MSC Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework

Contents

Document History

Version	Effective Date	Description of Amendment	Affected Section / Page
1.0	24/09/2024	New Document – replacing the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework	N/A

About this Framework

This Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework specifies a set of indicators for tracking how the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and its programs are performing over time, within the context of the MSC Theory of Change (ToC). The MEL Framework is set out in compliance with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems (ISEAL, 2023).

What is Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning?

Monitoring is a continuous function that utilises the systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide the MSC executive and stakeholders with information on the extent of program progress and the achievement of objectives.

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of indicators of success, targets and activities. It determines the value and significance of the direct and indirect impacts that MSC programs may have on the environment in which it operates, as well as within broader socio-ecological systems.

Learning is the use of the results of monitoring and evaluation to answer specific questions and support continual improvement of MSC programs, activities, and decision making processes.

Please refer to the MSC-MSCI Vocabulary or the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems for definitions of many of the technical terms used in this framework.

The Importance of Evaluation

"The purposes of evaluation are to promote accountability and learning. Evaluation aims to understand why — and to what extent — intended and unintended results were achieved and to analyse the implications of the results. Evaluation can inform planning, programming, budgeting, implementation and reporting and can contribute to evidence-based policymaking, development effectiveness and organizational effectiveness."

- United Nations Norms and Standards for Evaluation (United Nations Evaluation Group, 2016)

"Evaluation is the systematic assessment of an intervention's design, implementation and outcomes. Both monitoring and evaluation should be considered before, during and after implementation."

- United Kingdom Government's Green Book on Evaluation (HM Treasury, 2022)

MSC Theory of Change and Program

The MSC Theory of Change

Based on the MSC Theory of Change (Figure 1), market and consumer demand for sustainable seafood, achieved through credible certification and ecolabeling programs, can drive growth in sustainable fishing practices (Arton et al., 2020), which can ultimately result in improved outcomes for biodiversity, the environment and society. In this sense, increased consumer awareness and preference for sustainably sourced seafood can drive market demand for seafood products sourced from MSC-certified fisheries, while increases in market demand will in turn drive additional fisheries to follow sustainable practices and seek MSC certification.

Read here for more information on the MSC Theory of Change and how it "pulls" the seafood sector towards certification.

1. Fisheries that meet the MSC Standard are independently certified as sustainable

2. Retailers and restaurants choose MSC certified sustainable seafood

3. A traceable supply chain assures consumers that only seafood from an MSC certified fishery is sold with the blue MSC label

4. Consumers preferentially purchase seafood with the blue MSC label

5. Market demand for MSC certified seafood is increased

6. More fisheries choose to improve their practices and volunteer to be assessed to the MSC Standard

Figure 1: The Marine Stewardship Council's Theory of Change

The MSC Program

The MSC has developed three certification Standards (Table 1) to ensure that MSC-labelled seafood comes from a sustainable source, and uses an independent third-party assessment process to ensure separation between standard setting, assessment and auditing. It has also developed a range of programs (Table 1) that aim to increase the accessibility and credibility of the program globally.

The MSC further conducts a wide range of activities in the delivery of the MSC program including: regular review of certification Standards; support and quality assurance of Standard implementation; commercial and fisheries outreach; science and marketing communications; and targeted research. A grant-making function, the Ocean Stewardship Fund (OSF), supports innovative research, engagement, and fisheries sustainability at all scales.

Table 1: Certification standards and programs developed by the MSC. Note that certification against the Fisheries and Chain of Custody (CoC) Standards must also comply with the MSC Labour Eligibility Requirements, which preclude certification for at least two years for any organization with an entity that has been convicted of forced or child labour violations.

Standard or program	Description
MSC Fisheries Standard	Sets out requirements that a wild-capture fishery must meet to ensure that target stocks are healthy, environmental impact is minimised, and good governance is in place.
MSC Chain of Custody (CoC) Standard	Sets out requirements for a wide variety of seafood supply chain actors to process, distribute and/or sell products with the MSC ecolabel that are sourced from an MSC certified fishery.
ASC-MSC Seaweed Standard	In collaboration with the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), sets out environmentally sustainable and socially responsible requirements for seaweed producers. As this is a joint ASC-MSC certification Standard, it is not included in the M&E Framework.
Pathways program	Supports fisheries on a path towards certification. Provides fisheries with access to MSC tools and expertise. Includes the MSC Improvement Program, aiming to support small-scale and Global South fisheries in making environmental sustainability improvements and achieving MSC certification; the Capacity Building program, aiming to build technical capacity and knowledge of the MSC Standards for fisheries regardless of scale and socioeconomic setting; and the Technical Consultant Register, aiming to increase access to experts who can provide services to fisheries working to meet the MSC Fisheries Standard.
Standards Training program	Provides auditors, assessors, stakeholders and MSC staff with training on the MSC Standards. Aims to drive accurate and consistent application, communication and understanding of the MSC's Standards across the MSC and external stakeholders involved in the certification process, reinforcing the credibility of the certification program, and enabling growth in developing economies.
Fisheries Conformity Assessor program	Increases awareness of opportunities in the assessor space by creating clear career pathways for early career scientists, consultants, researchers and other qualified applicants. Aims to increase the current pool of assessors to match growth of the certification and MSC Improvement programs.

MSC Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

MSC's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) activities comprise data and analyses to measure the intended or unintended impacts of MSC programs on target stocks, biodiversity, the environment, and socio-economic systems. The MEL process is used to inform program planning, review, and decision-making.

The scope of this MEL Framework includes indicators and data related to all fishery and chain of custody certificate holders[1] and eco-labelled products; project data generated by MSC programs and strategies, external datasets where relevant; and additional analyses undertaken to understand and/or communicate the function and impacts of MSC programs.

Table 2 This M&E Framework includes data and analyses pertaining to these parts of the MSC Program

Data and analysis of...	Part of MSC program
Sustainable fisheries including status and harvest strategies of wild-caught fish stocks (Principle 1), environmental impacts of fishing activity (Principle 2) and management of fisheries (Principle 3)	MSC Fisheries Standard
Seafood supply chains including the distribution, recognition, and sale of MSC eco-labelled products	MSC Chain of Custody Standard[1]
Assurance systems for providing confidence in the MSC program	MSC Fisheries Certification Process MSC Chain of Custody Certification Requirements General Certification Requirements MSC Labour Requirements
Outreach, pathway projects, MSC Improvement Program fisheries, capacity building training, Standards training, grant-making, research, stakeholder engagement, external consultancies and services, and communications	Activities across the MSC, overseen by the MSC Executive
Unintended consequences of the MSC program	All

Best Practice in Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

iseal This MEL Framework is modelled after the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems. Alignment of this Framework with the ISEAL Code is indicated throughout by the ISEAL icon in the margin.

iseal Monitoring, evaluation and learning is an ongoing set of interconnected functions, processes and activities that involve systematically assessing both the intended and unintended outcomes of an intervention, using evidence-based information from easily replicable analyses. MEL processes should explore the drivers and implications of outcomes, providing insights for decision makers and other stakeholders, informing subsequent policy and continual improvement.

iseal This MEL Framework provides a specific set of indicators that can be used to measure and evaluate MSC program outcomes and impacts. In doing so, this Framework provides an approach to measure

[1] Limited to the MSC CoC holders. Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) CoC holders are out of scope for this framework.

the intended or unintended impacts of the MSC program in general, and to help identify gaps where additional indicators may be needed. Establishing targets or thresholds for indicators is beyond the scope of this Framework.

The outputs of monitoring and evaluation are used to support continual improvement of MSC programs and activities to increase the effectiveness of their implementation and reduce the likelihood of negative unintended consequences occurring.

Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators

How indicators are defined

Indicators are quantitative or qualitative factors or variables that provide a simple and reliable means to measure achievement of objectives and outcomes, to reflect the changes connected to a standards system, or to help assess the performance of an organisation. The data sources and analysis methodologies for all indicators are described in the appendices of the MEL Technical Report.

Relevance of indicators to the MSC Integrated Strategic Plan

The MSC regularly produces a multi-year Integrated Strategic Plan (ISP) which provides direction and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for achieving the MSC vision. Some KPIs that are either part of the ISP and/or tracked on an ongoing basis can also comprise an M&E indicator and are annotated accordingly as "MSC KPI".

Relevance of M&E indicators to the intended outcomes of the MSC program

This Framework provides a list of indicators that can be used to measure and evaluate if MSC program activities are working as intended and delivering their intended outcomes and impacts, and identify whether unintended negative effects are occurring. The indicators can be categorised into how they measure three types of outcomes (Table 3): (a) the **reach** of the MSC "pulling" the seafood sector towards MSC certification, (b) the **credibility** earned with its stakeholders, and (c) the **impact** the MSC program is having on the water and the wider seafood sector (ISEAL, 2023).

Table 3: Definitions of 'Reach', 'Credibility', and 'Impact'.

Outcome Category	Definition
Reach	The extent of uptake, application, or use of a system. For example, the abundance and diversity of fisheries, supply chain and other actors in the seafood sector participating in the MSC program.
Credibility	The effectiveness, rigor and quality of sustainability systems as defined by the ISEAL Credibility Principles. For example, the MSC assurance programme and third-party certification system. Credibility is a key issue in establishing a trustworthy eco-labelling scheme, as voluntary market-based arrangements need the buy-in of their target participants (Bernstein & Cashore, 2004; Boström, 2006; Cashore et al., 2004).
Impact	The positive and/or negative long-term effects resulting from the implementation of the MSC program, either directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. For example, impacts on stock status, bycatch rates, ghost gear losses, ocean ecosystems and biodiversity.

Indicators relating to sustainable fisheries

The MSC ToC hypothesises that fisheries want to benefit from market and other incentives available to sustainably certified fisheries. The indicators in Table 4 measure the annual trends of fisheries engaging with MSC programs and/or becoming certified, change in the sustainability performance of fisheries engaged with the program, and in some cases the potential impacts of certification processes on biodiversity, the environment or governance structures. Analysis of these indicators by various fishery attributes can identify areas where the MSC program works well versus where it is not working as intended. This enables the MSC to prioritise areas for improvement and provides a better understanding of the validity of the assumptions of the Theory of Change.

Table 4: Indicators for measuring engagement and performance of fisheries with the MSC Program

Indicator number	Indicator name	Definition or Rationale	Application to Outcome Category			MSC KPI
			Reach	Credibility	Impact	
1.1	Number of Units of Assessment engaged with MSC	The number of MSC-engaged Units of Assessment reflects how the number and complexity of fisheries in the program changes over time. Engaged UoA categories are: certified; in initial assessment; MSC Improvement; and suspended from certification. In addition, the number of UoAs that have withdrawn from the MSC program or failed an assessment (so are no longer engaged) are monitored. Number of UoAs may be disaggregated by region, country economic status, gear type, or species group.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
1.2	Proportion of FAO landings engaged with MSC	The landings of MSC-engaged units of assessment (UoAs) as a proportion of global landings reported to FAO reflects the fraction of global landings certified as sustainably-managed (or otherwise MSC-engaged) over time. Relative landings categories are: certified; in initial assessment; MSC Improvement; and suspended from certification. Relative landings may be disaggregated by region, country economic status, gear type, or species group.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1.3	Distribution of Units of Assessment Principle scores at initial assessment and first re-assessment	Scores, assigned by third-party assessors during full assessments, represent the performance of Units of Assessment against the MSC Fisheries Standard at the time of assessment, providing more granularity than a simple pass/fail outcome. Comparing the distribution of Principle scores across Units of Assessment at initial	No	Yes	Yes	No

Indicator number	Indicator name	Definition or Rationale	Application to Outcome Category			MSC KPI
			Reach	Credibility	Impact	
		assessment and first re-assessment demonstrates the change in UoA performance over time.				
1.4	Conditions assigned to Units of Certification	Areas of required improvements are defined as 'conditions of certification' for Units of Certification. A closure of a condition indicates improved fishery performance against specific criteria of the MSC Fisheries Standard. Tracking the number of conditions open at the beginning of each 5-year assessment cycle and the proportion of conditions that are closed by the end of each assessment cycle can demonstrate both the rate of condition closure and the sustained improvements over time. The specific actions taken to close bycatch and habitat conditions are also collected on an ad-hoc basis and presented when available.	No	Yes	Yes	No
1.5	Performance Indicator score changes between pre-assessment and initial MSC assessment	Before a fishery enters a full MSC assessment, it may first undergo a pre-assessment against the Standard, which is a rapid version of a full assessment that helps to identify performance gaps and areas for improvement. During the pre-assessment, draft scoring ranges are assigned against the MSC Fisheries Standard Performance Indicators. For the fisheries that go on to formal MSC assessment, corresponding scores can be compared between the pre-assessment and the MSC Announcement Comment Draft Report, potentially showing improvements in fishing practices leading up to formal assessment. Score changes can be split by the eventual MSC status (certified/withdrawn from assessment or failed/still in assessment) to observe trends. This indicator focuses on pre-assessments performed or verified by accredited third-party assessors.	No	No	Yes	No
1.6	Number of grants and amount of funding awarded through the Ocean Stewardship Fund	The total number of grants and amount of funding awarded to fisheries annually through MSC's Ocean Stewardship Fund represents MSC's support of fisheries with the costs of maintaining certification and making improvements, particularly small-scale fisheries and those from developing economies. These quantities can be disaggregated by country economic status or recipient fishery certification status to understand the reach and distribution of funding.	Yes	No	No	No

Indicators relating to seafood supply chains and markets

The MSC ToC hypothesises that preference of consumers to purchase MSC labelled seafood will drive more supply chain actors, restaurants, retailers and fisheries to become MSC-certified in pursuit of both market and sustainability incentives. The indicators in Table 5 provide information on annual trends in the number of organisations that carry MSC labelled products and are Chain of Custody certified, and the performance of those organisations against the MSC Standard. Analysis of these indicators by various certificate holder and product attributes can identify areas where the MSC program works well versus where it is not working as intended. This enables the MSC to prioritise areas for improvement and provides a better understanding of the validity of the assumptions of the Theory of Change.

Table 5: Indicators for measuring engagement of supply chain actors with the MSC Program

Indicator number	Indicator name	Definition	Outcome Area			MSC KPI
			Reach	Credibility	Impact	
2.1	Number of MSC Chain of Custody certificate holders	The number of Chain of Custody certificate holders reflects trends in different business sectors and seafood supply chain actors participating in the program over time. Certificate holder categories are monitored separately: certified, applicant, cancelled, withdrawn, and suspended. Number of certificate holders may be disaggregated by certificate holder type, region, country economic status, or sector.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
2.2	Total volume of seafood sold with the MSC ecolabel	The total volume of seafood sold bearing the ecolabel can provide insight on the growth of supply chain sectors participating in the MSC program and the seafood products sold over time. Sale volume may be disaggregated by product type, region, or sector.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
2.3	Relative number of Chain of Custody non-conformities	Chain of Custody certificate holders that do not meet the Chain of Custody Standard during an audit can be suspended and/or issued with non-conformities by the assessor. The timely resolution of these non-conformities ensures the credibility of the MSC program. The number of non-conformities issued, relative to the number of audits conducted each year, can highlight the transparency and quality assurance of the MSC program, as well as identify opportunities for improvement or clarification.	No	Yes	Yes	No

Indicators for measuring assurance

Assurance of program activities is a critical aspect of the MSC ToC, ensuring that auditors and assessors are competent and qualified to assess against the MSC Standards; that CABs conduct objective and impartial audits and assessments; that stakeholders are confident in the MSC program; that sufficient evidence is provided that the intent of the Standards is met by certificate holders; and that the MSC remains an independent standard setter, engaging transparently with the certification process. The indicators in Table 7 primarily provide information on the outputs of the continuous assurance activities performed by the MSC. Analysis of these indicators can identify areas where the MSC program works well versus where it is not working as intended, helping to prioritise areas for improvement.

Additional oversight of CABs is performed by Assurance Services International (ASI) (Assurance Services International 2022), the entity responsible for auditing CABs, and reported in their annual reports (Assurance Services International, 2024). The ASI Annual Report includes information on ASI non-conformities, ASI assessment of CABs, and the grading of CABs. It is provided to and utilised internally by the MSC to produce the MSC Assurance Annual Management Review, which provides information to key internal stakeholders about the performance of the MSC assurance system over the past year. These reports are not published publicly as they contain commercially sensitive information.

Table 6: Indicators for measuring outputs of MSC assurance activities

Indicator number	Indicator name	Definition	Outcome Area			MSC KPI
			Reach	Credibility	Impact	
3.1	Relative number of Technical Oversight findings	In addition to CAB oversight by ASI, the MSC Fisheries and Supply Chain teams carry out Technical Oversight on a sample of fishery assessment reports. Technical Oversight involves conducting checks to ensure all required sections of a report have been provided and to evaluate the fisheries assessment work of CABs against MSC scheme requirements. Any potential non-conformities are known as Technical Oversight findings. The number and type/severity of Technical Oversight findings raised, relative to the number of assessment reports sampled, demonstrate quality assurance of the MSC program and help identify opportunities for improvement or clarification of the MSC Standards.	No	Yes	No	No
3.2	Relative number of Variation Requests	CABs can make a formal request to apply requirements of the Standards in a way that deviates or varies from the Standard (variation requests). Analysis of the number of these requests, relative to the number of audits and assessments, and the nature of these requests can provide information on whether the	No	Yes	No	No

Indicator number	Indicator name	Definition	Outcome Area			MSC KPI
			Reach	Credibility	Impact	
		requirements are functioning as intended (clear, feasible, and reflecting MSC's intent), or if additional clarifications need to be considered. The nature of these requests also reflects CAB performance, depending on whether or not they are following due process and varying legitimately from the requirements.				
3.3	Relative number of objections to fishery certification	The MSC Fisheries Certification Process allows stakeholders who have participated in the assessment to file an objection to the Final Draft Report produced by a CAB. The number of objections to fishery certification, relative to the number of Final Draft Reports published, is an indicator of ongoing stakeholder engagement with fishery assessments, providing a measure of the credibility of the MSC program.	No	Yes	No	No
3.4	Availability of competent auditors, assessors, and Technical Consultants	The number of assessors, auditors, and Technical Consultants can highlight the availability of human capacity to assess fisheries and supply chain actors against the MSC Standards. Details of the training that auditors and assessors have completed, and the number of assessments or audits in which they participate annually, can provide insight into their level of competency and current activity.	Yes	Yes	No	No
3.5	Number and diversity of stakeholder responses to Standard review processes	The MSC holds stakeholder consultations as part of its periodic program reviews. The number of respondents, their geographic distribution, the diversity of stakeholder types, and trends in these measures over time can serve as a measure of the credibility of the MSC program.	Yes	Yes	No	No

Indicators relating to public perception

The MSC ToC hypothesises that as consumers preferentially purchase MSC labelled seafood from a variety of supply chain actors, the market demand for MSC certified seafood increases. The indicators in Table 6 provide information on consumer views and public awareness of the MSC over time. Analysis of these indicators by region can identify where the MSC program has reach and credibility with consumers and the general public, versus areas to prioritise for improvement. It also provides a better understanding of the validity of the assumptions of the Theory of Change.

Table 7: Indicators for measuring engagement of consumers and markets with the MSC Program

Indicator number	Indicator name	Definition	Outcome Area			MSC KPI
			Reach	Credibility	Impact	
4.1	Consumer perception of the MSC	The MSC biennially commissions a third-party to survey trends in consumers' relationships with sustainable seafood across multiple countries over time. The survey monitors consumers' awareness and perception of the MSC, as well as their values, behaviours, intended behaviours, attitudes and knowledge regarding sustainable seafood, including the proportion of respondents who are aware of and/or purchase the MSC eco-label.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4.2	Number of articles in print, broadcast, and online media coverage	The indicator provides information on the external print, broadcast and media coverage that the MSC receives each year, providing information on the reach of the MSC program to consumers and stakeholders.	Yes	No	No	No
4.3	Sentiment of media coverage	This indicator provides information on the sentiment of print, broadcast and online media coverage each year with respect to the MSC, providing information on the credibility of the MSC program with consumers.	No	Yes	No	Yes

Indicators for measuring unintended consequences

Unintended effects of the MSC are defined as activities and outcomes that occur in response to, or as a consequence of, a program activity, and which may not be directly related to the MSC's mission and vision. The MSC performs a number of continuous functions to detect issues raised by any stakeholder with any aspect of the MSC programs and documents. The MSC monitors the outputs of these functions and reports on them annually through the indicators of unintended negative effects described in Table 8. Analysing trends in these indicators can highlight where further policy and operational development is required to improve the performance of the MSC program. Evaluations of other unintended effects, such as those outlined in Table 9, are performed through a combination of surveys and research.

Table 8: Indicators for measuring unintended consequences of the MSC program

Indicator number	Indicator name	Definition	Outcome Area			MSC KPI
			Reach	Credibility	Impact	
5.1	Relative number of interpretations	When questions relating to MSC program documents are received from CABS, ASI, assessors/auditors, and MSC colleagues, they are categorised based on the required response into queries, interpretations, or policy development. Analysis of the number of these questions and the nature of the responses, relative to the number of audits and assessments conducted annually, can provide information on whether the requirements are functioning as intended (i.e., they are clear, feasible, and reflecting MSC's intent), or if additional clarifications need to be considered to ensure consistent fisheries assessments and chain of custody audits.	No	Yes	No	No
5.2	Number of logged issues	The MSC has an internal ticketing system for logging issues; these are defined as any problem or opportunity that relates to any aspect of the MSC program documents or supporting documents, or any other element of the MSC certification program. The issues are assigned a category then triaged and utilised for the purpose of policy and operational development, such as addressing ambiguities that may have been highlighted in the MSC Fisheries Standard and Fisheries Certification Process. The number and type of logged issues over time can serve as a measure of unintended negative effects of the program.	No	Yes	No	No

Unintended consequences with no indicators

There are a range of potential unintended consequences for which there are no specific indicators due to their complex nature and lack of relevant available data (Table 9). Instead, these are typically investigated through in-depth evaluations, prioritised according to MSC's strategic priorities as defined in the Integrated Strategic Plan. Some examples of such evaluations provide in Table 9. It is an ISEAL requirement to consult with stakeholders on the unintended consequences of the MSC program, and the MSC will undertake these consultations in future MEL system reviews.

Table 9: List of potential unintended consequences of the MSC program.

Potential unintended consequence	Example consequence scenario	Reference
Secure livelihoods	MSC certification may create negative impacts for those fisheries that can't reach the sustainability standards, closing certain markets to them.	(Pérez-Ramírez et al., 2016)
	Cost of certification restrict small scale and/or developing world fisheries from accessing the benefits of MSC certification.	(Pérez-Ramírez et al., 2016)
Access to Health and Sanitation	Achieving MSC certification can create a sense of pride by government and central institutions resulting in infrastructure improvements at the local fishing community levels.	(Phillips et al., 2008)
Cultural Identity	MSC certification generates a sense of stewardship and ownership promoting respect and self-empowerment.	(van Putten et al., 2020)
Social Capital	MSC certification generates a sense of trust, giving the public confidence in certified fisheries and giving the fisheries a level of social capital.	(van Putten et al., 2020)
Labour rights	The MSC labour policy may increase accountability and improvements in fisheries labour components and workforce.	(Tindall et al., 2022)
Governance	MSC certification helps to foster better collaboration and engagement with a range of different stakeholders.	(Anderson et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2021)
Diet and nutrition	Due to certification, products that would otherwise be consumed in the developing world may be exported to the developed world due to increased demand, and consequently less available to local people.	(Akrong et al., 2022)
Environment	By not considering all forms of pollution (such as effluent from processing) the MSC program may be accounting for some negative environmental impacts.	(Islam et al., 2004)

Potential unintended consequence	Example consequence scenario	Reference
	MSC CoC Certification may impact the length of the supply chain, impacting the carbon emissions from seafood supply chains.	(Arton et al., 2020)
	MSC certified fisheries activities could impact the ability of the ocean to store carbon.	(Cavan & Hill, 2022)
Animal welfare	Maximising sustainability and animal welfare are separate but related goals. By perpetuating fishing the MSC programs may perpetuate the suffering of fish and other marine life.	(Bovenkerk & Meijboom, 2020)

Influencing factors

iseal There are several influencing factors which may affect the delivery, reach, credibility, and impact of the MSC program. The MSC recognises the following external factors which may affect the program but are beyond the control of the organisation:

- Climate change
- Legal and regulatory factors such as quotas
- Geo-political situations such as war
- Pandemics (e.g., COVID)
- Disadvantages for the developing world
- Labour

Reporting

Annual Report

The MSC produces an Annual Report, the purpose of which is to communicate the achievements and progress made by the MSC in the most recent year.

Technical Report

iseal The MSC also produces a biennial Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Report, the purpose of which is to assess whether the implementation of a strategic plan, standard, or program area achieved its intended impact on the MSC program overall. In practice, these reports give an updated evaluation of the indicators listed in this framework and discuss trends or progress against defined targets, or link to other reports where this has been done elsewhere. Learnings and recommendations from recent MEL activities are presented alongside changes made as a result of previous MEL activities. These reports also include a bibliography of peer reviewed academic papers and reports published by MSC staff, starting with the most recent.

Stakeholder Engagement Report

iseal The MSC publishes a stakeholder engagement report following every standard review. These reports summarise the number and diversity of responses to consultation and explain MSC decisions in response to feedback.

Publishing reports

All publicly available reports published by the MSC are available on the MSC website. A bibliography of all peer-reviewed publications can also be found on the website, alongside a list of current and planned MEL activities.

Continual improvement of the MSC program

The outputs of MEL activities are incorporated into all review processes, including Standard reviews and internal assurance reviews, to ensure the continual improvement of the MSC program. MEL activities also inform the establishment of new strategies and programs to improve the ability of the MSC to achieve its mission and vision, such as the new Integrated Strategic Plan (ISP 4) or MSC Improvement Program.

Management of this M&E Framework

Reviewing this framework

This framework will be updated as appropriate to incorporate further improvements to the M&E strategy and/or keep pace with the MSC program as it evolves.

A formal review of this document shall be completed within five years of it being published. This review will include opportunities to provide input on the design and revision of the M&E Framework, specifically regarding the intended and unintended impacts and outcomes of the Standards system, and the scope and boundaries of the M&E Framework. This process shall include stakeholder consultation on the intended and unintended consequences of the MSC program.

Resourcing this framework

This framework is managed by the MSC Research Team within the Science and Standards Department. This team includes multiple researchers with a range of specialist technical skills.

This framework is underpinned by an evolving quality management system related to monitoring and evaluating the MSC's internal processes. More information on this system is available on request.

Contact

All comments and queries on the M&E Framework should be sent to standards@msc.org, where the MSC will aim to reply within 10 working days.

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Annex 1: Aspirational indicators

The aspirational indicators below were identified during review of the previous M&E framework as useful measures of the intended and unintended outcomes of the MSC program that we do not currently have the data or capacity to monitor, but which should be possible to monitor in the near future as new data collection systems are being developed, internal data structures are being improved, and new tools for analysis are being implemented.

These indicators are included here to show the intended direction of growth for the MEL framework and to increase the flexibility of the framework, as these will be reviewed regularly and incorporated into the full list of indicators when their monitoring becomes feasible.

Table 10: Indicators that may be possible to analyse in the near future, but for which we do not currently have the necessary data available or the capacity to monitor on a regular basis.

Indicator theme	Indicator name	Definition	Outcome Area			MSC KPI
			Reach	Credibility	Impact	
Fisheries	Amount of MSC fishery catch at assessment stages	The amount of catch recorded at each of the following stages: pre-assessment; as part of Pathway Projects or MSC Improvement Program; initial assessment; first certification cycle; secondary and further re-assessment cycles; under suspension; withdrawn from the program; and those fisheries who re-entered into assessment after withdrawing or being suspended. These data can provide insight regarding the reach of the MSC program within the pre-certification space and beyond, and insight on retention of fisheries through each of these stages.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Fisheries	Progress in Pathway Projects and the MSC Improvement Program	Progress of fisheries in Pathway Projects or the MSC Improvement Program can be an indication of changes made by fisheries prior to certification at a regional or species level.	No	Yes	Yes	No
Assurance	Number of stakeholders commenting on fishery assessments and outcomes of comments	These data monitor how and why stakeholders react to MSC fishery assessments and scoring outcomes, and how CABs respond to these comments. They can highlight areas where additional clarifications are needed, while also providing a transparent and credible assessment and assurance program.	No	Yes	No	No

Indicator theme	Indicator name	Definition	Outcome Area			MSC KPI
			Reach	Credibility	Impact	
Assurance	Number of complaints and appeals	Stakeholders and participants of the MSC program can make complaints about any aspect of the MSC program and lodge appeals about decisions (Marine Stewardship Council 2022). Analysis of these data can reveal opportunities for improving the credibility of the MSC program.	No	Yes	No	No
Supply chains	MSC-certified fraction of global seafood trade	Quantity of seafood trade through MSC-certified supply chain companies expressed as a proportion of global seafood trade. Global estimates as reported to FAO are available in the FAO Global aquatic trade database. Relative trade quantities may be disaggregated by region, country economic status, or species group. Availability of MSC supply chain quantities and linkages with FAO databases make this indicator aspirational.	Yes	Yes	No	No
Assurance	Time taken to close conditions	The time taken to close conditions, and the proportion of conditions closed by the end of an assessment cycle, are important credibility indicators. Lack of linkages between old and new versions of rewritten conditions within MSC databases make this indicator aspirational.	No	Yes	No	No
Assurance	Distribution of auditors, assessors, and Technical Consultants	The global distribution of assessors, auditors, and Technical Consultants can highlight the geographic distribution of human capacity to assess fisheries and supply chain actors against the MSC Standards.	Yes	Yes	No	No
Assurance	Relative number of peer review disputes	An indicator relating to peer review disputes is currently being drafted and will be ready by summer 2024.	No	Yes	No	No