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State of the Water Spain 2025

Progress, milestones and case studies

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Contents

Preface

At the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), we envision oceans teeming with life, and seafood supplies safeguarded for generations to come. Through our globally recognized certification program the blue MSC ecolabel and more recently our pre-certification work with the MSC improvement program and the pathway projects, we promote and reward sustainable fishing practices. Our goal is to have over one-third of the world's marine catch certified or actively engaged in our program by 2030; a target aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water.

By 2050, the global population is projected to reach 9.7 billion. This reality brings with it an urgent challenge: how do we feed a growing world without exhausting our planet's natural systems? The answer lies in transforming our food systems to support both nutritional well-being and environmental sustainability.

Blue foods, including fish, seafood, and aquatic plants, offer a critical part of the solution. These nutrient-rich resources not only provide essential nourishment, but also generally carry a lower environmental footprint than land-based proteins. Aquatic foods are uniquely positioned to help meet global food security needs while preserving ecosystem health.

MSC certification is grounded in science and continuous improvement. It drives real change "on the water," helping fisheries enhance stock management, reduce environmental impacts and foster improvements in governance. An audit third party system and the participation of a wide range of stakeholders ensure a transparent and credible process. Collaboration is vital: fishers, scientists, NGOs, policymakers, industry leaders, and consumers all play a role in this shared mission.

Spain has demonstrated strong leadership in this area, with nearly half a million tons of catch already MSC certified. This includes iconic fisheries such as Barents cod, Asturias octopus, bluefin tuna from the Strait of Gibraltar, and Cantabrian anchovy, North Atlantic albacore, and tropical tuna fished by Spanish companies across oceans all over the world. These examples show what's possible from fisheries leadership and sustainable practices supported and recognized.

However, more must be done. There is an urgent need for greater involvement from market actors in Spain to reward responsible fisheries and strengthen this momentum. MSC's Theory of Change shows that when demand for sustainable seafood grows, more fisheries are encouraged to pursue certification and improve their fishing practices.

Our mission is not just to recognize sustainable fisheries, but to drive lasting solutions that benefit ocean ecosystems, coastal communities, and the global food supply. Together, we can make sustainable fishing the norm, not the exception.

This report presents the stories of progress and achievements from Spanish fisheries engaged in the MSC program. Thank you for taking the time to read it.

Alberto Martín,
Spain and Portugal Program Director

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Introduction

This State of the Water report describes the change that has been driven by the MSC program in Spain and in Spanish fisheries around the globe and the impacts that this has had on the water. Its scope entails the 12 Spanish fisheries that are currently MSC certified.

The MSC's journey in Spain has lasted over a decade: the first fishery (within the scope of this report) to obtain certification was the Pescafria-Pesquera Rodriguez Barents Sea Cod fishery in February 2012 followed by the AGARBA Spain Barents Sea cod, which now is a part of the Northeast Arctic cod and haddock demersal fishery, in November 2013. During these past 13 years, Spanish fisheries have made significant progress with regards to environmental sustainability. Nearly half a million tons of landings from vessels flagged to Spain or owned by Spanish companies are now engaged in the MSC program. This is a very positive development because Spanish fisheries engaged in the MSC program are contributing significantly to the protection and conservation of the different elements of the ecosystem where those fisheries operate, the waters around Iberian Peninsula. The incentives offered by the program have enticed Spanish fleets (and the relevant management bodies), with the help of other relevant stakeholders, into taking measures to minimize their impacts on marine life and their surroundings. The fisheries involved are contributing significantly to the protection and conservation of the different elements of the ecosystem where they operate through improving management, reducing impacts on other species and habitats, producing enhanced scientific evidence, etc.

The objective indicators provided through MSC's scoring have demonstrated that these fisheries have continued to reduce their impact on the surrounding environment and better managed their stocks after joining MSC's certification program, helping ensure that future generations may enjoy the same bounty. Furthermore, through the closing of conditions alone—required as part of participation in the program—37 additional improvements on the water have been made by Spanish fisheries since certification. This does not include the improvements made by the fisheries before the initial assessment (typically after being pre-assessed against the MSC Fisheries Standard to identify gaps) so that they could meet the high bar of the MSC Fisheries Standard during a full assessment process towards certification.

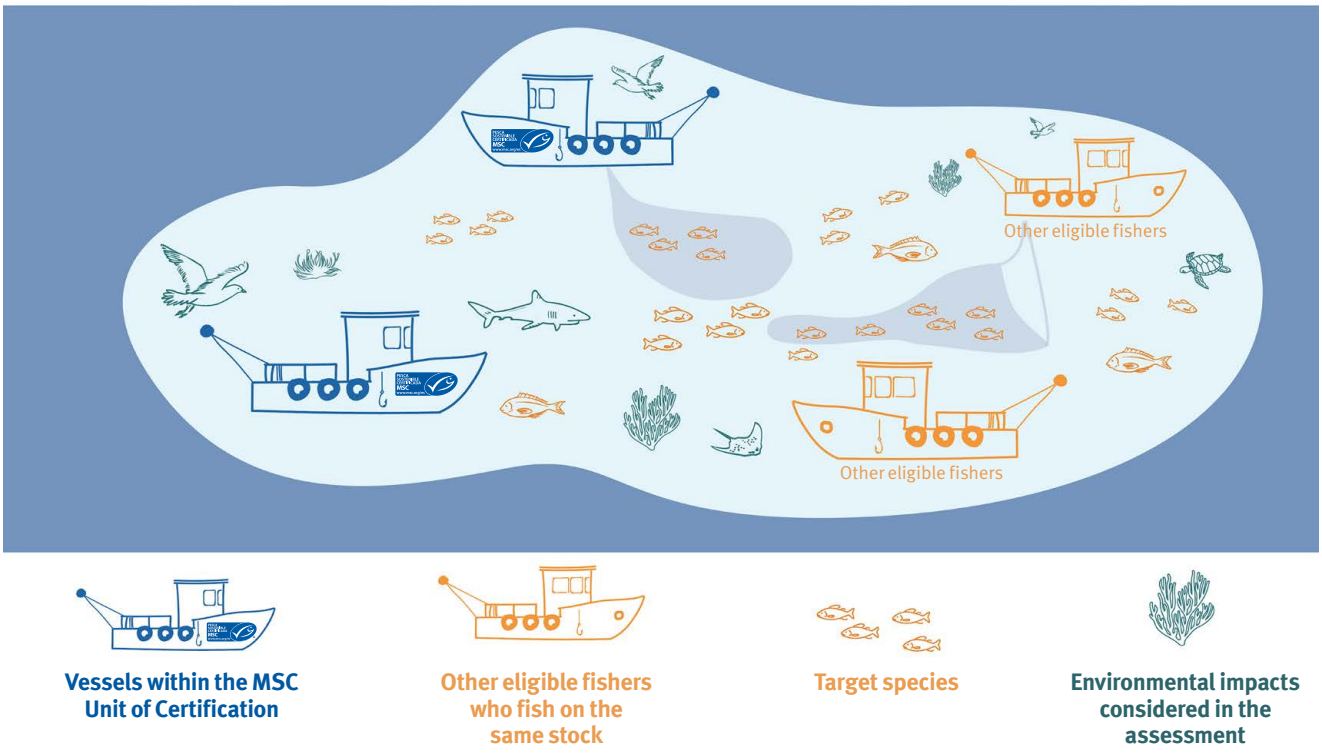
We hope that this report and its learnings regarding the progress that Spanish fishers have made while continuing to harvest and sell their product will inspire others to follow their lead as well as remind us all that profit and environmental performance are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather mutually dependent. Ultimately, one is not possible without the other, and both are necessary to solve Earth's most wicked problems.

What is a ‘fishery’ at MSC?

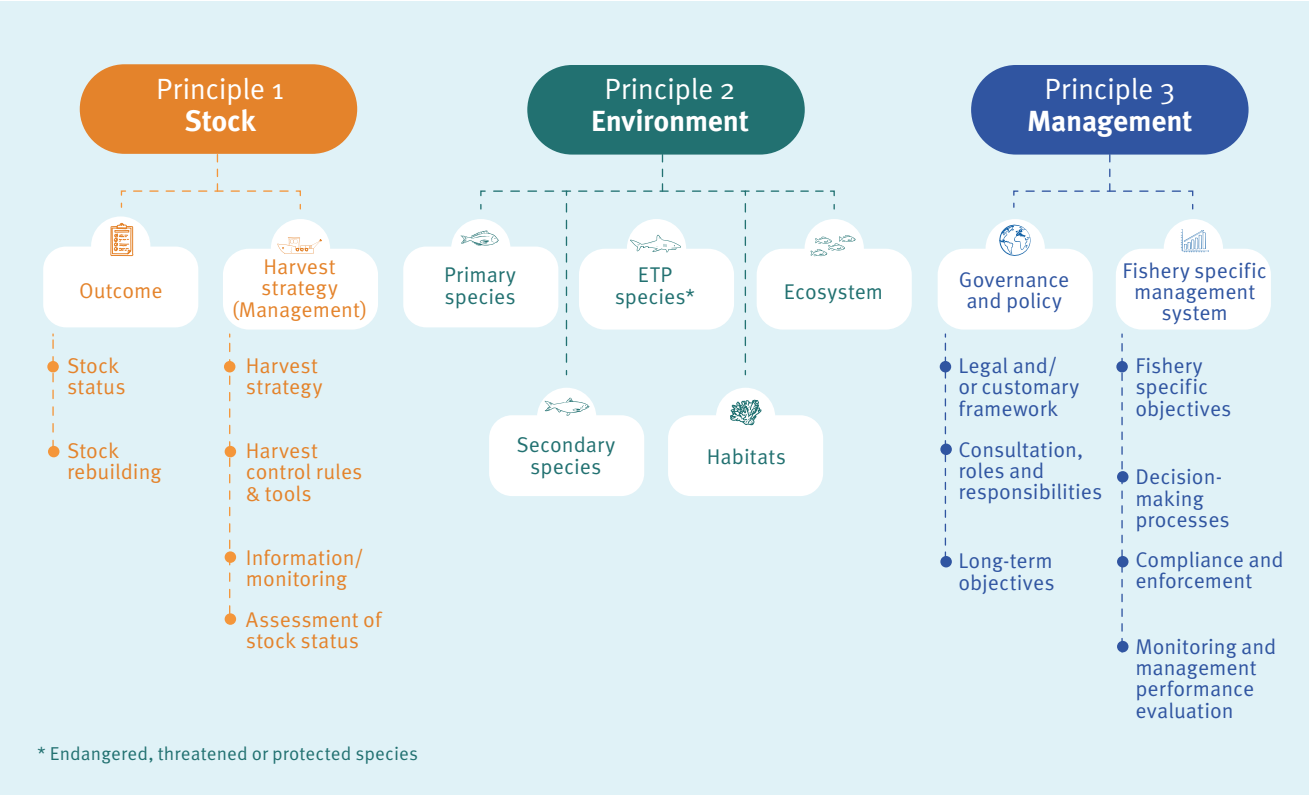
To determine whether a fish has been caught sustainably, it is necessary to look not only at the species being targeted, but also at where and how it was caught. A certified ‘fishery’ is therefore always a combination of those factors, which means that, for example, sardine is not itself certified as a whole species but the specific stock needs to be considered and can only carry the blue MSC ecolabel if it is fished in the defined location and with the defined gear, by a vessel belonging to an MSC certificate. A fishery can consist of a small group of local fishers, or be a large international collaboration, as long as there is joint management of the fishery.

Being part of an MSC certificate means that the fishery may land MSC certified fish, so long as it has been caught according to the rules of that certificate. Once landed, MSC's Chain of Custody Standard ensures the existence of traceability implemented by the owners of MSC seafood products and that any product offered for sale to consumers with the MSC blue ecolabel comes from a certified fishery.

For the purpose of this report, a fishery is defined by the certificate scope of each MSC Spanish fishery, and so may contain multiple species or gear types. Only those fisheries that are currently certified have been considered in the analysis of progress, so any fisheries that were previously certified and are either currently suspended, in assessment, in the Improvement Program, or are now withdrawn from the program altogether, are out of scope.



The MSC Fisheries Standard v2.01



The MSC Fisheries Standard was developed based on the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. It was developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders across the globe, including government, academics, researchers, fishing industry, NGOs, and the private and fishing sectors. The Fisheries Standard is made up of three principles:

- **Principle 1 (P1) Sustainability of the stock:** fisheries must operate in a way that allows fishing to continue indefinitely, without overexploiting the resource

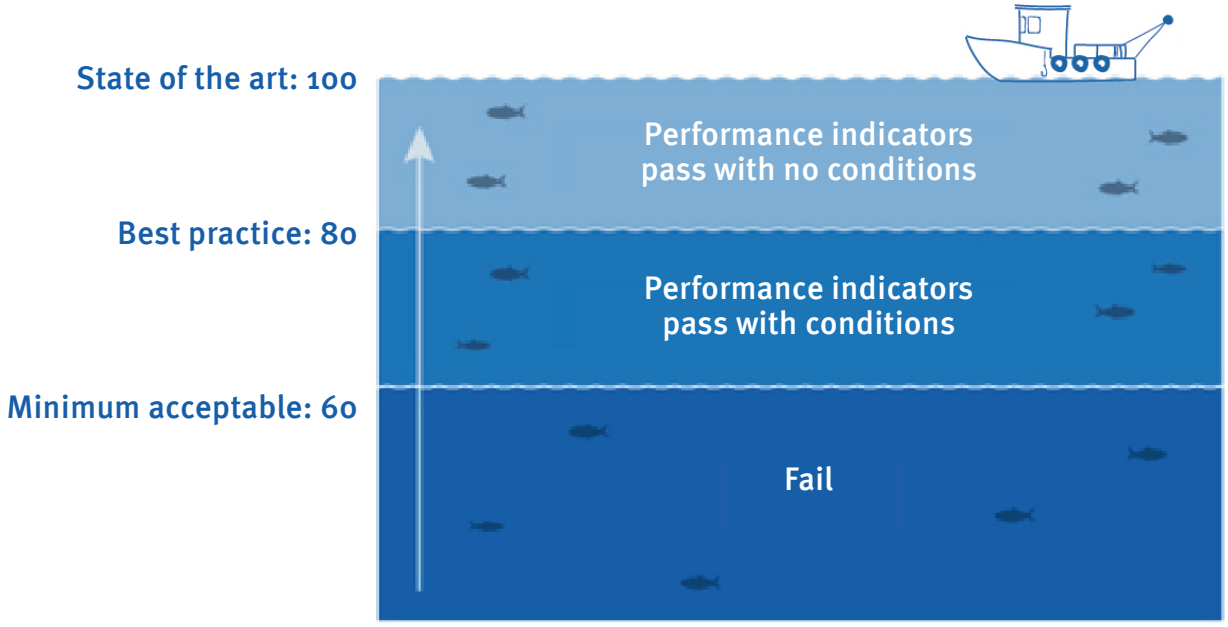
- **Principle 2 (P2) Ecosystem impacts:** fishing operations need to be managed to maintain the structure, productivity, function and diversity of the ecosystem upon which the fishery depends, including other species and habitats

- **Principle 3 (P3) Effective management:** all fisheries need to meet all local, national and international laws and have an effective management system in place

Each principle is further broken down into a set of Performance Indicators (PIs). Fisheries are assessed and scored against each of these PIs by an independent auditor (also known as Conformity and Assessment Bodies, or CABs) to determine how the fishery performs overall against the MSC Fisheries Standard.

To guide independent auditors in scoring fisheries, each PI is further broken down into one or more scoring issues. The performance required to reach a score of 60 (minimum acceptable level), 80 (global best practice) or 100 (state-of-the-art performance) is defined in a set of scoring guideposts. CABs will determine the performance of a fishery against the MSC Fisheries Standard based on whether or not they meet each of the numeric Performance Indicator scoring guideposts, with clear rationales being provided at each point.

The MSC Fisheries Standard scoring



There are 28 performance indicators that sit under the three principles of the MSC Fisheries Standard (Version 2.01).

A fishery will be assigned a score for each performance indicator, where 60 is the minimum acceptable level, 80 is global best practice and 100 is state-of-the-art performance.

To become certified, a fishery must score at least 60 for each of the 28 performance indicators and achieve an average of at least 80 for each of the three principles. If the fishery scores between 60 and 79 for any performance indicator, they will be required to take appropriate action as a condition of certification. This action needs to improve the performance of the fishery so that it scores 80 or above for that indicator. The timeframe to make these improvements is typically five years or less.

For example, if more research/evidence is needed on the status of a specific species, impacts of a gear type or fished habitat range, a condition may be applied. Such conditions mean that the fishery is conditionally certified and is required to draw up an action plan to be implemented in the following years, which address these conditions. Progress is checked every year in a 'surveillance audit'. These conditions are what drive further improvements and direct impacts on the water.

All assessments and checks are carried out by independent, accredited parties called Conformity Assessment Bodies (CAB). This means that MSC is not involved in the audits and decision making. MSC does have the option of performing Technical Oversight, to ensure that the auditors have correctly interpreted and applied the Standard.

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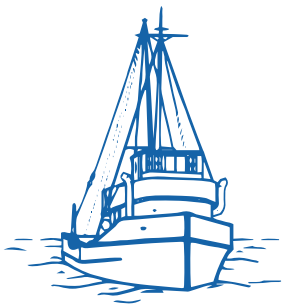
The MSC fisheries landscape in Spain

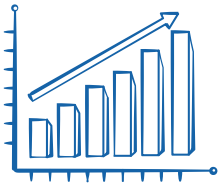
The Spanish fishing sector targets a wide variety of species, from tuna to demersal species (cod and octopus) to small pelagics (anchovy and sardine). The total volume of Spanish commercial landings in 2023 was 766,685 mt[1] caught by 8,657 vessels,[2] and the Spanish fishing industry generated 18,155 billion euros and 34,844 jobs in 2024.[3]

In 2025, there were approximately 558 certified vessels operating across twelve Spanish certificates. Total landings from MSC certified Spanish fisheries have grown tremendously since 2020, when they amounted to 30,841 metric tons, and in 2025 reached 427,163 metric tons—an increase of well over 1,000% in just five years. It should be noted that some of these fisheries are geographically proximate to Spain, while others are located far across the globe and targeted by Spanish-flagged vessels and Spanish owned companies flagged to third country states.



558

certified vessels operating across twelve Spanish certificates

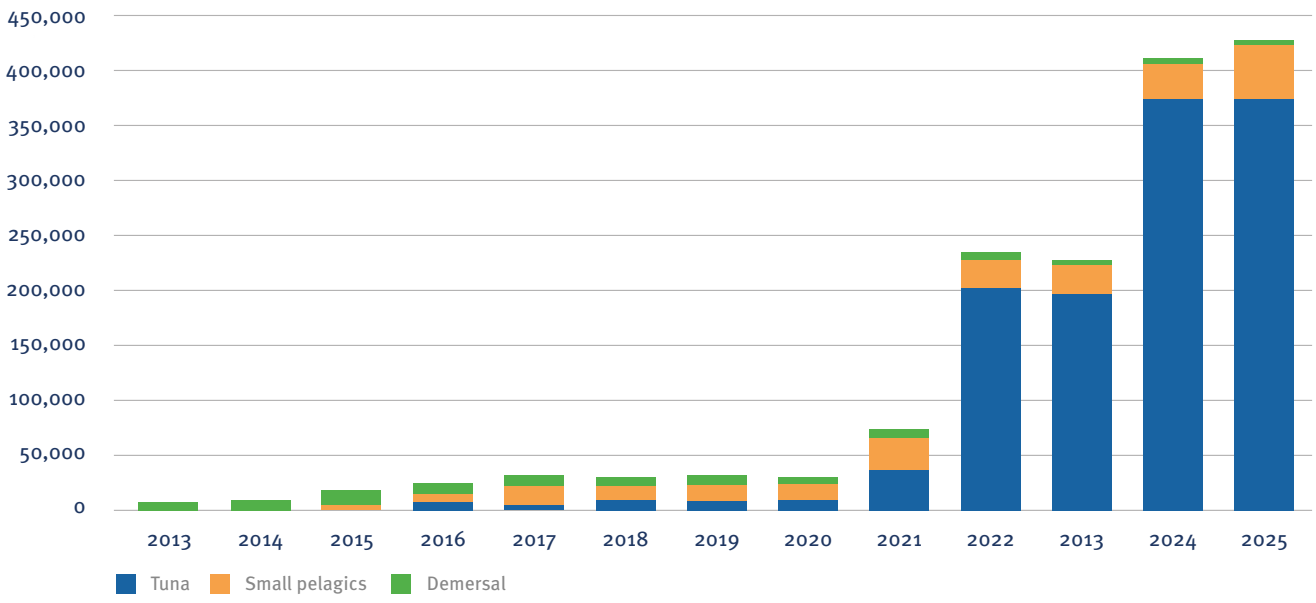


427,163

metric tons—an increase of well over 1,000% in just five years

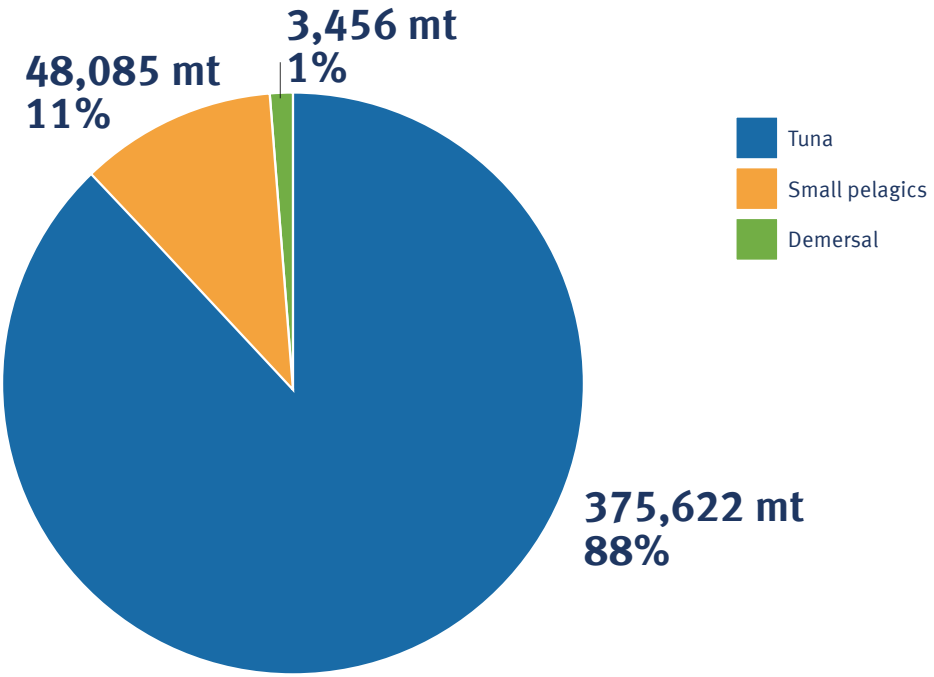
[1] *Source: FAO, FishStatj (2024)*
[2] *Source: Informe Anual de la Actividad de la Flota Pesquera Española (2024)*
[3] *Source: Efe: Agro (2024)*

Certified catch (MSC), mt



*Graph only includes total certified catch categorized by species group

Certified catch (MSC), by species category 2025



Furthermore, certified volumes are set to increase in the near future: there are scope extensions to the ANABAC Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack fishery and the AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery. In the case of the former, yellowfin tuna is being assessed for addition to the certificate, and in the case of the latter, yellowfin tuna in the Indian ocean and skipjack tuna in the Atlantic are currently undergoing assessment as well. Bigeye tuna in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans for the AGAC fishery are under the MSC Improvement Program, meaning they have committed to reach the MSC level to enter full assessment after a period of five years.

MSC certified fisheries in Spain

Below it could be found the list of fisheries currently certified by MSC in Spain clustered by species category. Additionally, a map highlights the approximate geographical location of their fishing operations.

MSC TUNA

AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery – Atlantic Ocean

AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery – Indian Ocean

AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery – Western and Central Pacific Ocean

AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery – Eastern Pacific Ocean

ANABAC Atlantic purse seine yellowfin tuna (Thunnus albacares) and skipjack tuna (Katsuwonus pelamis) fishery (FAD and FSC)

ANABAC Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack fishery

JC Mackintosh Greenstick, handline and fishing rod bluefin tuna fishery

North Atlantic albacore artisanal fishery

MSC DEMERSAL

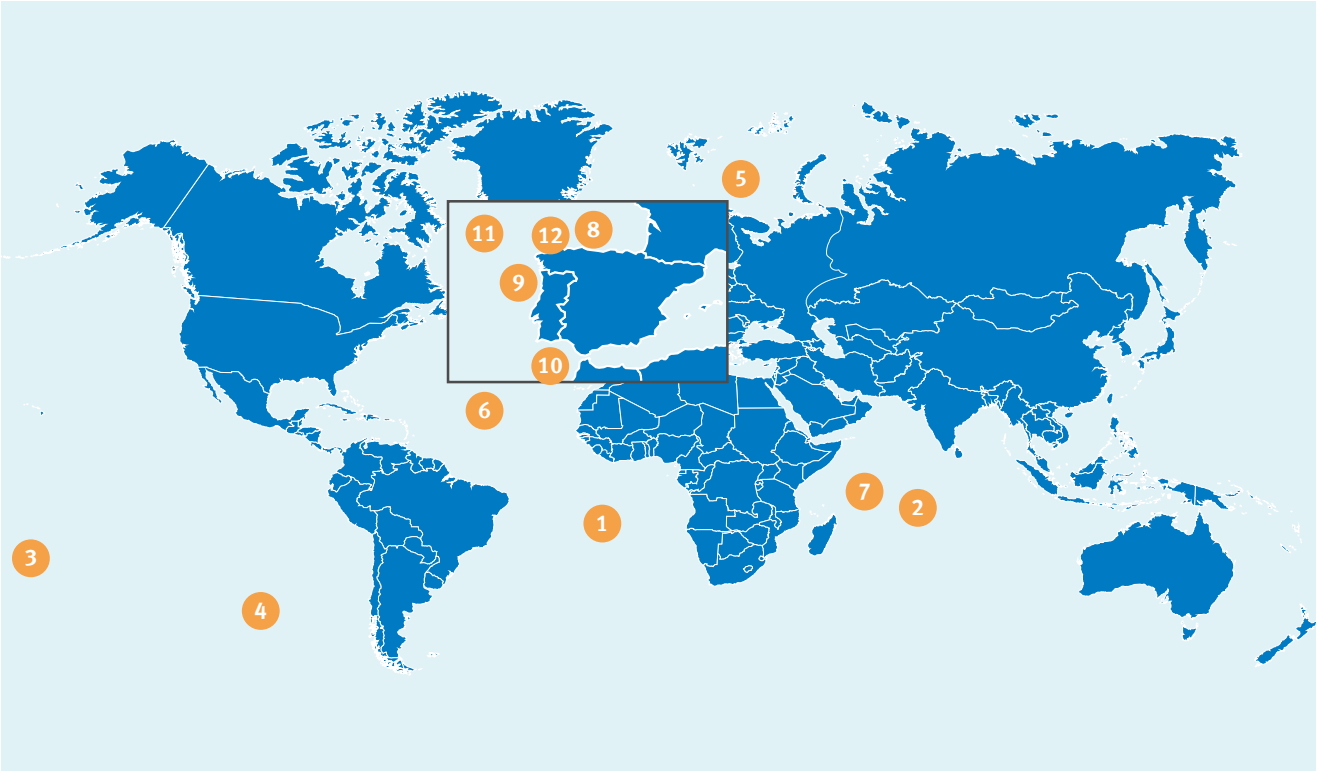
Northeast Arctic cod and haddock demersal fishery

Western Asturias Octopus Traps Fishery of Artisanal Cofradias

MSC SMALL PELAGICS

Cantabrian Sea purse seine anchovy fishery

Iberian sardine purse seine fishery



1. AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery - Atlantic Ocean
2. AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery - Indian Ocean
3. AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery - Western and Central Pacific
4. AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery - Eastern Pacific Ocean
5. Northeast Arctic cod and haddock demersal fishery
6. ANABAC Atlantic purse seine yellowfin tuna (Thunnus albacares) and skipjack tuna (Katsuwonus pelamis) fishery (FAD and FSC)
7. ANABAC Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack fishery
8. Cantabrian Sea purse seine anchovy fishery
9. Iberian sardine purse seine fishery
10. JC Mackintosh Greenstick, handline and fishing rod bluefin tuna fishery
11. North Atlantic albacore artisanal fisnery
12. Western Asturias Octopus Traps Fishery of Artisanal Cofradias

Milestones for MSC certification of Spanish fisheries

2013
- AGARBA Spain Barents Sea cod fishery[1]

2015
- Cantabrian Sea purse seine anchovy fishery

2016
- North Atlantic albacore artisanal fishery
- Western Asturias octopus traps fishery of Artisanal Cofradias

2018
- Echebastar Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack tuna[2]

2021
- ANABAC Atlantic purse seine yellowfin tuna (Thunnus albacares) and skipjack tuna (Katsuwonus pelamis) fishery (FAD and FSC)
- AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna fishery – Eastern Pacific Ocean

2022
- AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna fishery – Western and Central Pacific Ocean
- AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna fishery – Atlantic Ocean
- AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna fishery – Indian Ocean
- JC Mackintosh Greenstick, handline and fishing rod bluefin tuna fishery

2024
- ANABAC Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack fishery

2025
- Iberian sardine purse seine fishery

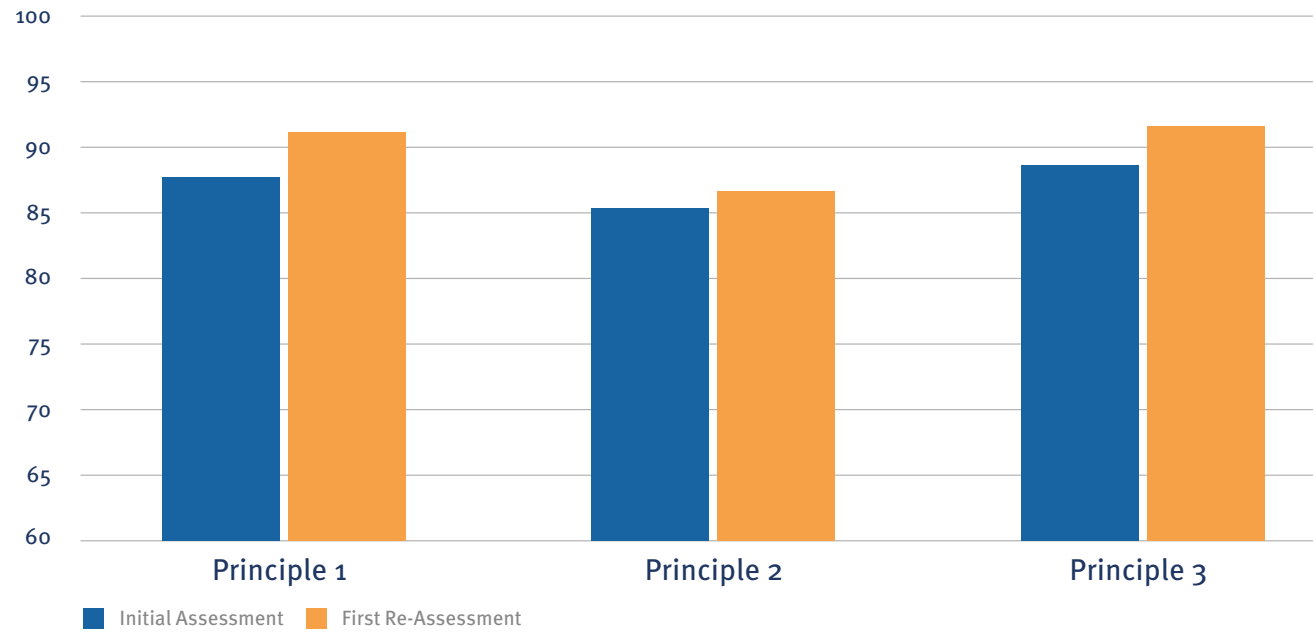
[1] Currently named Northeast Arctic cod and haddock demersal fishery, after merging with Euronor and Compagnie des Pêches de Saint-Malo cod and haddock trawl fishery
[2] Currently included within ANABAC Indian Ocean purse seine skipjack fishery certificate

The MSC program as a driver for improvement

The MSC assessment process

Spanish certified fisheries have made significant progress with regards to sustainability since obtaining certification, taking their already commendable practices a step even further. The figure below displays the average Principle scores for the four fisheries that have completed one second assessment cycle, comparing the scores at the Initial Assessment to those at the first Re-assessment.

Scoring: Initial Assessment vs. First Re-Assessment

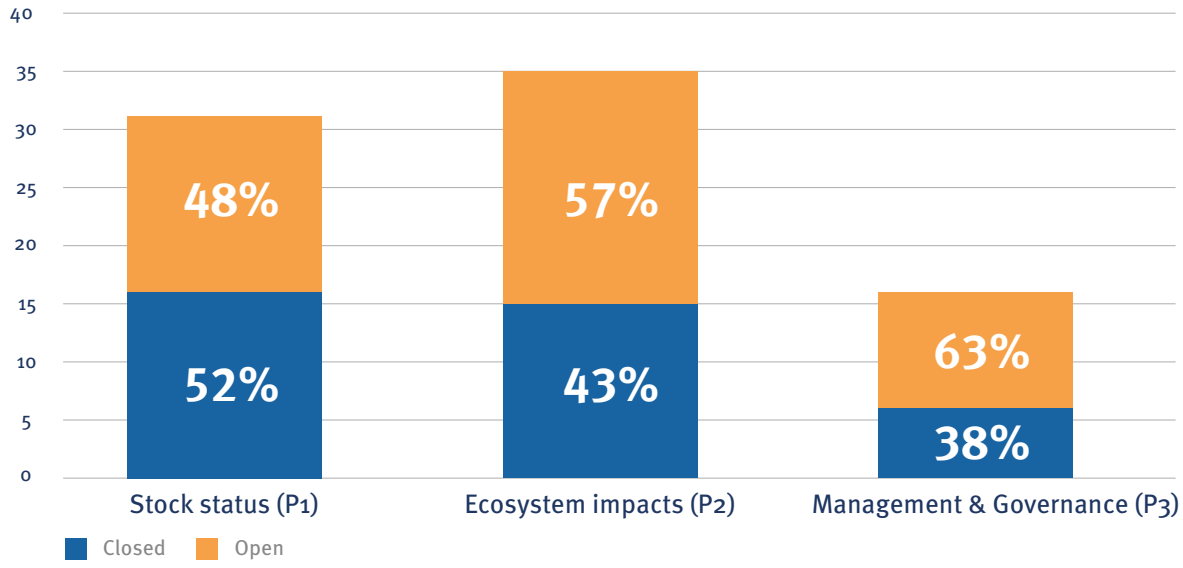


All average Principle scores started at at least 85, illustrating the high bar with regards to sustainability that had been already established. By the start of the second cycle, however, the average Principle 1 and 3 scores reached above 90, achieving best-in-class performance. Their improvement of 3.9% and 3.2% over just the course of one cycle demonstrates the great strides these fisheries made in such a short period of time.

Spanish fisheries conditions and improvements

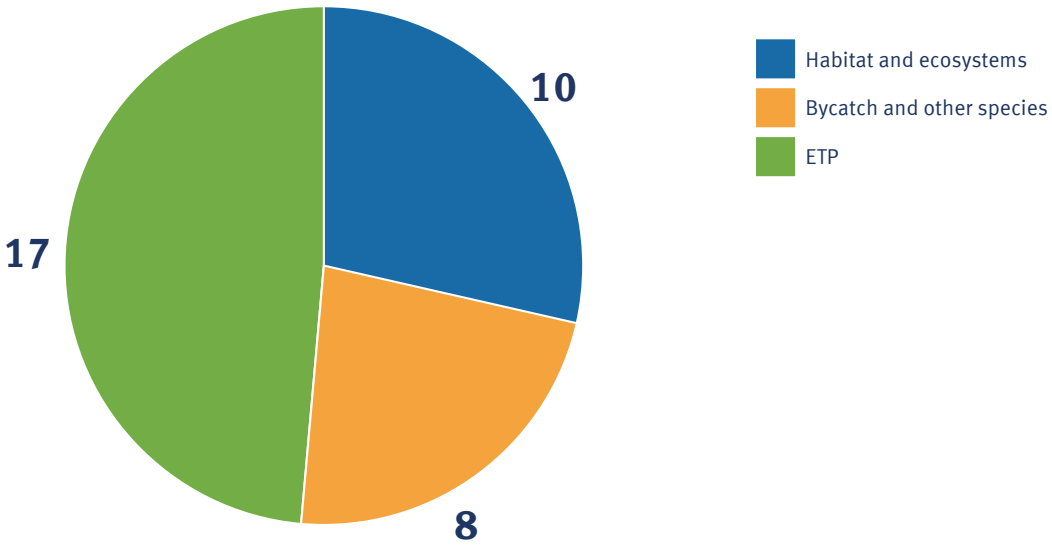
In order to close conditions, Spanish fisheries have made many improvements over the years (a condition is an action or a set of actions set in an assessment, while an improvement is all the parts of the assessment where the action has been applied and completed). A total of 82 unique conditions have been issued to the fisheries included within the scope of this report (for 83 potential improvements, since one condition entails two PIs). Excluding one that was withdrawn, 46% of those conditions have been closed, meaning that 37 improvement actions completed. The fisheries with the remaining 44 are currently working on implementing their action plans to close the conditions by the end of the cycle.

Conditions per MSC Principle



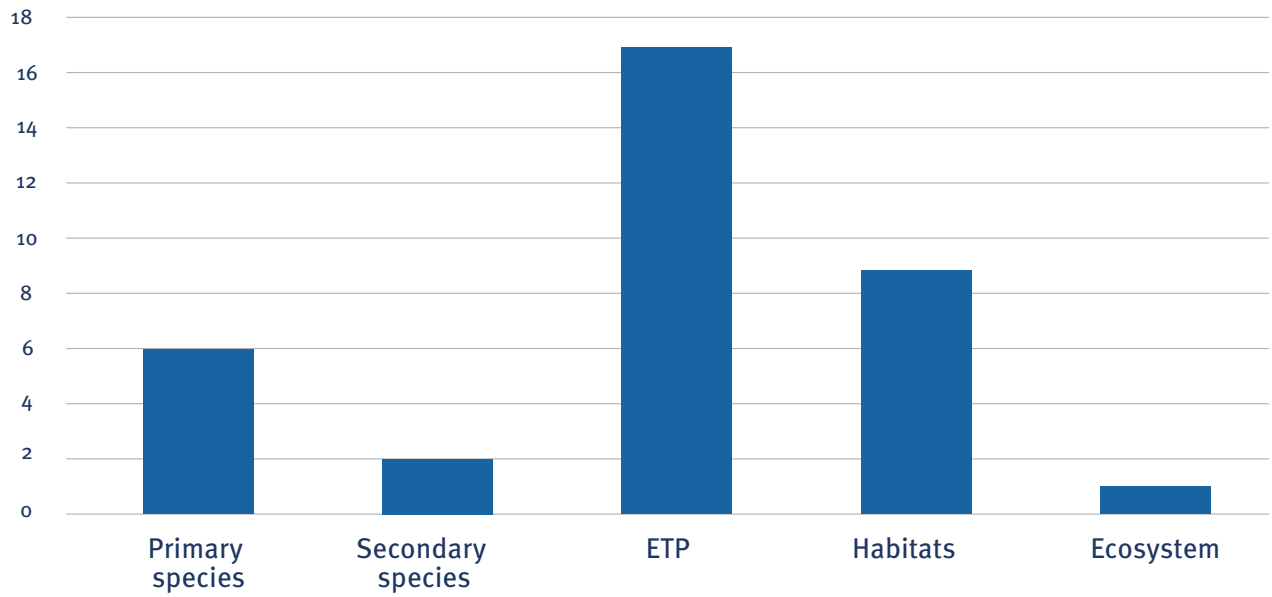
The conditions are fairly spread out across the three Principles, although P3 is the one with significantly fewer. And for each of the Principles, there are about as many currently open conditions as have been closed in the past. This is because seven of the 12 currently certified fisheries are still in their first assessment cycle and, thus, have not yet closed their conditions. The most (20) fall under P2, but P3 has more open conditions compared to previously closed ones (10 and six, respectively). The Principle with the greatest number of closed conditions is P1, with 16, demonstrating the strides that have been made with respect to the health of the stocks of the species targeted by Spanish fisheries.

Focus of ecosystem impact (P2) conditions



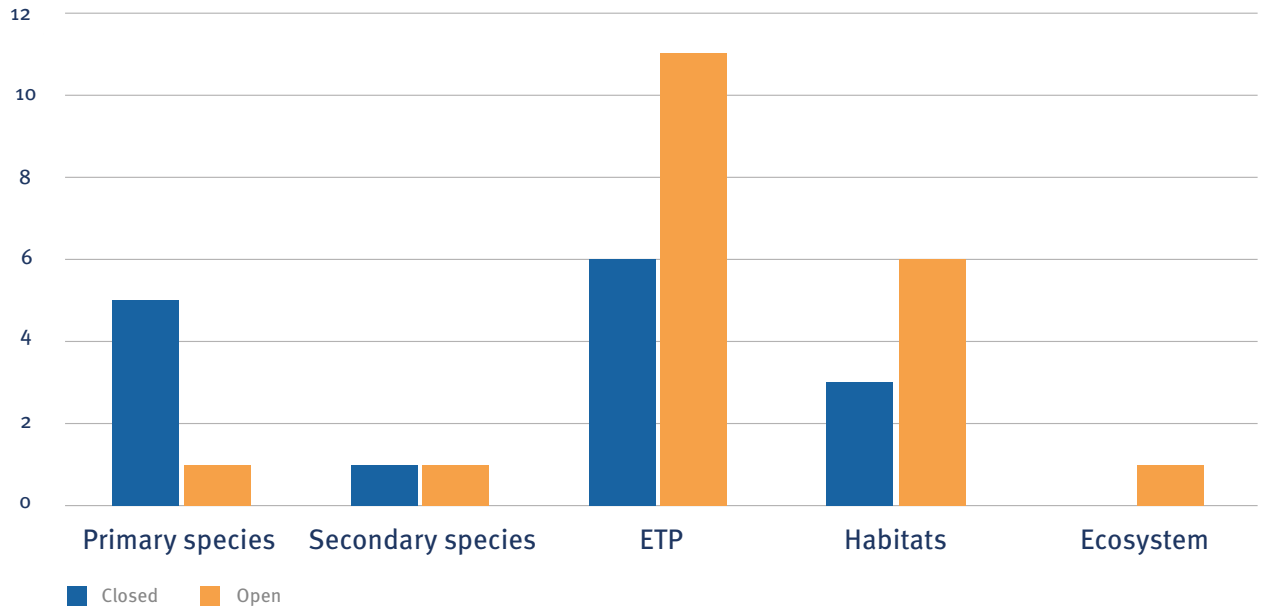
Nearly half of the P2 conditions were placed on the ETP component. The MSC Fisheries Standard maintains a very high bar regarding interactions with ETP species that the fisheries must meet. This means that the fisheries have made and will continue to make improvements with respect to understanding, reducing, and managing such outcomes. When broken down by individual component, habitats have had more conditions assigned after ETP, following by primary species.

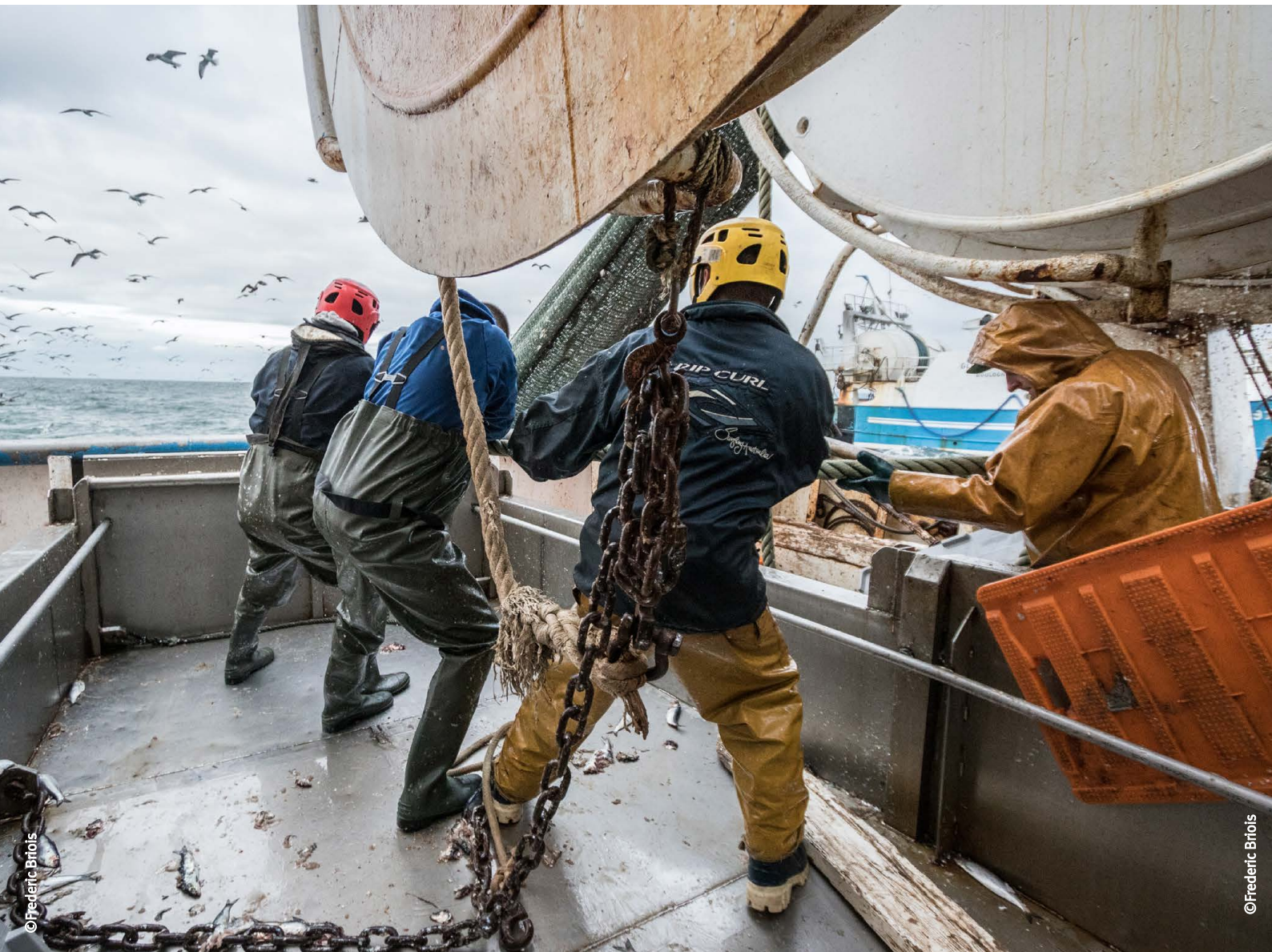
Number of conditions per Component



Amongst these three components, however, there are differences with regard to what has already been accomplished and what remains to be done. Five improvements have been made in closing conditions placed upon the primary species component, with only one condition remaining open. On the other hand, while improvements have been made with respect to ETP species and habitats, there is still progress to be made. This is understandable considering the number of Spanish fisheries that have recently joined the program.

Number of Conditions per Components





Progress in Spanish fisheries: case studies

The Spanish fishing fleet is not only one of the most important in the European Union in terms of catch volumes, but it is also leading the path in environmental sustainability. MSC certified Spanish fisheries can showcase multiple examples of best practices and significant improvements to achieve effective fisheries management that ensure stocks are harvested within sustainable biological limits and negative impacts on the environment are minimized. The conditions received by fisheries at certification are main drives for achieving further improvements and direct positive impacts on the water.

Spanish tuna fleets fostering effective management

The Spanish tuna fisheries have made great strides in recent years with regards to environmental sustainability.

Tropical tuna fisheries in the four oceans

The AGAC four oceans Integral Purse Seine Tropical Tuna Fishery and the ANABAC fisheries in the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean (with which Echebastar merged at the beginning of 2025) —all targeting tropical tuna species —have been proactive in mitigating their impact on ETP species such as sharks, rays and marine turtles, by trialing and implementing bycatch handling and release devices and by using non-entangling fish aggregating devices (FADs).

In collaboration with AZTI —a Spanish scientific and technological center —, these fisheries have developed and implemented tools such as sorting grids and shark velcros and hoppers intended to reduce impacts on sensitive species. By deploying satellite tags and assessing behaviors, fisheries and researchers are currently analyzing improvements in post-release survival of endangered, threatened or protected species linked to the implementation of the mentioned devices.

Another key area of work to close conditions is the improvement of drifting FAD designs. These man-made floating objects are widely used to enhance fish concentration and fishing efficiency. However, they also have several negative impacts, such as bycatch and contribution to marine litter, which need to be addressed. Accordingly, AGAC and ANABAC fisheries are transitioning to FADs built of non-entangling materials and biodegradable components that reduce bycatch risks and synthetic waste. Building upon this, the mentioned fleets are currently working to remove FADs from ecologically sensitive zones in the Seychelles to further mitigate their environmental footprint. Other initiatives include collaboration with local organizations in the recovery of discarded nets and FAD components to transform them into raw materials for new products.

©ANABAC

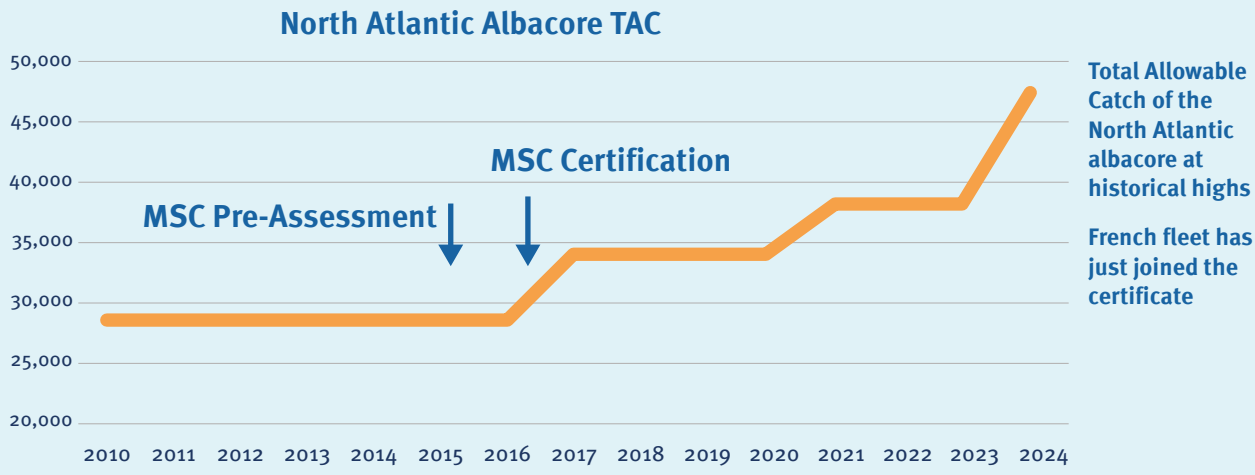
Improved management for North Atlantic albacore

Spanish tuna fisheries also provide excellent examples of best practice for the management of target species. Tuna fisheries are managed by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs)—international governing organizations formed by member nations that share practical and/or financial fishing interests in a particular region of international waters or of highly migratory species. In the Atlantic Ocean, the RFMO is the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). In 2017, this organization—with the decisive support of the Spanish and Basque Governments, as well as that of the client for the North Atlantic albacore artisanal fishery —launched a multistakeholder process to evaluate, test and adopt different harvest strategies to manage the North Atlantic albacore stock. The final candidate harvest strategy was adopted in 2018 and included a harvest control rule (HCR), which now allows the management system to swiftly respond to changes in the stock status and ensure its long-term sustainability. As a result of ICCAT's stock assessment conducted in 2016 for the North Atlantic albacore and the progress on developing and adopting a HCR, conditions on PIs 1.1.1 and 1.2.2 for the fishery were closed during the first two years of the certificate.

Moreover, efforts made by ICCAT's Standing Committee Research and Statistics (SCRS) to provide fishery-specific management objectives and a new Code of Conduct adopted by the entire MSC certified fleet allowed the condition on PI 3.2.1 to be closed in 2019. A year later, and despite the COVID pandemic, the fishery was able to close the remainder two conditions that were still open on PI 2.3.1 and on PI 2.3.3. A monitoring program to collect information on ETP species was implemented demonstrating that interactions with those species were highly unlikely to create significant impacts.

The total allowable catch (TAC)—set at 47,251 metric tons for the period from 2024 to 2026—has significantly increased since 2010, when it was 28,000 metric tons, while keeping the precautionary approach. This shows the strength of the management and how sustainable fishing maximizes the economic yield.

Sustainable Fishing is Profitable for the Entire Supply Chain



MSC (internal). Spain's quota is approximately 50% of the total TAC

This fishery is currently on its second certification cycle, after having been recertified in 2021 with no conditions. In 2024, the scope of the certification was extended to include the French fleet associated in Pecheurs d'Aquitaine. Consequently, condition on PI 3.2.1 was reopened—the French client of the fishery is now required to develop fishery-specific management objectives consistent with those established for the Spanish component.

Sustainable bluefin tuna fishery in the Strait of Gibraltar

Nearly two decades ago, the Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna stock was on the verge of collapse. To reverse such dire situation, a recovery plan was established in 2007 that included stringent management measures that lead to a significant recovery in numbers during the past decade. This recovery allowed for the certification of several bluefin tuna fisheries including the Spanish JC Mackintosh greenstick, handline and fishing rod bluefin tuna fishery in 2022. At certification, JC Mackintosh was assigned a condition on PI 1.2.2 to establish well defined HCRs ensuring that the Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna stock remains fluctuating around healthy levels consistent with—or above—the maximum sustainable yield (MSY). This level represents the highest average catch that can be taken from a given stock of a renewable resource over an indefinite period, while ensuring the stock's long-term survival and ability to replenish itself. While the management plan for the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna had the overall objective of maintaining the stock biomass at levels compatible to MSY, there was not established a clear mechanism—or HCR—to adapt the fishing pressure to the status of the stock and keep it in line with the mentioned management objectives. This HCR would be an essential part of the harvest strategy enabling it to act as a 'safety net' to ensure the stock is allowed to recover should it ever fall below sustainable levels. After a long and collaborative identification and evaluation process carried out by ICCAT members, an agreement to establish a harvest strategy for Atlantic bluefin was reached in November 2022. The move to a harvest strategy is a significant step towards ensuring the long-term sustainability of the stock and departing from annual quota negotiations, which had previously contributed to years of decline and overfishing of Atlantic bluefin tuna.

Collective efforts to change the course of the Cantabrian anchovy

The Cantabrian Sea purse seine anchovy fishery provides an excellent example of how through sound management and effective collaboration, even fisheries in dire straits can recover. Overfishing and improper management policies in the early 2000s caused the stock to collapse, resulting in a ban on fishing being instituted by the EU in 2005. This, of course, had a profound impact on the fishers that caught the Cantabrian anchovy and the companies down the supply chain that bought, processed, or canned their catch, as they had to turn to other species (imports of lower quality, in the case of the canners). By 2010, the stock had recovered to the point where the EU lifted the ban. The quota was lower, however, and the EU called for better management. In this context, a group of stakeholders—the Spanish fleet and fishers' organizations, management administrations, research institutions and companies along the supply chain—coalesced to go beyond simply returning to the previous status quo, but rather to take the fishery to the next level of environmental sustainability and economic success.

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Since earning MSC certification in 2015, this fishery has consistently upheld leading sustainability standards. Over its first five years of certification, the fishery actively embraced improvement conditions to tackle key challenges: enhancing data on bycatch and interactions with protected species, and establishing clear, fishery-specific sustainability objectives. Through strong collaboration and adaptive management, the fleet successfully overcame these hurdles, further reinforcing its credentials. During its 2020 reassessment, every Performance Indicator exceeded the 80-point benchmark—clear evidence of its dedication to sustainability. This ongoing commitment keeps the Cantabrian anchovy not just a culinary staple, but a living emblem of both heritage and forward-thinking practice. What had not long ago collapsed is now a shining example of a sustainable, well-managed fishery. ICES found the spawning-stock biomass in 2024 to be 155,570 metric tons, about five times higher than the 26,600 metric ton lower limit. The TAC, set at 30,663 metric tons in 2025, has more than doubled since 2011, when it was 15,600 metric tons. The fishery management policies are set with collaboration from scientists and stakeholders. Furthermore, at its 2020 recertification, the fishery received no conditions. This demonstrates that the fishery has exemplary performance with regards to sustainability and presents no serious weaknesses.

The fishery is of great importance to the local economy, which employs thousands of women in local canning factories. The improvements made in its journey to and through MSC certification have not only helped ensure that future generations will enjoy the fishery's bounty but also benefited the fishers and their buyers down the value chain in the short-term by helping find them markets around the world that desire the MSC label.

Mapping interactions with vulnerable habitats

The Northeast Arctic cod and haddock demersal fishery, formerly called the AGARBA Spain Barents Sea cod fishery, is the longest-running MSC certified Spanish fishery. This bottom trawling fishery has since become re-certified twice, both times without any conditions, underscoring the high performance at which it operates across all aspects of environmental sustainability. While it has continued to meet the high bar of 'best practice' across the entire MSC Fisheries Standard for over a decade, it did not start at that point.

When this fishery first obtained certification in 2013, it had six conditions, one of which was on PI 2.4.3 (Habitats Information). The MSC full assessment process for the fishery highlighted significant knowledge gaps regarding seabed habitats in some areas fished in, especially in the Svalbard Fishery Protection Zone (from which most of the catch comes). To close the condition, it was required a recording system to be devised and implemented to gather information on interactions with seabed habitats. Subsequently, detailed information needed to be collected and summarized annually on the different types of habitats encountered, with special attention paid to vulnerable or sensitive ones. Finally, all data would need to be spatially referenced with the final goal of completing a map of all vulnerable areas with which the fishery had interaction.

Through intense collaboration between the fishery client and AZTI, which involved the development of a Vulnerable Habitat Management Book, training courses on the identification and recording of benthic organisms, mapping overlaps and interactions between the fishery and the different habitat types, the condition was closed in 2017. In 917 hauls performed in 2017, sponges were only caught in five of them, with no presence of corals. Sponge aggregations were only encountered in 2.2% of the fishing trips, and comparison between the area covered by the fishery and sponge aggregations mapped by OSPAR, showed that only 0.25% of the latter was affected by the fishery.

The current fishery comes as a result of the merging in 2025 of the AGARBA fishery with that encompassing the Compagnie des Pêches de Saint Malo and Euronor fishing for cod and haddock in ICES subareas I, IIa and IIb. The later had two associated conditions: one on PI 2.3.3, concerning the need to have better quantitative and independently verified information to assess the fishery’s impact on ETP species, which is on target; and another on PI 2.4.2 which got closed during the first surveillance audit, since the fishery was able to demonstrate that impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems, particularly sponges and coral gardens, are monitored in detail, through measures such as overlapping maps of the fishery Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data with vulnerable habitats, the continuous collection of independent information by observers, training of the crews related to interactions with vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs), and application of move on rules (whenever needed).

A small octopus fishery that is doing great

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The Western Asturias Octopus Traps Fishery of Artisanal Cofradias is a prime example of the benefits that the MSC program can bring to even the most "a priori" low-impact fisheries. This artisanal fishery was already doing things the right way previous to its certification: the season closed from July to December every year, the minimum weight for an octopus to be caught was 1kg and the total catch was limited to 10 metric tons per season and per boat, and the number of traps per boat was limited to 350, although this limit was not always respected.

However, the fishermen realized that they were not properly capitalizing on the sustainability of the fishery: the consumer could not differentiate the Asturian octopus from the octopi that were harvested in less sustainable fisheries. What they needed was a trusted, credible source of authority from which to make a sustainability claim, rather than simple self-marketing. Thus, they turned to the most credible third-party sustainable seafood ecolabelling program: that of MSC. After a 2013 pre-assessment revealed strong practices but weak data on octopus populations, the fishery adopted the Risk-Based Framework to bridge scientific gaps. With support from local government and new enforcement measures, they achieved MSC certification in February 2016. Since then, the fishery has undertaken a host of improvements, due in no small part to help from the Centro de Experimentación Pesquera of Principado de Asturias. Groundbreaking research on the population dynamics of the Asturian octopus improved understanding of the species' biology. The Asturian government's regulations were modified so that there was explicit mention of the long-term sustainability of the fishery being one of the goals of the fishery's management, which made it possible to close a condition on 3.2.1 three years after it was first certified. The fishery introduced satellite monitoring, expanded observer programs, and strengthened compliance. The owners of the vessels listed in the MSC certificate formed the association ARPESOS, gaining more input into decision-making: they are represented, along with scientists and NGOs, on the octopus oversight committee; this fostered the empowerment and cohesion of fishers, shifting from a top-down to a bottom-up approach. Following the spirit of collaboration created during the MSC certification process, REDEPESCA was established—a tool for information exchange and transfer among the fishing sector, the scientific community, and the Asturian administration. It was this collaborative atmosphere between different stakeholders that catalyzed the closure of the remainder three conditions (PIs 1.2.2, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3) during the certification's first cycle.

From a commercial perspective, the fishery has achieved significant progress that has benefited fishermen. On the one hand, following certification, they achieved an improvement in the first-sale value of octopus landed in ports[4], which served as an incentive for good fishing practices. Certification led to the opening of new marketing models for first sales and access to new markets both in Spain and abroad (mainly Northern Europe). The direct consequence has been an optimization of both fishing and commercial processes. Thus, for example, the number of octopus pots used has decreased, according to the fishermen themselves, and with it, lower operating costs, which again contributes to profitability. They have been recognized in the press as well, which has raised awareness of the economic benefits the certification has brought to the local economy, helping to give them a social license to operate. It has also helped the fishermen reorganize the system of auctions, holding them biweekly or monthly instead of daily, giving them greater agency and more stable prices.

The 32 vessels operating in this fishery still have progress to be made with regards to information on their impact on primary and secondary species (PIs 2.1.3 and 2.2.3, respectively), specifically the ones used for bait. If the fishery can resolve these issues and maintain its high performance elsewhere, it will pass its re-assessment audit and become recertified in 2026, thus continuing its sustainability journey.

[4] *J.L. Fernandez Sanchez, J.M. Fernandez Polanco, I. Llorente Garcia. Evidence of price premium for MSC-certified products at fishers' level: The case of the artisanal fleet of common octopus from Asturias (Spain). Marine Policy 119 (2020).*

The return of the Iberian sardine

The recovery of the MSC certification for the Iberian sardine marks a milestone in sustainable fishing and science-based management in the Iberian Peninsula. It is the first fishery to achieve certification through an alliance between Spanish and Portuguese fleets, setting an example of international cooperation for responsible marine resources management. In 2010, Portugal led the way by obtaining the first MSC certificate for its purse seine fleet at national level. However, after years of overexploitation and negative assessments—indicating critical stock deterioration and management system shortcomings—certification was suspended in 2014.

Subsequently, ICES recommended a TAC of zero tons for the Iberian sardine in 2017, forcing a comprehensive review of the fishery management. In response, Spain and Portugal launched a coordinated action to establish a binational alliance for their purse seine fleets. Together they designed a shared recovery and management plan, implemented strict HCRs, introduced temporary closures, as well as restrictions for catches of juvenile specimens. All these coordinated efforts have been key in restoring the health of the Iberian stock and to regain MSC certification. Thanks to this model of shared management and governance – supported by fishers, industry, governments, and research institutions—the Iberian sardine has experienced notable recovery. Recent data show biomass levels well above biological safety thresholds, which have contributed to achieve a new MSC certificate for the fishery in 2025, placing Spain and Portugal as global leaders in sardine export and in the sustainable management of fisheries.

However, the process is not over. Commitments for the next five years include increasing scientific observer coverage on board, improving recording and analysis of bycatch and impacts on sensitive species (e.g., cetaceans, seabirds, etc.), investing in technical training, and undertaking independent annual audits to ensure continuous improvement.

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Other MSC fisheries important in Spanish markets

Global seafood markets are highly internationalized and include very complex value chains, with products usually moving through various stages of processing and distribution in different countries. The same goes for catches from MSC certified fisheries, which frequently enter multiple value chains across the world. In recognition of the globalized nature of these supply chains, we would like to provide some highlights on the improvements undertaken by some other MSC fisheries that are not linked to Spanish fleets but also important for the market of labeled sustainable seafood products in Spain.

Sustainable hake fisheries in the Southern Hemisphere

There are a few different hake species sold with the blue MSC label that are sourced from Southern Hemisphere fisheries and very popular in Spain. These fisheries—supported by MSC offices in South Africa and Latin America—demonstrate various examples of best practices.

The South Africa hake (Merluccius capensis, Merluccius paradoxus) trawl fishery was obtained certification in 2004. This was the first fishery in Africa and the second groundfish fishery in the world to receive MSC certification. Over the years, the fishery has supported substantial efforts towards understanding and reducing its impact on seabed habitats. As well as restricting fishing to its historical fishing grounds, the fishery has collaborated with relevant partners—such as the South African Department of Forestry, Fisheries & the Environment, the South African Environmental Observation Network, the University of Cape Town and the South African National Biodiversity Institute—in a five-year benthic trawl experiment, aiming to gain scientific understanding of the environment and mitigate impacts.

The fishery received a condition at the initial certification to improve the understanding and management of seabird impacts. To address these aspects, a collaboration with the NGO Birdlife South Africa was started, which led to the implementation of bird-scaring lines and the adoption of improved discard management. Consequently, seabird mortality was reduced by 90% in the fishery.

An additional condition highlighted the need to improve the research and management of bycatch species. Between 2016 and 2019, the South African Offshore Trawl Bycatch Fishery Conservation Project, led by WWF, worked with the fishery to improve its management of non-target species. The project has contributed to improving scientific knowledge related to more than 20 species and enhancing their management systems.

The Namibia hake (Merluccius capensis, Merluccius paradoxus) trawl and longline fishery was certified in 2020, becoming the second African fishery to receive MSC certification. However, its sustainability journey began earlier: the fishery has been engaged with MSC since 2010 and worked with stakeholders to improve its performance. Some of the improvements included establishing a rebuilding strategy for the target hake stocks. Fishing quotas are now set in line with scientific advice and the harvest strategy works closely with that of the South Africa hake fishery to ensure the sustainability of the stocks.

In 2025, a research project was awarded funding from MSC's Ocean Stewardship Fund (OSF) to test the efficacy of Targeted Acoustic Startle Technology in minimizing potentially harmful interactions of Cape fur seals with fishing gear. Rooted in neuroscience, this technology emits a low-range frequency that deters seals from approaching the fishing gear without damaging their hearing or that of other species present in the area. As well as mitigate interactions with Cape fur seals during the Namibian fishery's operations, the research hopes to gain valuable insights that can be used by other fisheries facing similar challenges with fur seal interactions.

Another important species traded in Spanish markets using the MSC blue label is the southern or Austral hake (*Merluccius australis*). The Chile Austral hake industrial trawl and longline fishery achieved MSC certification in 2019 and is one of Chile's most important fisheries, with around 14,000 tons landed per year. The main conditions received by the fishery

at certification were related to demonstrating and ensuring through effective management that the target species fluctuates around healthy levels. Accordingly, a process to identify a new HCR effective in achieving the required exploitation levels was started. The latest stock assessment for the Austral hake—carried out in 2024—found that there was evidence indicating that the HCR was being effective in achieving the exploitation levels and that the mortality related to fishing was kept below the intended management target level.

Recent developments for the Argentine red shrimp

Another Latin American fishery, the Argentine red shrimp (Pleoticus muelleri) coastal trawling fishery in waters of Province of Chubut was certified in early 2025. It's the first coastal shrimp fishery to achieve MSC certification in Argentina, highlighting the fishery's commitment to sustainability and effective management. Efforts to improve the fishery's management, strengthen monitoring, and reduce environmental impacts have all been vital to accomplishing this achievement. The involvement of fishing companies as Achernar, Agropez, Cabo Virgenes, Consermar, Food Partners Patagonia, Greciamar, Iberconsa de Argentina, La Escalerona, and Pesquera Vera has been a major driver in the certification of the fishery. Furthermore, the offshore component of the Argentine red shrimp fishery is currently undertaking full assessment and it is expected to reach MSC certification by the end of 2025.

Medfish: a pathway to sustainability for Mediterranean fisheries

As part of MSC's Pathway to Sustainability approach, MSC and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) launched the Medfish project in 2015. Medfish main objective is to support Spanish and French Mediterranean fisheries in their transition to environmental sustainability.

The Mediterranean Sea is of great economic and cultural significance for the more than 150 million people who live along its coasts. The fishing sector itself contributes with over 180,000 direct jobs and average total annual catch of around one million tons. In Spain, Mediterranean fisheries also have important socio-economic impacts. They represent 6,614 direct jobs in the primary sector and a total catch of 61,060 tons in 2021. These volumes constitute around 20% of EU catches in the Mediterranean basin and a value of EUR 278 million.

However—and despite significant improvements—overfishing and other fishing related impacts like bycatch and habitat disruption are currently contributing to hinder the recovery of Mediterranean fishery resources and the ecosystems they depend on, which in return impacts the livelihoods of thousands of local fishers and coastal communities.

To contribute to overcoming the mentioned impacts, Medfish carried out rigorous and comprehensive analysis of Mediterranean fisheries using the MSC Fisheries Standard as a benchmark for sustainability. Engaging multiple stakeholders, action plans were subsequently defined with and for each fishery to address gaps regarding sustainability and serve as road maps for improvements.

Pathway to Sustainability approach

MSC has developed the Pathway to Sustainability program in support of fisheries improving the environmental performance of their fishing practices. As part of the program, Pathway projects bring together a wide range of partners—including governments, fishers, scientists, supply chain actors and NGOs—in a collaborative effort to create the enabling conditions for multiple fisheries in a specific region to progress towards sustainability. They also provide a range of fishery improvement tools and capacity-building resources to foster all those improvements within the pre-certification space. MSC is currently involved in running 14 Pathway Projects in 19 countries, from the United Kingdom to the Mediterranean Sea or the Indian Ocean, involving a wide range of species and gear types. Medfish in Spain and France is one of the longest-running projects within the Pathway approach.

Driving improvements

The update of the management plan for the Palamos blue and red shrimp (*Aristeus antennatus*) trawl fishery in 2018 was an opportunity to adopt and implement improvements defined within the Medfish action plan for the fishery. The approved larger mesh size helped to improve gear selectivity and reduce catches of juvenile shrimp by 60%. The downsizing of vessels within the management plan has contributed to reduce fishing effort in the fishery by 24%. Additionally, the adoption of mid-water otter trawl doors by the whole Palamos' fleet is contributing to minimizing fishery impacts on seabed habitats. Proof of the relevance and effectiveness of the mentioned Palamos' measures to reduce fishing effort, improve gear selectivity, and reduce seafloor disturbance is their replication in subsequent management frameworks implemented for demersal stocks in the Western Mediterranean. Furthermore, a recent study carried out by the Marine Research Institute of Barcelona in 2023 found that the portion of the stock of blue and red shrimp located at Palamos' fishing grounds is in better condition than the estimated for the whole distribution of the stock across the Levantine coast of Spain.

The participation and leadership of fishers and their organizations in the improvement processes is essential. As part of the project, technical staff from several fishers' guilds have been trained to lead in the definition and implementation of fisheries' action plans. In general, Medfish provides technical assistance to fishers' guilds fostering empowerment and participation. This has proved instrumental in the creation of Motril's Fish Producers Organization, which is enabling structure in support of Medfish improvement processes for port's fisheries.

Medfish is facilitating the engagement of fishers with research institutions and management administrations. This collaboration—including three of the main Spanish research institutions for marine and fishery science active in the Mediterranean (i.e., the Spanish Oceanographic Institute, the Marine Research Institute of Barcelona and the Mediterranean Institute of Advanced Studies)—is helping to significantly address information gaps identified in Medfish fisheries through research project like:

- A research to improve the knowledge on dolphinfish (*Coryphaena hippurus*) movements within the species' seine fishery in the Balearic Islands and to identify dolphinfish migratory patterns across the Mediterranean.

- An analysis to carry out stock assessments of blue and red shrimp and highlight changes in the status of the stock along its geographical distribution across the West Mediterranean Sea. It helped to highlight the positive effects of local management for the Palamos trawl fishery.

- An initiative to gather data on interactions between the Castellon purse seine fishery and endangered, threatened or protected species, marine mammals and seabirds.

Conclusion and discussion

Over the past decade, Spain has witnessed a significant evolution in its journey toward sustainable fishing. The first fishery in the country was certified in 2013, marking the beginning of a growing movement that has since gained considerable momentum. In the last five years alone, certified landings have increased from 30,841 to 427,163 tons, signaling both an expansion in the adoption of sustainable practices and a greater alignment with international environmental standards. This progress positions Spain as a key player in the global shift toward more responsible fisheries management.

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) has played a central role in this transformation. Its certification process has served not only as a benchmark for sustainability but also as a catalyst for tangible improvements within Spanish fisheries. These improvements occur at two key stages: before certification, as fisheries strive to meet the stringent environmental requirements of the MSC Standard, and after certification, through the implementation of conditions for improvement and associated action plans. Since the first MSC certification in Spain 82 conditions of improvements have been set and 37 of those conditions (46%) have been successfully closed what is a clear indicator of real and ongoing progress.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Currently, there are 44 open conditions currently working on implementing their action plans to close the conditions by the end of the cycle. Those conditions are spread out across the 3 principles involving improvements in harvest strategies and harvest control rules but also addressing impact on ecosystems, including bycatch management and habitat protection and improved governance. It is worthy to remark that the majority of the fisheries are in their first certification cycle what means that the conditions of improvement are mostly following their action plans to be closed.

Addressing these conditions requires not only technical adjustments but also long-term monitoring and adaptive management. Adding to these challenges, climate change is introducing new variables that add additional difficulties to sustainable fishing. Rising ocean temperatures, changes in ecosystem productivity, and species migration are increasingly complicating fisheries management, affecting both certified fisheries and those in the process of pursuing certification.

Despite these difficulties, the MSC process has fostered valuable innovations and best practices that extend far beyond certified fisheries. In many cases, the conditions imposed by the MSC have spurred creative, science-based solutions that benefit the entire sector. These innovations serve as replicable examples for other fisheries seeking certification or simply looking to improve their environmental performance. Examples include the adoption of more selective gear types, improved stock assessments and harvest control rules through collaborative science, and spatial management measures that reduce impacts on vulnerable habitats. Such practices have the potential to raise the sustainability baseline across Spanish fisheries and inspire similar efforts internationally.

A recurring theme in successful certification processes is the active involvement of stakeholders. The collaborative participation of NGOs, scientists, industry representatives, and governmental institutions is essential for driving improvements and ensuring credible, science-based evaluations. For instance, the AGAC fishery spent five years in a Fisheries Improvement Project (FIP) with WWF, working to enhance its fishing practices before achieving certification. Similarly, stakeholder involvement in Medfish has been vital for promoting improvements in fisheries such as the red shrimp fishery of Palamós. In this case, dialogue among stakeholders has enabled the implementation of practical measures that bring the fishery closer to certification. A notable example of multi-stakeholder impact is the involvement of Portuguese NGOs in the assessment process of the Iberian sardine fishery. Their participation not only contributed to a more robust understanding of the fishery's dynamics but also helped define the necessary conditions for improvement. This type of inclusive, evidence-based process illustrates how broad stakeholder engagement can enrich the quality of fisheries assessments and ensure that the resulting actions are both effective and socially supported.

Supporting tools such as the MSC Improvement Program are designed to foster the progress toward sustainability. This program assists fisheries that are working to meet the certification requirements by providing technical guidance, benchmarking, and action planning. Complementing this effort, the Ocean Stewardship Fund, established by MSC, offers targeted financial support to help fisheries close conditions and fund sustainability related research and innovation projects. Fisheries enrolled in the MSC Improvement Program are given priority access to this funding, encouraging a continuous cycle of improvement and capacity building.

The Pathway projects, like Medfish, has proven to be a highly valuable tool for promoting improvements in fisheries sustainability. Guided by the Medfish action plans, some fisheries, such as the Palamós blue and red shrimp, have made significant progress toward adopting more sustainable fishing practices. Several of these actions have even served as models for broader fisheries management strategies in the Western Mediterranean.

Looking to the future, Spain's fishing fleet is well-positioned to continue leading the sustainability movement. The growing number of certified fisheries and active improvement projects reflects a sector that is both aware of and committed to its environmental responsibilities. However, a new frontier lies ahead: increased engagement from market actors. While the production side of the supply chain has demonstrated strong leadership, greater involvement is needed from retailers, distributors, and consumers to close the loop. This would ensure that sustainability efforts are not only recognized but also rewarded through market mechanisms, creating a more robust and resilient system of incentives.

In conclusion, Spain's experience with the MSC certification process offers valuable lessons in how sustainability can be achieved through a combination of fisheries leadership, scientific rigor, stakeholder collaboration, policy support, and market engagement. The progress to date is substantial, but the path ahead will require continued effort, innovation, and cooperation. If these elements remain aligned, Spain can continue to set a global example in sustainable fisheries management, protecting marine ecosystems while securing long-term viability for the fishing sector.

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One of the most valuable features of MSC certification is the requirement to address Conditions for improvement within a set timeframe. The efforts that certified fleets undertake to meet these Conditions, such as enhancing monitoring and the handling of interactions with endangered, threatened, and protected (ETP) species or sensitive habitats, often yield benefits beyond a single fishery," said Victor Restrepo, Chair, ISSF Scientific Advisory Committee. "These improvements are frequently adopted by other fleets as best practices. At a broader scale, certified tuna fisheries are playing a key role in urging Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) to adopt harvest strategies. Ultimately, these advancements support all tuna fisheries—not just those that are certified.

Víctor Restrepo – ISSF

Sustainability is not incompatible with profitability or competitiveness. Integrating responsible fishing practices without compromising them represents a long-term innovation strategy that ensures healthy marine ecosystems and comprehensive resource management.

MSC certification has enabled us to strengthen our collaboration with the fishing sector, promote applied research, and actively contribute to the sustainability of marine ecosystems. Working closely with MSC has reinforced our commitment to scientific excellence and continuous improvement, generating tangible benefits for both the environment and coastal communities. At AZTI, we understand that sustainability is not merely a goal, but a shared responsibility that guides every step we take.

Rogelio Pozo, General Manager AZTI, Centro de Investigación Marina y Alimentaria

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Being part of the MSC program has been a source of pride and transformation for us. It has allowed us to join a global community united by a shared commitment to the sea and responsible fishing. Thanks to the certification, we have gained access to international markets, increasing our visibility and earning trust beyond our borders. Today, we fish with greater awareness, with greater recognition, and with the certainty that we are leaving a positive mark on both the present and the future of the sector.

Daniel Mackintosh, CEO JC Mackintosh

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> *The fisheries of Motril, Conil and La Atunara illustrate that sustainability is not solely the result of regulatory frameworks, but rather the outcome of dynamic and participatory transformation processes, in which the sector engages actively through knowledge, commitment and a culture of continuous improvement. At SOLDECOCOS, we make use of the MSC Fisheries Standard as a strategic framework to support this ecological transition, transforming technical diagnoses into effective measures with measurable impacts on both marine ecosystems and coastal communities.*
>
> **Jorge Sáez Jiménez, SOLDECOCOS Director**

> *The MSC certification of tropical tuna purse seine fisheries stands as a clear example of the transition pathway fostered by the MSC program. The sustained efforts undertaken by the purse seine tuna fleet over the past 13 years—particularly in minimizing bycatch and advancing the development of biodegradable Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)—have enabled this fishery to become a reference model for the continuous improvement and transformation encouraged by MSC. This progress supports the reliable supply of significant volumes of protein to a growing global population, with 97% of the catch originating from healthy fish stocks.*
>
> **Julio Morón, Managing Director, OPAGAC**

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> *Since 2013, Palamos blue and red shrimp fishers have been working under the first Management Plan with the objective of achieving optimal sustainability levels for the fishing grounds of this highly valued resource, which is both commercially important and essential to the local economy of Palamos.*
>
> *Being part of the Medfish project has helped us assess the fishery and realize that we are not far from reaching MSC certification. For this reason, we will join the MSC Improvement program this year, with the aim of achieving full certification within the next two to three years.*
>
> **Cristina Mañas, Manager of Palamos Fish Producers' Organization**

Glossary

AGAC: Asociación de Grandes Atuneros Congeladores.

ANABAC: Asociación Nacional de Armadores de Buques Atuneros Congeladores.

Annual/surveillance audit: An official, independent, and documented inspection within the MSC certification program. Audits are typically conducted by a CAB.

AZTI: Centre for Fisheries Science and Technology Studies.

Bycatch species: Organisms that have been taken incidentally during fishing operations and are usually not retained.

CAB: Conformity Assessment Body. CABs are third-party auditors who independently assess fisheries against the MSC Fisheries Standard.

Condition: A requirement concerning a certified fishery to produce outcomes to achieve a score of 80 —best practices — or above for a given MSC Performance Indicator.

ETP species: Endangered, threatened or protected species.

FAD: Fish Aggregating Device.

FAO: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

Fish stock: The living resources in the population from which catches are taken in a fishery. Use of the term fish stock implies that the particular population is a biologically distinct unit.

FIP: Fisheries Improvement Projects are multi-stakeholder initiatives that aim to help fisheries work towards sustainability.

Habitat: The chemical and bio-physical environment, including biogenic (made by organisms) structure, where fishing takes place.

HCR: Harvest Control Rule. HCRs are sets of well-defined pre-agreed rules or actions used for determining a management action in response to changes in indicators of stock status with respect to reference points.

HS: Harvest Strategy. A HS is the combination of monitoring, stock assessment, harvest control rules and management actions, which may include a management plan.

ICCAT: International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

ICES: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea.

ISSF: International Seafood Sustainability Foundation.

MSY: Maximum Sustainable Yield. MSY is the highest theoretical equilibrium yield that can be continuously taken (on average) from a stock under existing (average) environmental conditions without significantly affecting the reproduction process.

OSF: MSC Ocean Stewardship Fund.

OSPAR: Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic

PI: Performance Indicator.

Primary species: Species caught in the fishery that are not the targeted stock (not covered by MSC Principle 1) or ETP species and are managed through management reference points.

RFMO: Regional Fisheries Management Organisation.

Scope extension: A process led by a CAB to extend an MSC certificate to include other fishery operations such as a new gear type, a new target species and/or new vessels.

Secondary species: Species caught in the fishery that are not the targeted stock (not covered by MSC Principle 1) or ETP species. They are not considered 'primary' as they are not managed through management reference points.

SCRS: ICCAT Standing Committee Research and Statistics

Spawning stock biomass (SSB): Total weight of all sexually mature fish in the stock.

TAC: Total Allowable Catch

UoA: Unit of Assessment. A UoA comprises the target stock(s) combined with the fishing method/gear and practice (including vessel type/s) pursuing that stock, and any fleets, or groups of vessels, or individual fishing operators or other eligible fishers that are included in an MSC fishery assessment. In some fisheries, the UoA may be further defined based on the specific fishing seasons and/or areas that are included.

UoC: Unit of Certification. A UoC comprises the UoA without other eligible fishers that are not included in the certificate. Only seafood products originating from the UoC could bear the MSC ecolabel.

VME: Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem. These are ecosystems that are classified as vulnerable due to their respective characteristics and processes, such as rarity, fragility, life history dependency by various species, structure complexity and the functional significance of the ecosystem.

VMS: Vessel Monitoring System. VMS is a satellite surveillance system primarily used to monitor the location and movement of commercial fishing vessels.

WWF: World Wildlife Fund.


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