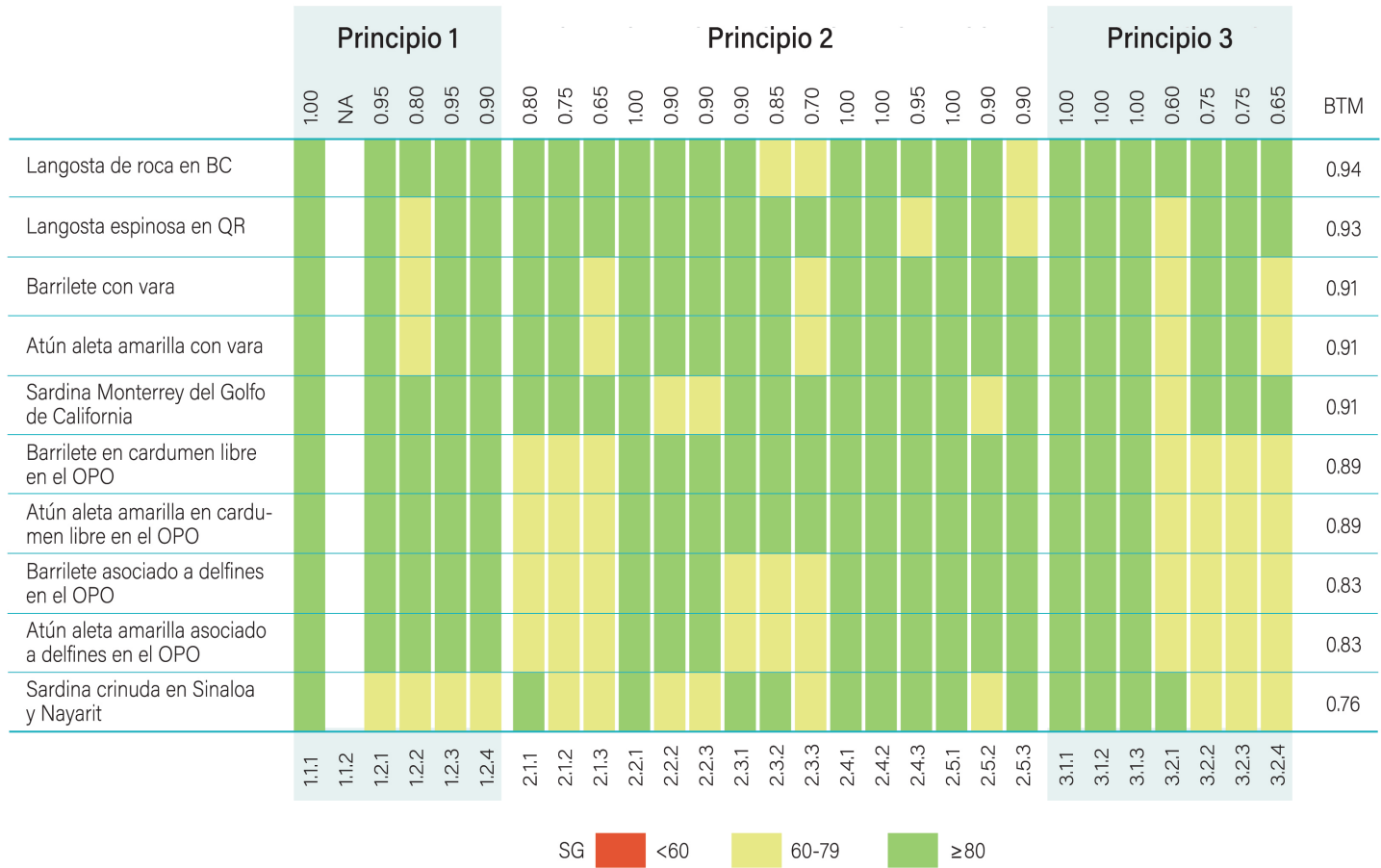


Figure 16. Scoring of the first assessments of MSC certified fisheries in Mexico. The colours of the cells represent the level of scoring per PI for each fishery. The numbers on the right are the BMT overall scoring for each fishery. The numbers on the top represent the average BMT score for each PI for all the fisheries. [Extract from the comparative study conducted by Pronatura Noroeste in collaboration with WWF and SFP.](#)

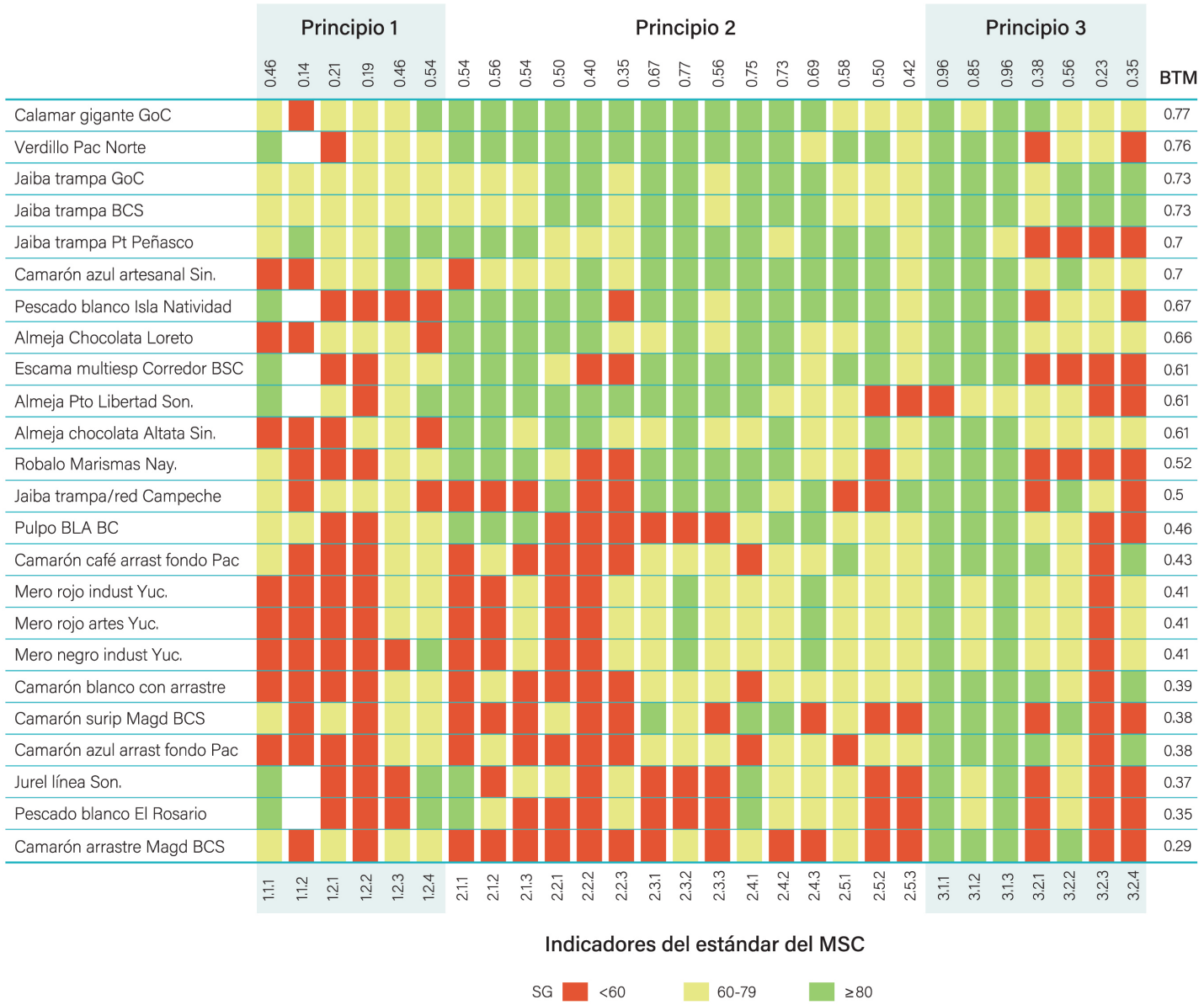


Figure 17. Scoring of pre of MSC certified fisheries in Mexico. The colours of the cells represent the level of scoring per PI for each fishery. The numbers on the right are the BMT overall scoring for each fishery. The numbers on the top represent the average BMT score for each PI for all the fisheries. White cells for PI 1.1.2 are due to a scoring ≥ 80 for PI 1.1.1. [Extract from the comparative study conducted by Pronatura Noroeste in collaboration with WWF and SFP.](#)

The biggest challenges to achieving a greater environmental performance that are faced by the majority of the evaluated fisheries include:

- An absence of comprehensive harvest strategies
- Limitations of existing information systems to conduct appropriate fisheries management
- Deficient implementation of the Mexican fisheries regulatory framework (Figure 18 and 19).

In order to drive fisheries towards sustainability, the analysis shows that the Mexican fisheries management system requires:

- 1) Strengthening active management, based on the state of the stock
- 2) Using existing systems of information and extending them to address broader needs
- 3) Improving the implementation of the general regulatory framework in the specific management of the fisheries
- 4) Assigning greater power to state governments and producers in the field of research, management and compliance

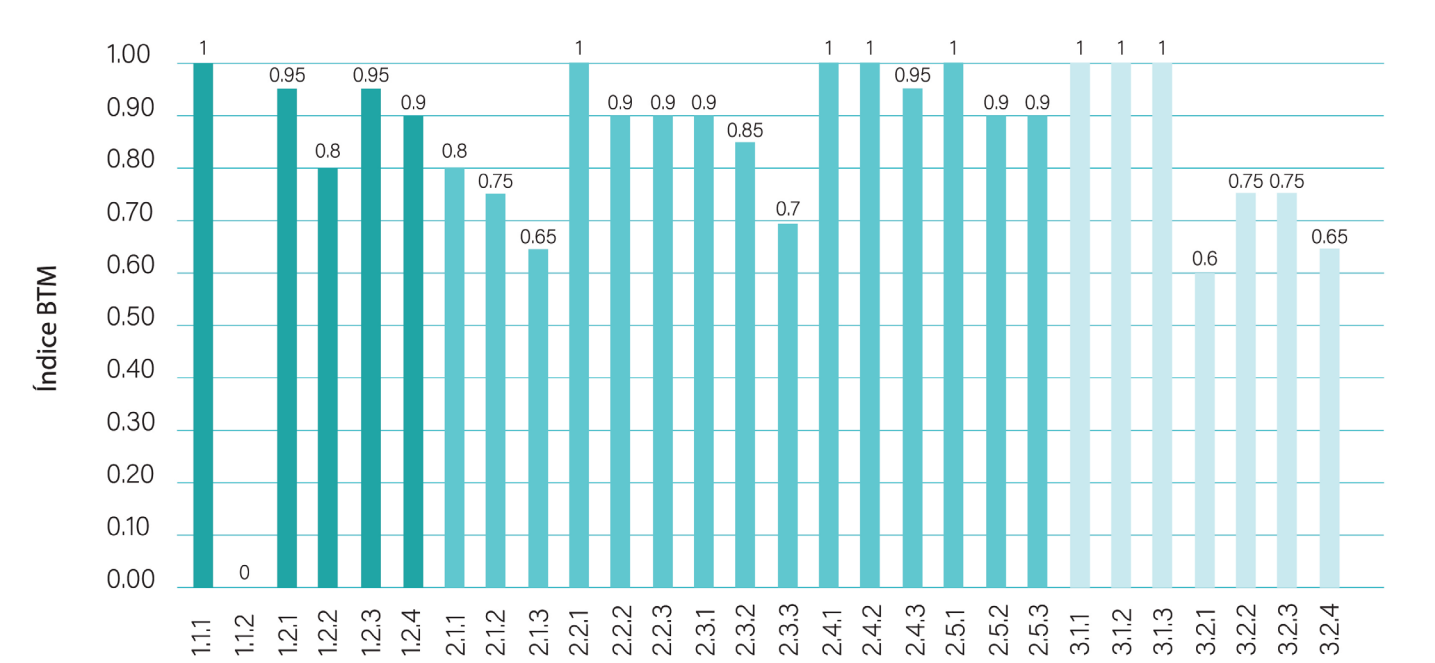


Figure 18. Average BMT score for all the certified fisheries per PI (dark blue for Principle 1, medium blue for Principle 2 and light blue for Principle 3). Extract from the [comparative study conducted by Pronatura Noroeste in collaboration with WWF and SFP.](#)

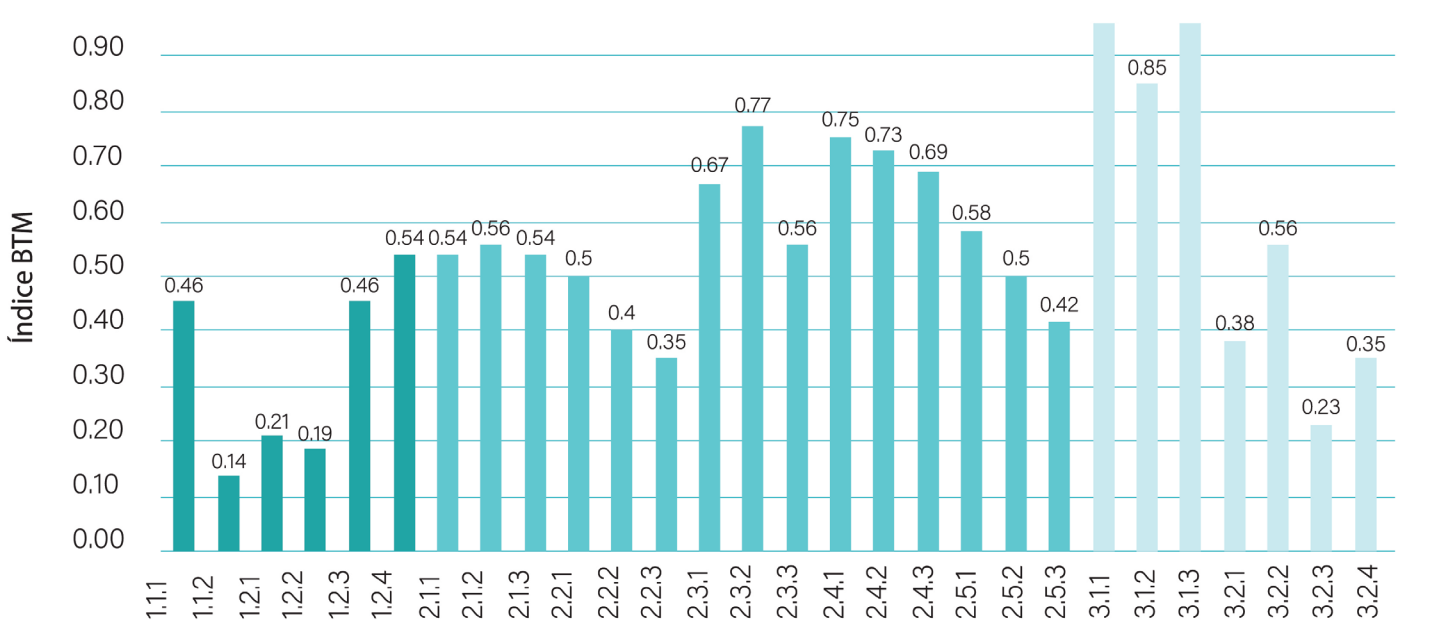


Figure 19. Average BMT score for all the pre-assessed fisheries per PI (dark blue for Principle 1, medium blue for Principle 2 and light blue for Principle 3). Extract from the [comparative study conducted by Pronatura Noroeste in collaboration with WWF and SFP.](#)

The analysis conducted by Pronatura Noroeste opened a new perspective on the potential that a critical mass of pre-assessed, and fully assessed, fisheries might have in term of collective action for sustainable

ocean management. A group of Mexican non-profit organisations are now working together on a common agenda to address their common challenges that have been identified via the MSC Pathway tools.

3. Effective strategies for the MSC Pathway to Sustainability

In the previous sections of the report, we presented the MSC Pathway Tools and Pathway projects that form our broader MSC Pathway to Sustainability program. This final section aims to identify the enabling conditions that influence the success of our effort in the improvement space. To do so, we analysed the pre-assessment scores of 70 fisheries belonging to the Pathway projects above mentioned, and two additional projects in India and Indonesia, to identify the main trends and challenges amongst them. Then, we used the [ISEAL \(2020\) Choosing effective strategies to drive sustainability improvements – decision making framework](#) report to answer the following question: how can we design an MSC Pathway to Sustainability strategy that will support lasting improvements in the fisheries sustainability performance?

3.1. Pathway to Sustainability: trends and challenges

Following the same approach presented for Western Australia and Fish for Good Mexico (Figures 16 and 17), we compiled the pre-assessment results of 71 fisheries of the following Pathway projects:

- Project UK – 8 fisheries
- Western Australia – 3 fisheries, the last ones that are still improving towards certification
- Medfish Spain – 11 fisheries
- Medfish France – 11 fisheries
- Fish for Good Mexico – 9 fisheries
- Fish for Good Indonesia – 6 fisheries
- Fish for Good South Africa – 8 fisheries
- India - 9 fisheries
- BluFish – 6 fisheries

3.1.1. Trends and challenges per gear groups and per species groups

We carried out an initial analysis of the all the 71 pre-assessment results by dividing them by [gear groups](#), as follows:

- Bottom trawl (n=25)
- Dredge (n=2)
- Gillnets (n=5)
- Hand gathered (n=7)
- Hooks and lines (n=10)
- Rope grown (n=1)
- Surrounding nets (n=9)
- Traps (n=12)

A similar analysis was conducted for the groups of species that are targeted by the pre-assessed fisheries in our data base. Each species has different characteristics,

in terms of the life history and vulnerability, which impact the environmental performance and pre-assessment scores of the fisheries targeting them. The distribution of the 71 pre-assessed fisheries per group species is as follows:

- Bivalve (n=10)
- Cephalopod (n=10)
- Lobster / Crab (n=9)
- Coastal pelagic fish (n=13)
- Shrimp / prawns (n=13)
- Small pelagic (n=7)
- Tuna (n=4)
- Whitefish (n=5)

The results of this analysis show where fisheries have more improvements to make (Figures 20 and 21) and should not be interpreted as the expected performance of certain types of fisheries against the MSC Fisheries Standard. However, they could inform a future strategy for the MSC Pathway to Sustainability, including the development of tools to address specific challenges faced by certain fisheries. Still, we will see in the next section that some PIs are challenging by nature, independently of the species or the gear that might characterise a fishery.

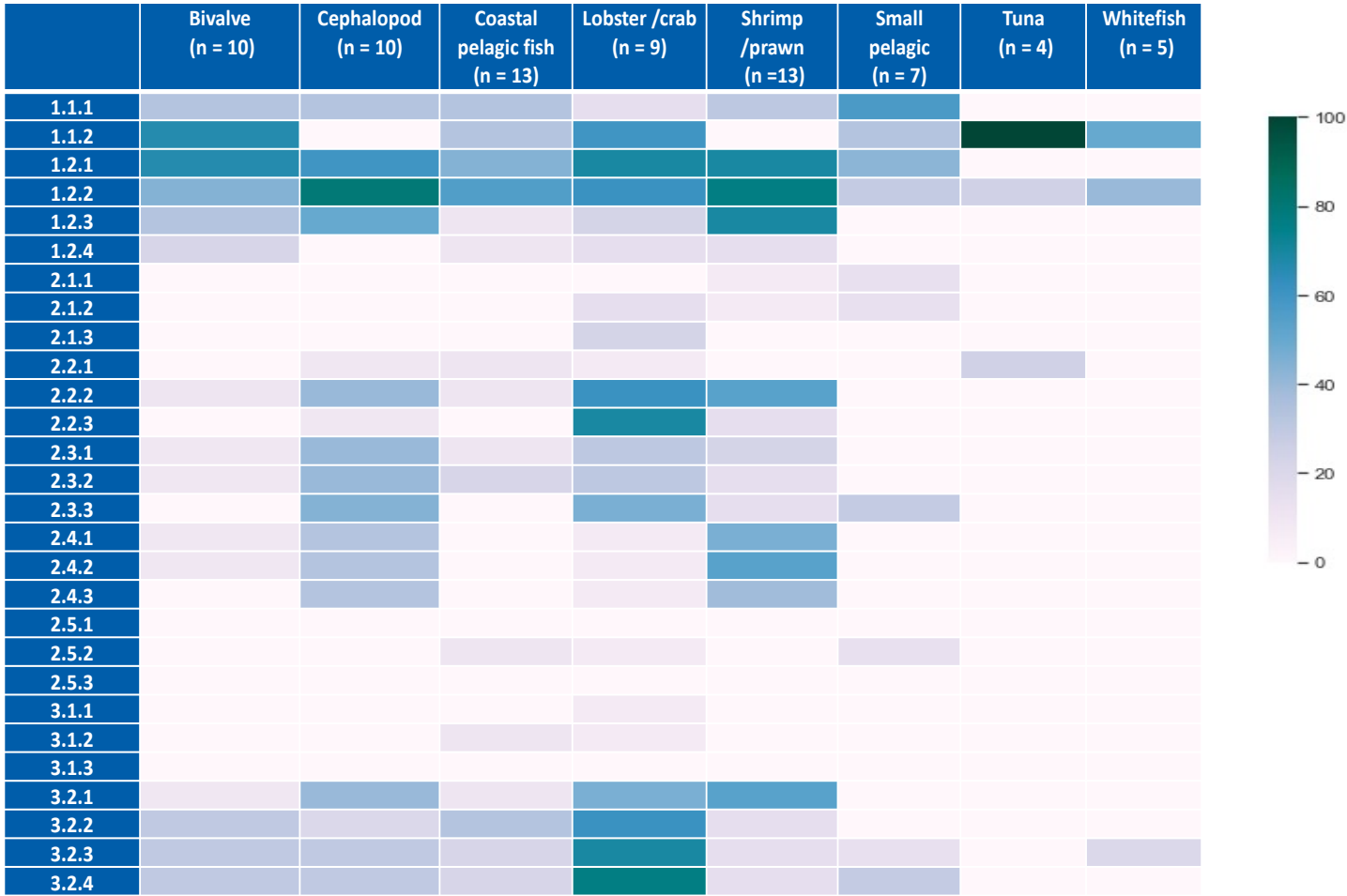


Figure 20. Percentage of failure per PI by Gear Group for pre-assessed fisheries – the lighter cells represent the lowest probability of failure, while the darkest green cells represent the highest probability of failure.

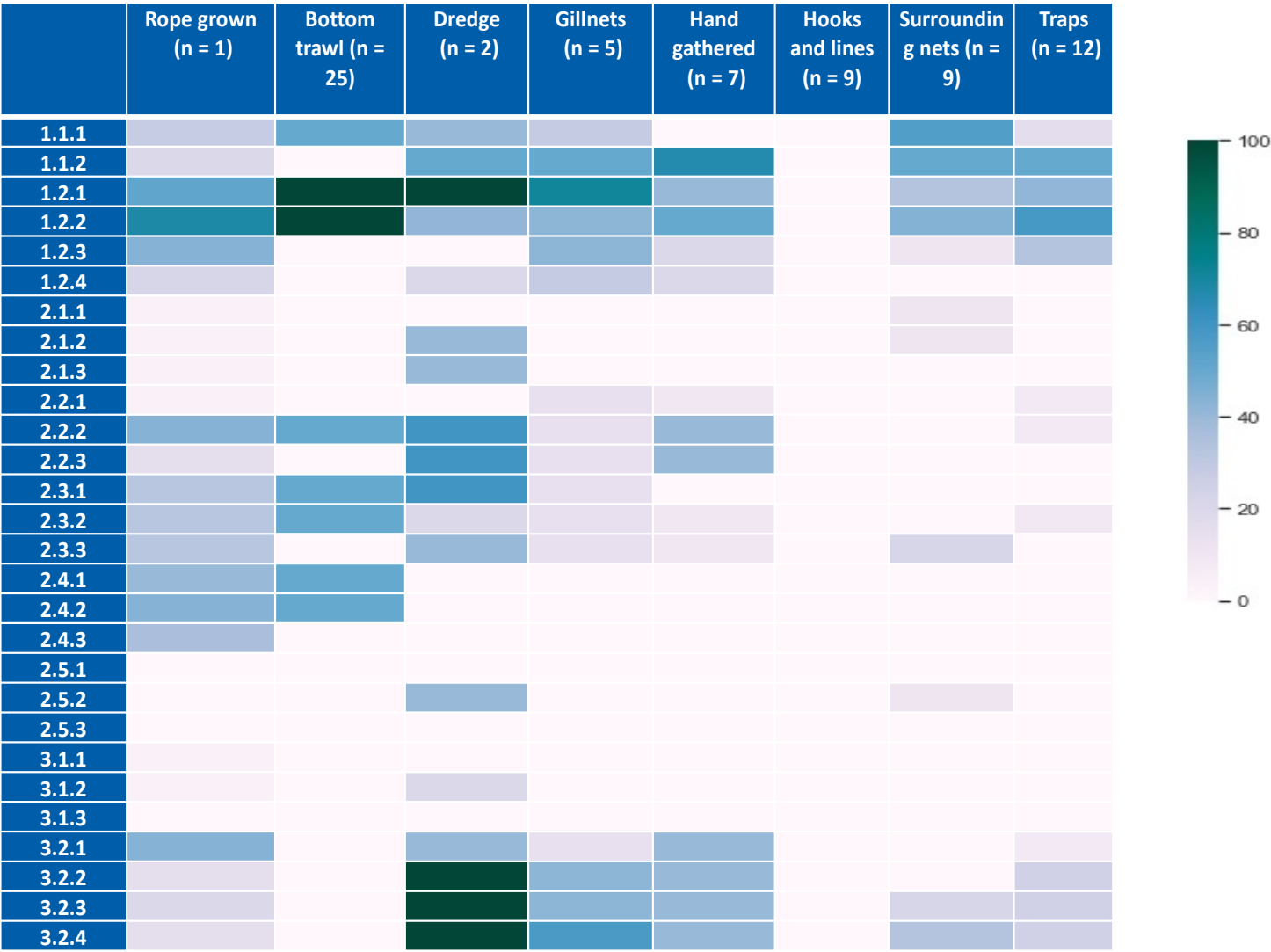


Figure 21. Percentage of failure per PI by Species Group for pre-assessed fisheries – the lighter cells represent the lowest probability of failure, while the darkest green cells represent the highest probability of failure.

3.1.2. Challenging Performance Indicators

Finally, for all the fisheries in the Pathway projects above mentioned, we analysed the percentage of fail, conditions and pass scores per PI. We have been able to identify the most challenging PIs for those fisheries, which are the ones with the highest percentage of fail and condition together (dark green in Figure 22).

Percentage of total pathway project fisheries that would fail, receive conditions or pass (n=71)

	Fail assessment (%)	Receive a condition of certification (%)	Pass MSC assessment (%)	Challenging performance indicators
1.1.1	27	41	31	68
1.1.2	45	40	15	85
1.2.1	53	34	13	87
1.2.2	57	41	1	98
1.2.3	30	30	40	60
1.2.4	10	17	73	27
2.1.1	3	10	87	13
2.1.2	6	10	84	16
2.1.3	4	21	74	25
2.2.1	6	36	59	42
2.2.2	30	36	34	66
2.2.3	17	51	31	68
2.3.1	18	35	46	53
2.3.2	19	46	36	65
2.3.3	20	53	27	73
2.4.1	16	24	60	40
2.4.2	17	30	54	47
2.4.3	13	39	48	52
2.5.1	0	46	54	46
2.5.2	4	48	48	52
2.5.3	0	44	56	44
3.1.1	1	20	79	21
3.1.2	3	30	68	33
3.1.3	0	15	85	15
3.2.1	27	61	13	88
3.2.2	25	58	17	83
3.2.3	30	49	21	79
3.2.4	31	41	28	72

Figure 22. Percentage of fisheries in Pathway projects that would fail, receive condition or pass per PI – the lighter cells represent the lowest probability of failure, while the darkest green cells represent the highest probability of failure

It should not be surprising to see PIs that have already been identified as challenging PIs during the previous analysis per gear groups and per species groups. The four PIs where the most improvements are required are:

- PI 1.2.1 – Harvest strategy
- PI 1.2.2 – Harvest control rules & tools
- PI 3.2.1 – Fisheries specific objectives
- PI 3.2.2 – Decision making process

Note that we do not mention PI 1.1.2. in the above list, despite its high percentage of fail or condition in Figure 22. This is due to the nature of that indicator, that is scored only under certain conditions. As a result, fewer than 30 % of the fisheries in our dataset have scored that PI, so we do not consider that it is representative of the challenges faced by the fisheries in the pre-assessment space.

As a next step, it would be necessary to analyse further the specific challenges that fisheries face for each of those PIs and to explore the feasibility to develop specific tools to help them improve their performance for those PIs. As such a research is likely to require significant resources, a first valuable step might be to use the framework that ISEAL has developed with [Aidenvironment](#) in their [ISEAL \(2020\) Choosing effective strategies to drive sustainability improvements – Decision making framework](#).

In the following section, we classify the different elements of the MSC Pathway to Sustainability according to the two main categories of strategy identified in the paper - value chain strategies and systemic strategies – and how they are connected (Figure 23).

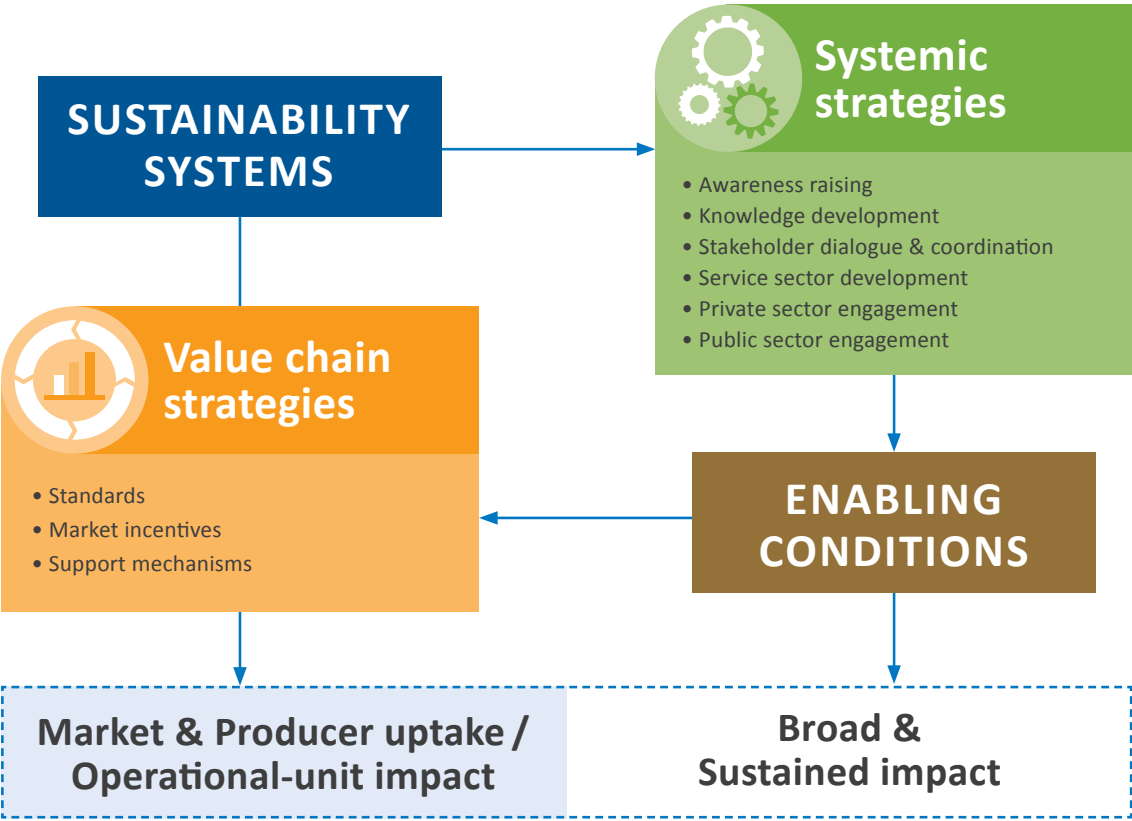


Figure 23. Overview of value chain and systemic strategies ©ISEAL 2020

3.2. Effective strategies to drive sustainability improvements

The MSC improvement strategy in the pre-certification space has evolved over time and it is enlightening to retrospectively examine the types of strategies implemented to create enabling conditions that drive sustainability improvements in the fisheries sector.

3.2.1. Value chain strategies

Value chain strategies are defined in the ISEAL paper as “market-driven approaches that aim to directly influence the behaviour of producing enterprises by introducing incentives through the value chain in the form of norms (e.g. standards), rewards (e.g. market incentives) or support (e.g. capacity building)”. As a standard setter, the MSC’s theory of change is built on a solid value chain strategy (Figure 24).

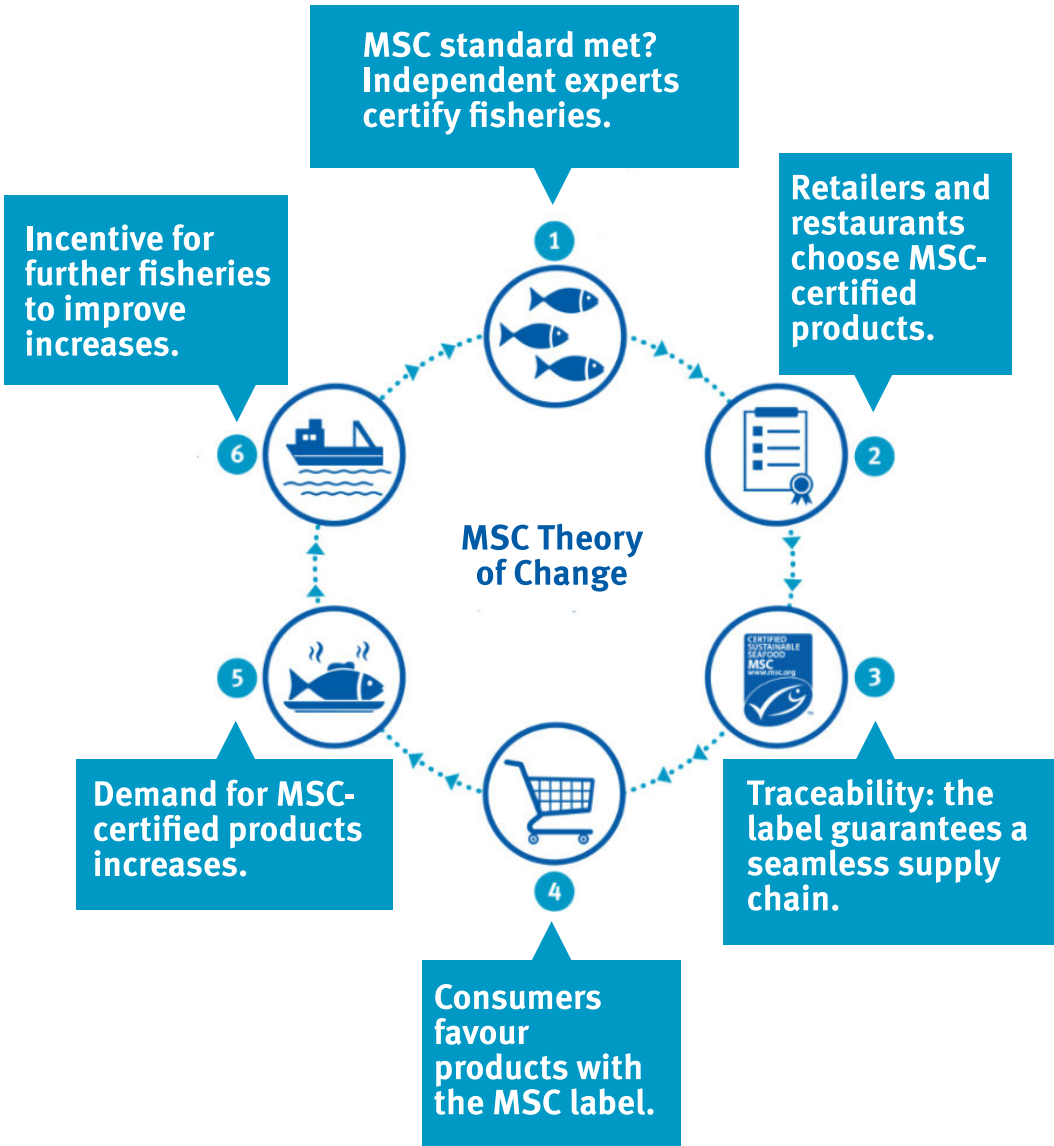


Figure 24. The MSC Theory of Change © MSC

As part of its Pathway to Sustainability approach, the MSC has kept its market reward as the main incentive for fisheries to improve. The first Pathway projects that have been implemented, Project UK and Western Australia, have a strong value chain focus and certification is certainly the end goal for the fisheries. Pathway tools are interventions that help target groups to improve, and as such they can be categorised as “support mechanisms” in the value chain strategy (Figure 23).

While the market incentive remains in more recent Pathway projects, like Fish for Good Mexico, it is complemented by other diverse objectives, including the creation of conditions to enable a value chain strategy to be efficient when necessary. Those objectives are categorised as “Systemic strategies” in the ISEAL paper and they are described in the next section.

In some contexts, the market might not be a sufficient incentive for fisheries to improve and the effectiveness of value chain strategies is undermined. The paper developed by Aidenvironment in collaboration with ISEAL identifies three aspects that indicate that the context might not be favourable for value chain strategy:

- If the producer context is not favourable,
- If the market context is not favourable,
- If the institutional context is not favourable

In those cases, their recommendation is to focus on systemic strategies to build enabling conditions for effective value chain strategies. In all MSC Pathway projects, the analysis of the context, or mapping (Figure 6) is the first step that allows to define a fair balance between value chain and systemic strategies.

3.2.2. Systemic strategies and enabling conditions

Systemic strategies for sustainability standards are meant to “change overall conditions to be more supportive of value chain actions”. In the MSC Pathway projects in the Mediterranean Sea and North-western Mexico, fisheries might operate in disabling conditions regarding the producer, market or institutional context. Therefore, Pathway projects in those areas, and others with similar challenges, include a stronger systemic strategy to complement the value chain approach.

Depending on the specificities of each context - i.e. fisheries management area, characteristics of the species and composition of the fleet - the balance between value chain and systemic strategies might vary. Therefore, the

Pathway project approach must be adjustable by nature and its entry point is always an analysis of the enabling and disabling condition, i.e. mapping. The ISEAL paper shares a useful decision-making framework to support the analysis of the context in which a Pathway project operates, and identify the most suitable direction to conduct the project.

Systemic strategies in Pathway projects have shown positive results on several areas, resulting in the establishment of enabling conditions for value chain strategies. The most outstanding impact reported across all Pathway projects is the improvement of collaboration between stakeholders, such as government, researchers, fishers, market actors and NGOs. A peer-reviewed [paper on the socio-economic impacts of MSC certification in Western Australia](#) was published in 2020, highlighting the greater acceptability and increased efficiency in the governance process. Inspired by those results, we have adapted the questionnaire and have conducted similar surveys that confirm the improvement of collaboration as one of the most important impacts of Pathway projects. The data from the surveys will be further analysed with the intention of publishing the results.

Due to the key role of authorities in the fisheries management system, and therefore in the environmental performance of fisheries, systemic strategies in Pathway projects are very much focused on engagement with governments. Depending on the national legislation, and the nature of the fisheries (e.g. migratory species or shared stock species), different levels of government might be involved in Pathway projects, from local to multilateral.

We described in the case studies how the Medfish project has expanded to include several Mediterranean countries, which will improve the alignment of fisheries management in the region. And we described how Fish for Good Mexico created a framework for the federal government to prioritise the improvements that need to be done in the fisheries management system. The MSC Pathway to Sustainability offers a framework for improvements that can be employed by governments and other stakeholders to build an enabling environment for fisheries sustainability, like the project in Western Australia illustrates.

As several of the 28 PIs in the MSC Fisheries Standard involve fisheries authority’s engagement, it is reasonable to assume that a better score for those PIs might improve the overall environmental performance of the fisheries involved in Pathway projects, and could have a positive impact for other regional fisheries.

Conclusion

The diversity of Pathway tools and their use in Pathway projects are the backbone of the MSC Pathway to Sustainability approach. The accessibility of Pathway tools makes them a key component for both value chain and systemic strategies to drive fisheries improvements in the pre-certification space. The flexibility of the Pathway project methodology also allows systemic strategies to be adjusted to specific contexts, in order to optimise MSC’s intervention and to support the establishment of enabling conditions for certification.

The examples of Pathway projects included in the previous section demonstrate that the strategic use of MSC Pathway tools can enable the three objectives of the Pathway to Sustainability to be achieved:

- Implementation of improvement actions
- Active government involvement
- Certification of fisheries

A jurisdictional approach has been found to be particularly efficient and favourable in MSC Pathway projects as it allows regional governance needs to be addressed.

While the MSC Pathway to Sustainability is being implemented in a large range of countries, it has proven to be a particularly effective gateway for inducing fisheries improvements in developing countries. However, it remains a constraint to scale it up, especially in countries where the MSC does not have an office. As such, it is mainly dependent on external philanthropic funding, which makes it particularly vulnerable.

The recent launch of the [MSC Transition Assistance Fund](#), that uses part of the ecolabel royalties received by the MSC to support the implementation of fisheries improvements, might be the first step towards a stronger financial structure of the Pathway to Sustainability. The MSC Transition Assistance Fund suggests that improvement strategies are now embedded into the overarching MSC financial strategy to strengthen ad hoc philanthropic supports.

Finally, the overall success of the MSC Pathway to Sustainability approach might be representative of the evolution of how third-party certification programs and scheme owners operate. Its role will certainly be key for the MSC to reach the ambitious goal of 30% of the global marine catch certified or engaged by 2030.

The paper ISEAL (2020) *Choosing effective strategies to drive sustainability improvements – Decision making framework* has been a valuable support to self-reflect on the improvements journey that the MSC started 20 years ago, as well as to think about directions to follow in the future.



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