MSC Canada
State of the Water Report 2023

Contents

Foreword

With the global population set to reach 9.7 billion by 2050 we face an unprecedented challenge: how to feed and sustain a growing population while ensuring we do not undermine our planet in the process.

As we march toward the midway point of the Ocean Decade, an increasing number of organizations are urging governments to make aquatic blue foods (fish, seafood and aquatic plants both wild and farmed) central to their food policies. We urgently need to establish resilient systems and pathways to ensure the sustainability of our blue food systems, including wild fisheries.

At the 2021 Food Systems Summit, the United Nations (UN) recognized the potential for fishing and aquaculture to provide nourishment while protecting nature, stating "the ocean covers 70 per cent of our planet, but currently provides only five per cent of our food [1]."

That same year, the Blue Food Assessment published an unprecedented body of work highlighting the potential for nutrient-rich aquatic foods to help deliver healthy diets and more sustainable, equitable and resilient food systems for the future [2]. Less than 12 months later the UN Food and Agriculture Organization released its Blue Transformation roadmap focused on the sustainable expansion of "blue food" production [3].

These, and hundreds of urgent calls to boldly reimagine our food systems point to an undeniable truth: for humans to thrive, consumption and conservation must be seen and treated as complimentary, not competing objectives. This confluence is at the very core of the MSC mission and Theory of Change as we aim to promote both sustainable fishing and consumption.

At home and abroad we have seen positive change as seafood brands and retailers implement more stringent seafood sourcing policies. Supported by an increasing number of conscious consumers who weigh the need to feed themselves with the environmental impact of their diets, from 2019 to 2022 Canadian sales of MSC certified seafood more than doubled.

Canada's approach to fishery management is largely poised to help fisheries and industry meet this growing demand for sustainably harvested seafood. Today, Canada is a global leader in terms of MSC certification with 61.5 per cent of all wild capture landings MSC certified sustainable. Importantly, this commitment has delivered several documented improvements to how our oceans, lakes and rivers are fished.

We recognize that the road to sustainability isn't always smooth, and engagement in the MSC program requires significant effort and investment from fisheries. That's why we are committed to delivering incentives and benefits back to our fishery partners. We do this in part through building and maintaining recognition and trust of the MSC as a credible, third-party, and evidence-based symbol of sustainability, as well as a mechanism to facilitate access to increasingly discerning markets. We also strive to be an effective convener for all fishers, stakeholders, seafood companies, consumers, government, academia and NGOs, wishing to participate in the journey to improving the sustainability of fisheries in Canada.

This first Canadian State of the Water Report reflects on 15 years of fisheries engagement, recognizing and celebrating the immense efforts and accomplishments achieved by MSC certified fishery partners, as well as the hundreds of resource managers and stakeholders whose input is invaluable to our collective success.

Thank you to all our partners for driving progress and helping to establish Canada as a global leader in sustainable fishing.

Kurtis Hayne,
Program Director, MSC Canada

Introduction

Boasting the longest coastline in the world, fishing has been and continues to be the lifeblood of many Canadian communities across the country. Fishing by Indigenous groups for iconic species like herring, eel, halibut, and cod dates back thousands of years. In 1605, the first European fishing post was established in Port-Royal, Nova Scotia, and by the late 1800s Canada's fishing industry had become one of the largest in the world thanks to its bountiful groundfish stocks.

Today, Canada ranks 23rd globally in wild capture production and fishing contributes $9 billion to the Canadian GDP, providing primary employment for 72,000 people in 350 communities across the country [4,5]. It endures as an historically and culturally significant industry that is deeply embedded in numerous coastal and remote communities, not only as a pillar of local livelihoods but also food security.

Recognized worldwide for its high-quality products from generally well-managed fisheries, Canada is also a global leader in the adoption of the MSC program. Canada ranks among the top countries in the world in terms of the percentage of MSC certified fisheries landings, demonstrating that many of its fisheries meet the highest standards for sustainable fishing.

This inaugural State of the Water 2023 report outlines the positive change in Canadian fisheries driven by the MSC program over the last 15 years. The scope of this report covers the 26 Canadian fisheries that are currently certified (a detailed list can be found in the Annex).

The MSC is a voluntary program, and fisheries engage for several reasons including gaining greater and more reliable access to markets and demonstrating their high level of performance. The level of engagement in the program in terms of species and scale would not be possible without the support of longstanding partners from the harvesting sector, the industry, management and other non-governmental organizations across the country and beyond. This report is a testament to the collective efforts of Canadian stakeholders to ensure the sustainable management of our Canadian oceans, lakes, and rivers.

It looks first at the evolution, status, and species scope of MSC certified fisheries across the country. Through an analysis of assessment, re-assessment and surveillance audit reports, it highlights the conditions of certification that fisheries received over 15 years, and the subsequent improvements they made to improve their performance against the MSC Standard. Finally, it looks at stakeholder participation in the MSC process, showcasing the diverse set of groups that have contributed to the assessment process to help ensure that the high bar for sustainability in the MSC program remains credible, transparent, and subject to the rigor of external input.

THE REPORT IDENTIFIES THREE MAIN TAKEAWAYS:

Growth in engagement: The percentage of MSC certified landings by volume in Canada increased from 7.6 per cent in 2008 (the first certified fishery) to 61.5 per cent in 2021. This growth, along with the increase in fishery certificates and the breadth of species covered reflects a deepened engagement in the MSC program from coast to coast. Total certified landings peaked in 2017 before declining slightly due to the suspension of fisheries impacted by climate change (East Coast herring, Gulf of St. Lawrence snow crab, B.C. salmon and 3Ps cod in Newfoundland and Labrador).

On-the-water improvements: MSC certified fisheries have made significant improvements as they stayed in the program. Often driven by conditions of certification, average Principle scores have all increased from initial fishery assessments to their first reassessments five years later. Since 2008, certified fisheries delivered 152 improvements through closing 72 per cent of the 211 conditions of certification received. Most conditions were in relation to Principle 2 (Ecosystem impacts), and in 63 per cent of cases required 'Technical' improvements to close out the conditions. These are proactive changes a fishery must adopt such as modifying gear to reduce bycatch or improving the harvest strategy.

Stakeholder participation: A diverse range of stakeholders including conservation organizations, scientists, government bodies, and industry groups have engaged in the MSC certification process, thus strengthening the credibility of the program. There were 739 stakeholder comments submitted on 51 assessment reports, the majority of which were made by either conservation organizations or government bodies. These comments tended to focus on Principle 2, specifically around ETP, as well as primary and secondary species.

Canadian Fisheries Landscape

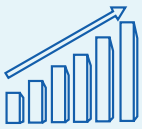
The global push for sustainable seafood has intensified due to concerns over overfishing, ecosystem damage, bycatch issues, food security, and the economic impacts of unsustainable practices. Climate change further increases this urgency due to its impacts on marine ecosystems. As a result, businesses, fisheries, governments, and international organizations are increasingly collaborating to implement or improve sustainable fisheries management, and seafood buyers are increasingly demanding that fisheries meet credible sustainability standards.

In Canada, the growing demand for sustainable seafood is such that **in 2022 Canadians purchased over CAD $340 million of MSC certified seafood**, almost doubling sales since 2019.

In 2021, the total volume of commercial wild catch landings in Canada reached 758,411 metric tons (mt), spread across 16,255 fishing vessels[8]. Of this, **466,397mt, or 61.5 per cent were MSC certified**. This achievement required immense collaborative effort from industry, government, NGOs and other stakeholders, and should position Canada to better respond to increased expectations both globally and locally.

By demonstrating environmental responsibility, Canadian fisheries are poised to maintain and reach new sustainability-minded markets while helping to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and safeguarding seafood for future generations.

BY THE NUMBERS

61.5%	OF CANADIAN LANDINGS ARE MSC CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE	
26	CERTIFIED FISHERIES	
19	SPECIES COVERED	
466,397	METRIC TONS OF MSC CERTIFIED CATCH	

Grand Banks cod collapse

In 1992, the collapse of the iconic Grand Banks cod stock shook not only the province of Newfoundland and Labrador but reverberated across Canada and the globe. A species critical to the province's economy and culture, and once so plentiful it was said you could scoop fish up by the bucket, had all but disappeared. The economic impacts of the ensuing cod moratorium were devastating with the loss of up to 35,000 jobs across 400 coastal communities seemingly overnight [6]. It was and remains the largest industrial mass layoff in Canadian history. The closure, which was expected to last two years, continues to this day as the stock remains in the critical zone. And although the '92 cod collapse is perhaps one of the most notorious, fishery collapses have also occurred in other parts of the globe.

Historic fishing village of Quidi Vidi in St John's, Newfoundland, Canada. Photo credit: pabradyphoto

Remote fishing in Manitoba

For over 100 years, Manitobans have commercially harvested fish across more than 200 lakes, many of these in remote communities where fishing is an essential part of the economic and social fabric [7]. Skownan First Nation and Chemawawin Cree Nation are two of these communities that fish on Waterhen and Cedar Lakes, the only MSC certified fisheries in Manitoba. Communities that fish on Waterhen and Cedar Lakes, the only MSC certified fisheries in Manitoba. While small in scale, these fisheries are usually the largest source of income in Manitoba's indigenous communities and create numerous indirect benefits in other sectors such as transportation, recreation, local food security and health In these First Nation communities, fishing has a particularly deep cultural significance and practices have been passed down from generation to generation.

Commercial ice fishing at the Waterhen Lake walleye and northern pike fishery, Manitoba. Photo credit: Mike Seehagel

MSC Certified Canadian Fisheries

The Canadian wild capture fishing sector targets a diverse variety of species: shellfish (such as crustaceans and molluscs), demersal species (like redfish and halibut), and pelagic species (ranging from hake to swordfish).

Over 15 years, fishery engagement in the MSC program grew from a single certified fishery in 2008 to 26 in 2023. These fisheries span 19 different species including all the most commercially important ones.

It is important to note, however, this does not mean that the entire catch of that species is MSC certified (see Figure 1: 'What is a Fishery').

The first fishery to achieve MSC certification in Canada was the **Canadian northern prawn trawl** fishery. In 2008, it was the largest MSC certified coldwater shrimp fishery in the world and continues to be certified to this day.

In 2009, the **Pacific halibut** fishery, shortly followed by the **Pacific Hake** fishery, were the first two west coast fisheries to join the program. In subsequent years, several new species were certified on both coasts including but not limited to albacore tuna, haddock, scallops, swordfish and snow crab.

In 2014, the **Waterhen Lake walleye and northern pike** Commercial gillnet fishery was the first freshwater fishery in Canada (and second globally), to achieve certification. Canada now boasts **three MSC certified lake fisheries**, two in Manitoba and one in Ontario. There is ongoing engagement in Manitoba to bring more freshwater fisheries into the program with the provincial government committing CAD$4 million to improving the sustainability of its fisheries and facilitating certification.

The **Clearwater Seafoods Eastern Canada offshore clam** fishery, certified in 2012, and the **Canada Atlantic halibut** fishery, certified in 2013, are the only sources of MSC certified Arctic surf clam and Atlantic halibut globally.

The annex contains more details on each fishery certificate, and full fishery information including assessments, surveillance reports, and other relevant information provided by independent auditors can be found on the MSC 'Track-a-Fishery' page.

What is a 'fishery''at the MSC?

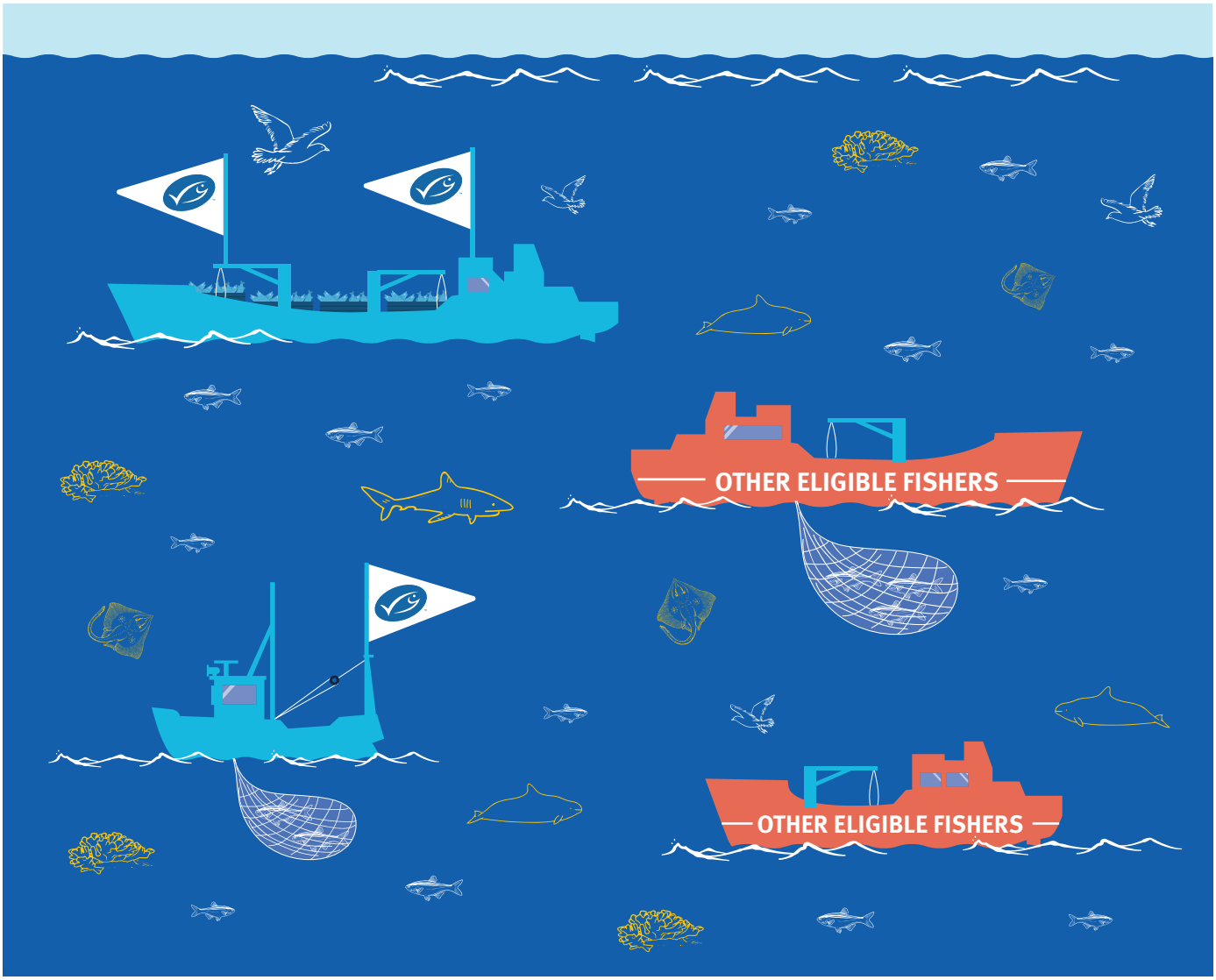
To judge whether fish has been caught sustainably, it is necessary to look not only at the target species, but also where and how it was caught. A certified fishery is therefore always a combination of those factors, which means that, for example, haddock is not itself certified as a whole species, but can only carry the blue MSC ecolabel if fished in the defined location and with the approved gear by a vessel belonging to the certificate.

A fishery can consist of a group of local fishers or be a large international collaboration - as long as there is joint management.

For the purpose of this report, a fishery is defined by the certificate scope of the fishery, and so may contain multiple species, stock areas, or gear types.

Being part of an MSC certificate means that the fisher may land MSC catches that have been caught according to the rules of that certificate. They are free to fish elsewhere, or for example with a different gear that does not fall under the certified scope, and land those catches as uncertified. The MSC Chain of Custody Standard ensures that there is no mixing of certified and non-certified catches throughout the supply chain.

UNIT OF ASSESSMENT



Vessels within the Unit of Certification

OTHER ELIGIBLE FISHERS

Other eligible fishers who fish on the same stock

Target stock

Environmental impacts considered by the assessment team

Figure 1. The Marine Stewardship Council 'Unit of Assessment'.

TIMELINE OF MSC FISHERY CERTIFICATIONS

2008
- Gulf of St Lawrence Northern shrimp
- Canadian Northern Prawn Trawl (Newfoundland inshore fishery later joined Canada northern and striped shrimp, remainder renamed Canada Scotian Shelf prawn fishery)

2009
- Canada Pacific halibut
- Pacific hake mid-water trawl

2010
- British Columbia Albacore Tuna
- British Columbia sockeye salmon (combined with British Columbia salmon)
- Canada sablefish (withdrawn)
- Canada Scotia-Fundy haddock
- Eastern Canada offshore scallop
- North West Atlantic Canada harpoon swordfish
- OCI yellowtail flounder trawl
- Eastern Canada offshore lobster (withdrawn)

2011
- British Columbia pink salmon (combined with British Columbia salmon)
- British Columbia spiny dogfish (withdrawn)
- Canada northern and striped shrimp
- Fogo Island Co-operative Society Limited cold water shrimp (combined with Canada northern and striped shrimp)
- Scotian Shelf shrimp (combined with the Canada Scotian Shelf Northern prawn trawl)

2012
- Clearwater Seafoods Eastern Canadian Offshore Clam
- Gulf of St. Lawrence snow crab (withdrawn)
- North West Atlantic Canada longline swordfish
- Scotian Shelf snow crab

2013
- British Columbia Chum Salmon (combined with British Columbia salmon)
- Canada Atlantic halibut
- FBSA Canada Full Bay sea scallop
- Iles-de-la-Madeleine lobster
- Newfoundland & Labrador snow crab

2014
- 4R Atlantic herring (withdrawn)
- Canada Scotian Shelf Northern prawn trawl
- Prince Edward Island lobster (combined into the Maritime Canada inshore lobster trap fishery)
- Waterhen Lake walleye and northern pike

2015
- Bay of Fundy, Scotian Shelf and Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence lobster (combined into the Maritime Canada inshore lobster trap fishery)
- Gaspésie lobster trap spring fishery
- Gulf of St. Lawrence fall herring (withdrawn)
- Lake Erie Multi-species commercial

2016
- 4VWX herring (withdrawn)
- Newfoundland 3Ps cod (withdrawn)

2017
- Canada 3LN redfish
- British Columbia Salmon (withdrawn)

2019
- Canada 0AB 2+3KLMNO Greenland Halibut

2020
- AQIP Gulf of St Lawrence Greenland halibut
- AQIP snow crab trap

2021
- Maritime Canada inshore lobster

2022
- Cedar Lake Walleye and Northern Pike

MSC Certified Landings in Canada

From 2008 to 2015, volumes of MSC certified landings steadily rose as the number of fishery certificates increased from one to 26. These included a large variety of fisheries across Canada, some with landings as small as 28 mt (Waterhen Lake walleye and northern pike) to those in excess of 100,000 mt (Canada northern and striped shrimp).

Certified landings peaked in 2017 and subsequently decreased as climate-driven impacts and ecosystem shifts caused landings to decline in some areas and fisheries to be suspended or withdraw in others. Many of the fisheries that were suspended out of the program and since withdrawn are now in Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) with the goal of re-entering the MSC program when they can. Since **2019, certified landings have levelled off at about 470,000mt**.

In 2021, **the species category with the largest volume was whitefish with 156,333mt** of certified landings. It includes species like Atlantic and Pacific halibut, Greenland halibut, haddock, hake, and redfish.

The species category with the second largest volume was lobster and crab at 135,527mt. MSC certified snow crab and lobster landings peaked in 2018 and then declined following the suspension of the Gulf of St. Lawrence snow crab fishery.

The **third largest, shrimp, is 84,033mt** and has been a major component of certified landings in Canada since the early days of the program. Culminating in 2012 with landings reaching 156,161mt, shrimp represented just under two-thirds of all certified landings at the time. Since 2012 certified landings have generally decreased due to a multitude of factors including environmental changes resulting in increased water temperatures[9,10].

The volume of certified **pelagic species** peaked at 92,149mt in 2016 but then dropped to just over 3,700mt with the suspension and withdrawal of the British Columbia Salmon fishery and the three Atlantic herring fisheries. Freshwater fisheries have been engaged in our program since 2015 but are relatively small volume fisheries compared to overall MSC catch, currently making up 0.6 per cent of landings.

MSC CERTIFIED LANDINGS, MT

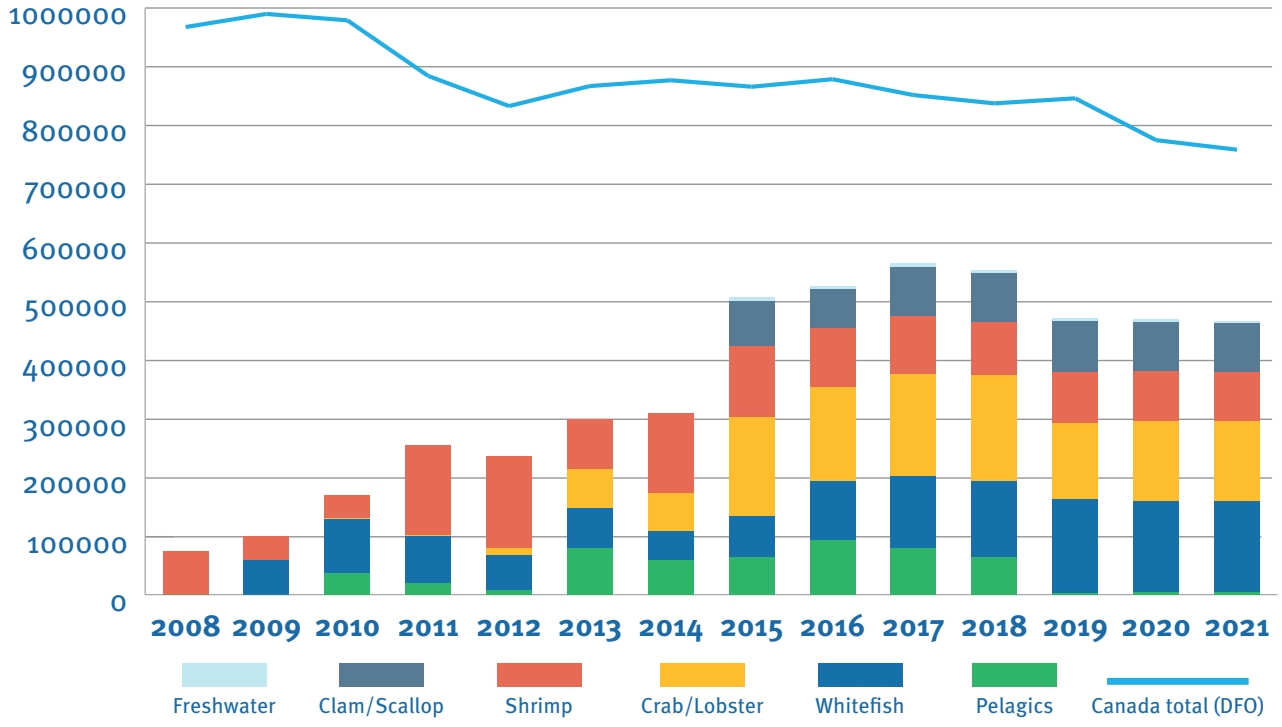


Figure 2: History of MSC certified Canadian landings (mt) by species grouping from 2008 to 2021.
Blue line represents total Canadian landings. The whitefish grouping includes Atlantic cod, Atlantic halibut, Greenland halibut, haddock, Pacific hake, Pacific halibut, redfish, sablefish and yellowtail flounder; pelagics includes albacore tuna, dogfish, herring, salmon and swordfish; crab/lobster includes lobster and snow crab; shrimp includes northern and striped shrimp; clam/scallops includes Atlantic scallop and Arctic surf clam; and freshwater includes northern pike, walleye (pickerel) and yellow perch.

MSC CERTIFIED LANDINGS BY SPECIES GROUPING 2021

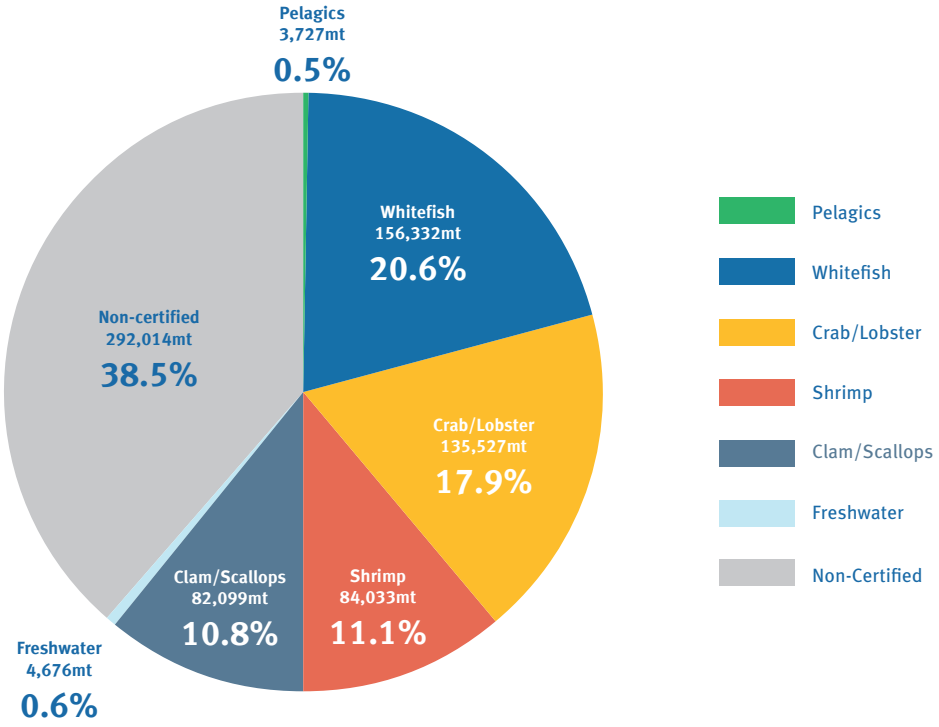


Figure 3: MSC certified landings by species grouping (2021).

Climate Change and Canadian Fisheries

From changes in ocean temperatures to ocean acidification, lower sea ice coverage, shifting currents, and an increase in the frequency and intensity of storm events, it is undeniable that we are witnessing the profound impacts climate change is having on our oceans[11,12].

These changes have impacted marine species in different ways: some species have declined, while others have become more abundant, yet others have shifted their geographical range.

In 2022, ocean temperatures in Atlantic Canada were substantially above normal and reached record highs in the deep waters of the northern Gulf of St. Lawrence, off southern Newfoundland and off the Scotian Shelf[13].

While sustainable seafood has a central role to play in climate change policy by providing a low carbon source of protein while ensuring sustainable livelihoods and food security[14], the effects of climate change on marine ecosystems will both increase the urgency for more fisheries to adopt responsive management strategies and simultaneously challenge efforts to fish sustainably.

Fisheries that meet the MSC Standard for sustainable fishing are well-managed and more prepared for climate change. These fisheries have effective monitoring and management in place to reduce their impacts on the environment, follow the current best scientific advice to ensure they catch fish sustainably, and are more responsive and resilient to the threats posed by climate change. They are proof that it is possible to balance economic and environmental priorities to safeguard our oceans, the wider environment, and seafood supplies for the future.

Case Studies: Climate Change Impacts on Canadian Fisheries

Photo credit: Tony - stock.adobe.com

North Atlantic Right Whales

On the east coast of Canada, changes in North Atlantic right whales' migration patterns have resulted in an increased number of whales spending time in the Gulf of St. Lawrence which has led to a higher risk of whales becoming entangled in lobster and snow crab fishing gear. Since the unprecedented number of mortalities witnessed in 2017, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada has worked with lobster and snow crab harvesters to introduce and implement extensive measures including mandatory gear marking, reporting of lost fishing gear, extensive fishery closures when right whales are sighted, and testing of various whale safe gear, including weak links and on-demand gear[15].

Lobster gear in PEI. Photo credit: Rick O'Brien

Shifting species distributions

We've also witnessed increases in the lobster population in more northern latitudes, which has led to higher landings in certain parts of the East Coast. Species that prefer cold waters, like northern shrimp and snow crab, have experienced declines in parts of Atlantic Canada, while warm-water species have increased in recent years[16].

Commercial salmon purse seiner, BC. Photo credit: Mike Seehagel.

Chinook Salmon and Bocaccio Rockfish

Marine heatwaves caused by climate change in the Pacific have led to notable changes in marine ecosystems. In 2014, a large mass of warm water coined 'the blob,' powered by heatwaves and El Niño weather patterns, descended on the Pacific coast of North America. The effects were widespread and had numerous implications for commercially harvested species. Warm waters impacted juvenile Chinook salmon returning to the ocean from 2014-16 causing reduced returns of adult fish in later years. More widely, recent drought conditions and low river levels have impacted Pacific salmon species' ability to return up natal steams to spawn [17]. On the other hand, the Bocaccio rockfish in BC waters benefited from the warm waters, showing a considerable increase in young fish populations. Despite its previous endangered status, Bocaccio is expected to return to stable numbers by 2024. This unexpected growth posed challenges for fisheries that had limited quotas for the species[18].

MAP OF CANADIAN CERTIFIED FISHERIES

The fisheries participating in the MSC program span the Pacific and Atlantic coasts and include several inland fisheries. The map below shows the approximate locations of all MSC certified fisheries in Canada.

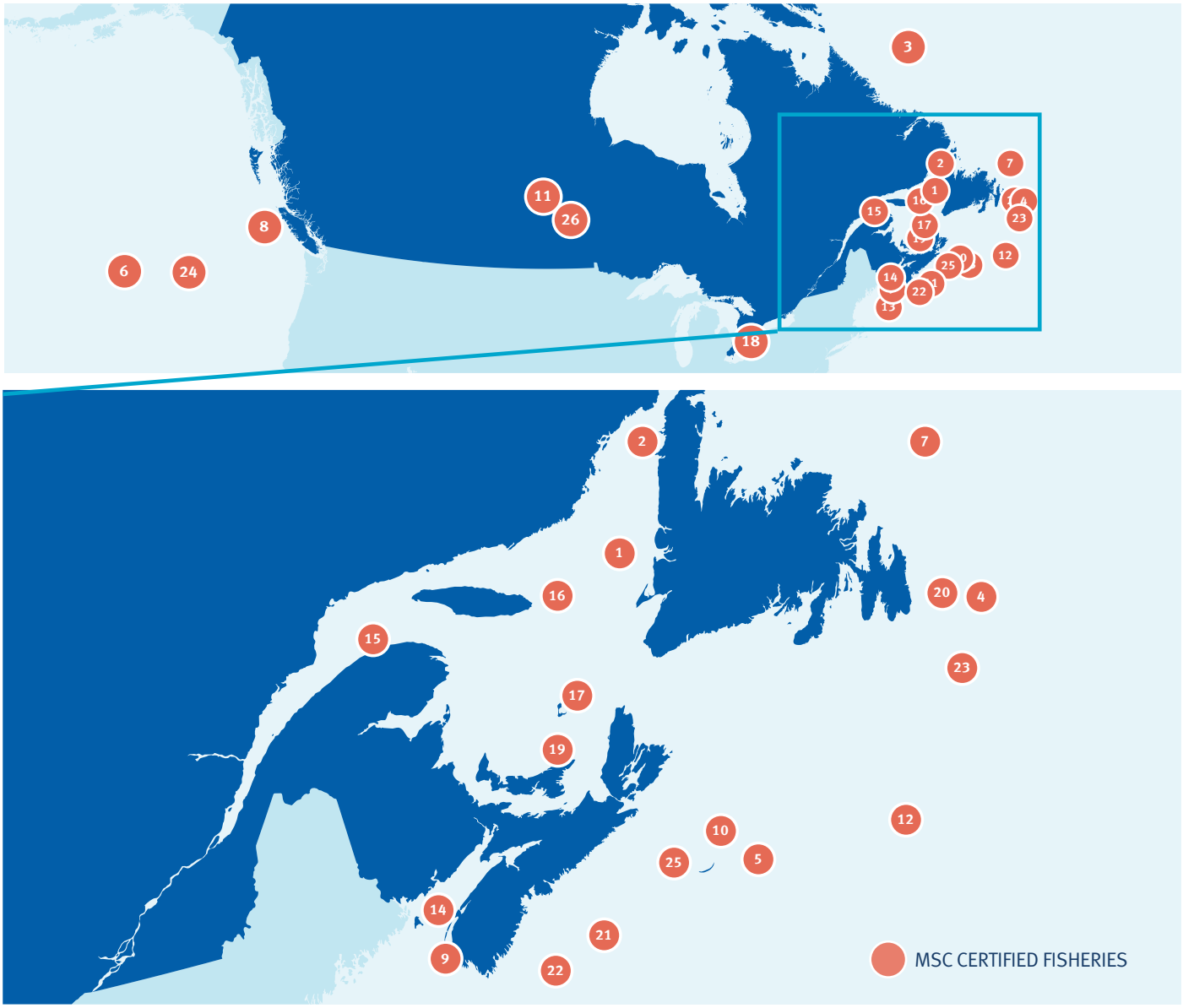


Figure 4: Map of MSC certified fisheries in Canada

1 AQIP Gulf of St Lawrence Greenland halibut fixed gear fishery
2 AQIP snow crab trap
3 Canada OAB 2+3KLMNO Greenland Halibut Bottom Trawl and Gillnet
4 Canada 3LN redfish
5 Canada Atlantic halibut
6 Canada Highly Migratory Species Foundation (CHMSF) British Columbia Albacore Tuna North Pacific
7 Canada northern and striped shrimp
8 Canada Pacific halibut (British Columbia)
9 Canada Scotia-Fundy haddock
10 Canada Scotian Shelf Northern prawn trawl
11 Cedar Lake Walleye and Northern Pike Fisheries
12 Clearwater Seafoods Eastern Canadian Offshore Clam
13 Eastern Canada offshore scallop
14 FBSA Canada Full Bay sea scallop
15 Gaspesie lobster trap spring fishery
16 Gulf of St Lawrence Northern shrimp trawl fishery
17 Iles-de-la-Madeleine lobster
18 Lake Erie Multi-species Commercial
19 Maritime Canada inshore lobster trap fishery
20 Newfoundland & Labrador snow crab
21 North West Atlantic Canada harpoon swordfish
22 North West Atlantic Canada longline swordfish
23 OCI Grand Bank yellowtail flounder trawl
24 Pacific hake mid-water trawl
25 Scotian Shelf snow crab trap
26 Waterhen Lake walleye and northern pike commercial gillnet fishery

Government Participation in Certification

MSC certification provides mechanisms through which national governments can benchmark their sustainability policies. Fisheries can also use the certification process to encourage governments to prioritize sustainability, enhance transparency, and make progress towards long-term sustainability goals.

In relative terms, Canadian fisheries, in coordination with and under the management of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) make Canada among the leading countries globally in terms of adherence to the MSC Fishery Standard. An impressive 61.5 per cent of Canadian landings come from MSC certified fisheries, compared to a global average of 15 per cent. DFO actively supports this achievement through its mandate for sustainable fisheries management, in-kind investment in certification processes, and various other supports provided to fisheries in meeting the MSC standard.

In 2015, Canada adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and has committed to delivering on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) both domestically and internationally[19]. MSC certification contributes to at least five of the SDGs, in particular Goal 14: Life Below Water, which governments and businesses involved in the program can use as evidence of their efforts towards meeting these SDG targets[20].

"DFO's mandate is to manage our fisheries sustainably, so we are pleased to provide information that demonstrates how fisheries align with MSC's standards. Working collaboratively with industry clients through the MSC process also provides opportunities to build strong relationships between the Department and the fishing industry."

- The Honourable Diane Lebouthillier,
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

While the decision to pursue MSC certification rests with industry, DFO contributes to the certification process by providing information on its science and sustainable management programs, including stock assessments, commercial data and integrated fisheries management plans, as requested. DFO's mandate is to manage our fisheries sustainably, so we [DFO] are happy to help show how our management meets MSC certification standards. We work with client groups throughout the assessment process, including in the preparation of their action plan to address any conditions that may be placed on their fishery.

The 10 MSC certified fisheries in DFO's Maritime's Region account for approximately 90 per cent of the landed value of all Maritimes Region fisheries. Participation in the MSC program provides an opportunity to demonstrate how our fisheries operate in a sustainable and ecologically responsible manner and can be a factor in developing market access. Working collaboratively with the industry through the MSC process provides opportunities to build strong relationships.

The MSC Fisheries Standard

The MSC Fisheries Standard was developed based on the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, 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: Sustainability of the stock. Fisheries must operate in a way that allows fishing to continue indefinitely, without overexploiting the resource.

Principle 2: 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: Effective management. All fisheries need to meet all relevant local, national, and international laws and have an effective management system in place.

In Version 2.0 of the MSC Fisheries Standard, each principle is further broken down into a set of 28 Performance Indicators (PIs), each consisting of multiple scoring elements against which every fishery is assessed by an independent auditor.

THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF THE MSC FISHERIES STANDARD (V2.0)

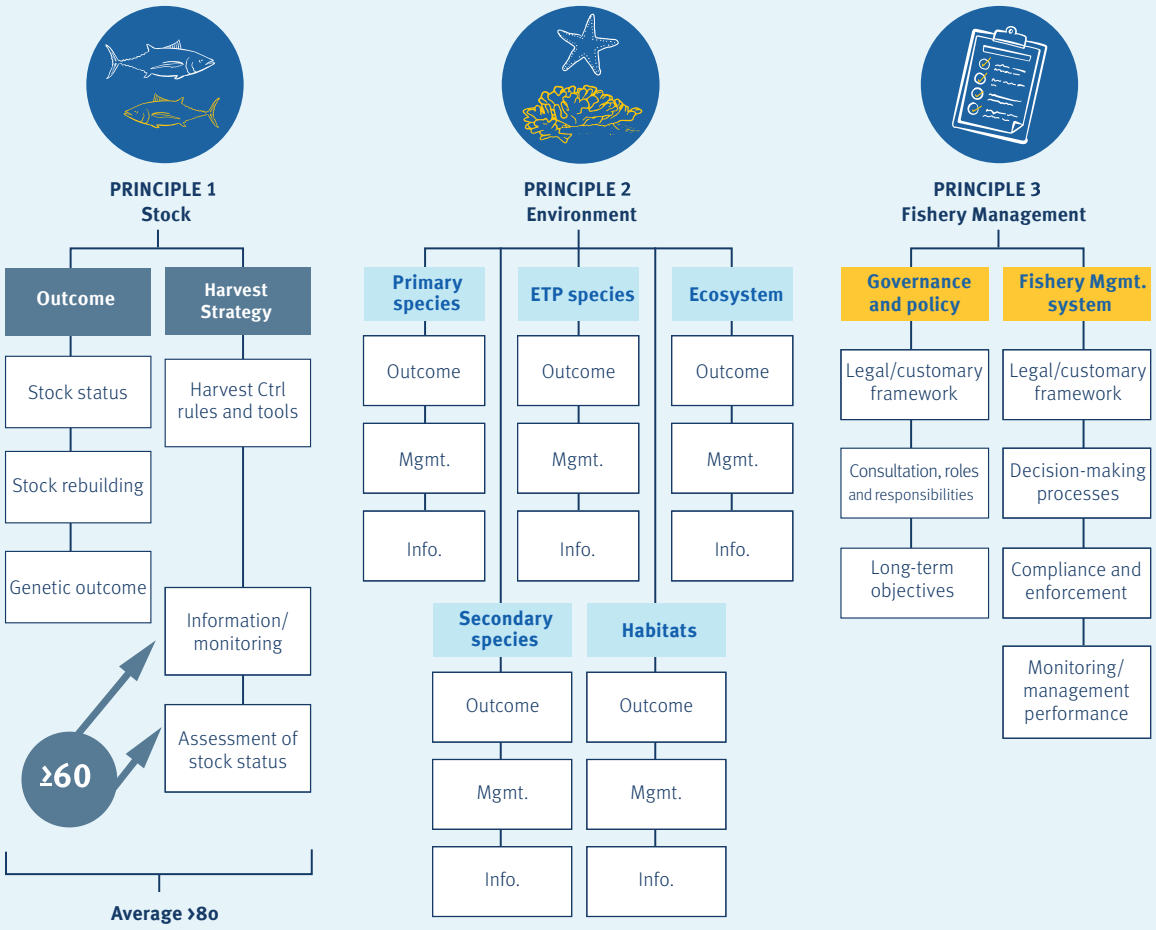


Figure 5: The three Principles and 28 Performance Indicators of the MSC Fisheries Standard (v2.0).

MSC Fisheries Standard Version 3.0

In October 2022, after significant stakeholder consultation and the most comprehensive Standard review to-date, the MSC published the newest version of the Fisheries Standard (version 3), in line with current best practice. Version 3.0 contains significant improvements to help address some of the most difficult issues facing the oceans, including better protections for marine biodiversity, and incentivizing stronger ocean governance.

Certified fisheries will be required to transition to version 3.0 by November 2028, and the MSC is committed to supporting fisheries through this transition.

For a fishery to pass the assessment and become MSC certified, it must score at least 60 on each of the 28 Performance Indicators (PIs), and average at least 80 for each of the three Principles. The highest score achievable is 100 and represents "state of the art" practice while a score of 80 represents "best-practice".

If a PI falls below 80, a 'condition' of certification is imposed, requiring further improvement until the score reaches 80. For each condition a fishery receives, it must draft and then implement a time-bound action plan to ensure the condition is addressed within the life of the certificate. The ongoing performance of all certified fisheries and specifically, progress against action plans, is monitored annually through surveillance audits.

SCORING OF MSC PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (PIS)

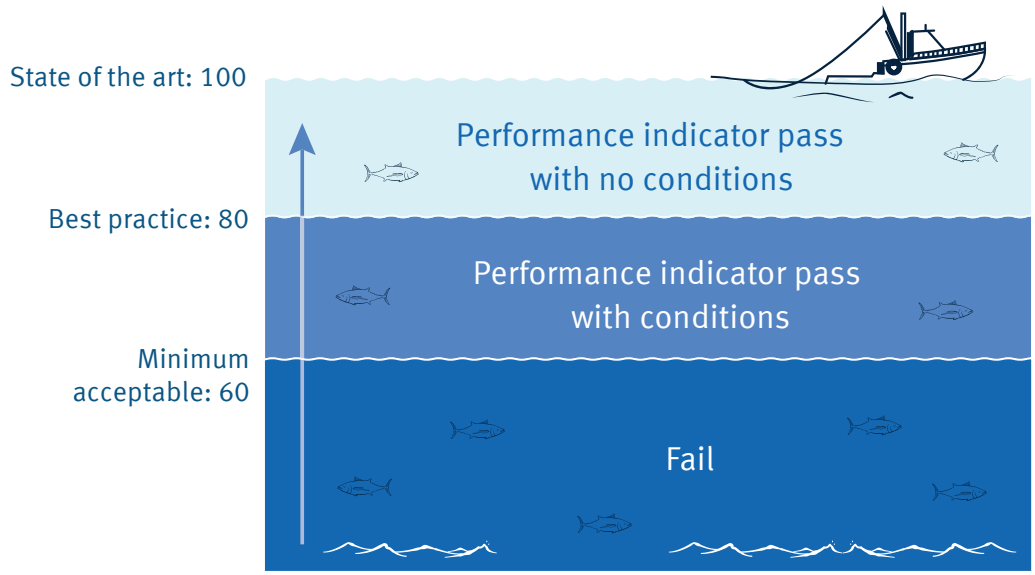


Figure 6: The MSC approach to scoring fishery performance.

Independent and accredited auditors, called Conformity Assessment Bodies (CAB), conduct all assessments and audits. The MSC does not directly participate nor influence the decision-making process. However, the MSC has the option to perform Technical Oversight on reports submitted by a CAB to ensure correct interpretation and application of the Standard. Additional information about this can be found in the Stakeholder Input section in this report.

The MSC Assessment Process

After their initial assessment and certification, all MSC certified fisheries must be audited annually – this is known as "surveillance auditing." At the end of the five-year certification cycle, fisheries must successfully complete the re-assessment process to remain certified. All assessment, annual audit, and re-assessment results are posted on the MSC Track-a-Fishery page.

THE MSC ASSESSMENT PROCESS

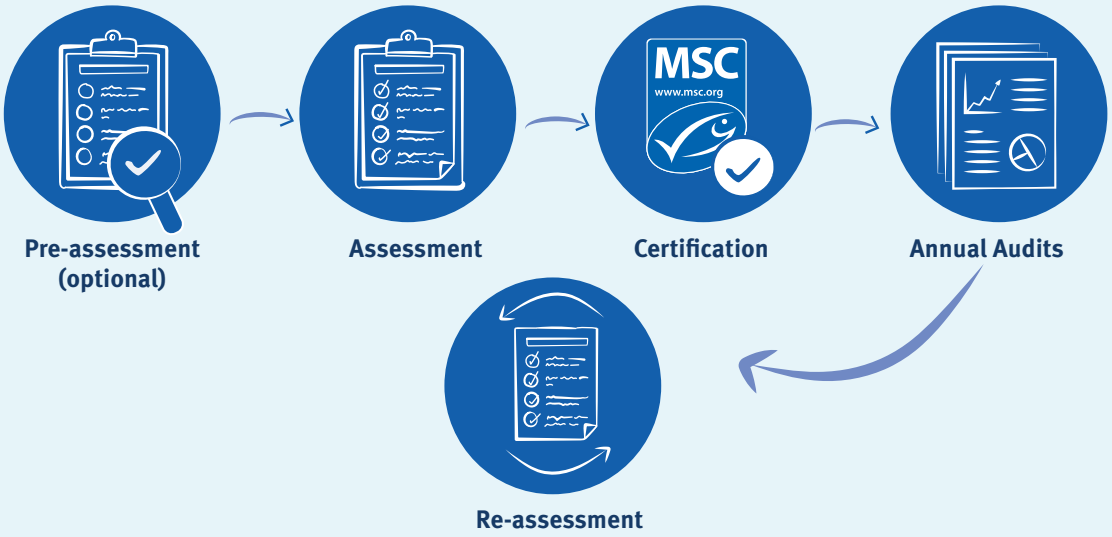


Figure 7: The MSC fishery assessment and re-assessment process.

Photo credit: @JoshHoltz

Canadian Fishery Scores and Conditions

Canadian fisheries have made significant improvements since certification. Average Principle scores have all increased from initial fishery assessments to their first reassessments five years later. Since 2008, certified fisheries implemented 152 distinct improvements to their practices, delivered through closing 72 per cent of the 211 conditions of certification.

The MSC certification process of assessments, annual audits and re-assessments produces a wealth of data and information about each fishery, all of which is made available in reports that are publicly available on the MSC Track-a-Fishery webpage.

Since the first fishery was certified 15 years ago, 230 reports have been published on Canadian fisheries. These reports cover: 27 initial assessments, 2 expedited audits, 172 annual surveillance audits, and 29 re-assessments.

The scope of this section includes only currently certified fisheries that have undergone at least one reassessment (have been in the program for a minimum of five years). The reports and conditions for fisheries that are in their first assessment are not included.

Withdrawn fisheries were excluded from the analysis of score changes, conditions, and improvements since without ongoing audits we could not confirm that the improvements implemented during certification were still accurate at the time of this report.

Improving High Performance

The boxplot below (Figure 8) provides a comparison of average Principle scores for the nine Canadian fisheries that have undergone two full assessment cycles (one re-assessment). The difference is striking. Since joining the program, these fisheries have implemented actions resulting in significantly improved performance. Both the median and average scores for each of the three Principles across all nine fisheries surpassed 88 by the end of the second assessment cycle. The scores for Principle 3 (P3) were particularly impressive, averaging over 92. The marked increase in Principle 2 and 3 scores suggests that these fisheries are benefiting from improved management practices, and that minimal impacts on surrounding ecosystems have been further mitigated. These fisheries can take pride in the substantial improvements they have made over the course of their MSC journeys so far.

SCORING: INITIAL ASSESSMENT VS 1ST RE-ASSESSMENT

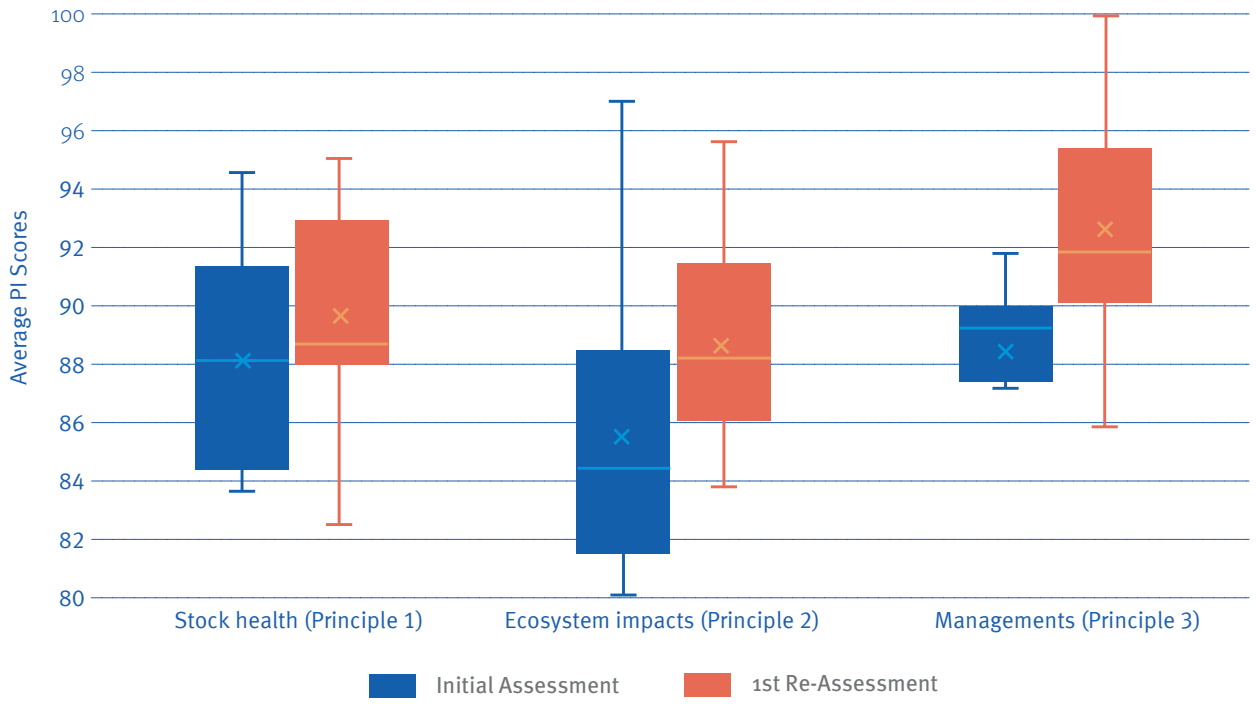


Figure 8: Changes in Principle scores between assessment cycles. Conducted on a subset of fisheries that have completed a reassessment against V 2.0. Blue plot represents Principle scores at initial assessment, orange plot represents Principle scores at re-assessment.

Condition Setting

There are often individual performance indicators for which a fishery can and should improve its performance to meet best practice. Provided the fishery has an overall high level of sustainability (average of 80 across all Principles) and meets the minimum requirements in all areas (60 in all performance indicators), it can be certified with conditions. A condition is given for Performance Indicator scores that are below 80 but above the minimum score of 60, and is a time-bound objective the fishery must achieve within the lifespan of its certificate to improve its sustainability and maintain certification. The fishery would need to bring its score to 80 or above by the end of the certification period by completing an action plan (see Figure 6). Through condition setting, certified fisheries are required to improve to reach the global best practice levels of sustainability set out by the MSC Fisheries Standard.

Improvements Through Time-Bound Action Plans

Often these conditions result in contributions to research, improvements to fishing methods or measures to rebuild fish stocks. The fishery's independent certifier will carry out annual audits to determine whether the fishery is making adequate progress towards addressing its conditions. If the fishery does not close its conditions within the specified timeframe, or the certifier judges that adequate progress towards closing a condition is not made, the fishery's certificate can be suspended. In this way, the MSC does not only represent a high bar when it comes to sustainability, it also ensures fisheries, if necessary, continue to make improvements to their practices after they have achieved certification.

Canadian fisheries have improved and successfully closed many conditions over almost 15 years. However, due to changes in the scoring system since the first fishery achieved certification, making a direct comparison between conditions assigned under earlier versions of the Fisheries Standard and those assigned since then is challenging. For this reason, the following graphs and charts do not include any conditions closed when the PRE-Fisheries Assessment Methodology (FAM) Fisheries Standard was in use (before 2008).

It is also important to highlight that for fisheries certified under the MSC Principles and Criteria for Sustainability Standard (pre-FAM), 29 unique conditions were closed, and five were rewritten into the new version of the Standard. Since then, 211 unique conditions have been issued to MSC certified Canadian fisheries (206 if the five that were rewritten are not counted), and 152 of these conditions (72 per cent) have been closed. The fisheries with the remaining 59 conditions are currently working on implementing their action plans to maintain their certificates into the next assessment cycle.

Photo credit: Rick O'Brien @rickettes

Conditions and Improvements by Principle

The following figure shows the distribution of fishery conditions by Principle. More than half (57.3 per cent) of conditions raised were against P2 Performance Indicators (environmental impacts), of which 72 per cent have been closed. Canadian fisheries in the MSC program have made many improvements (87) with regards to their impact on the surrounding ecosystem. The rest of the conditions have been balanced between P1 and P3 (19.4 per cent and 23.2 per cent, respectively). For these Principles, 63 per cent and 80 per cent of the conditions have been closed respectively.

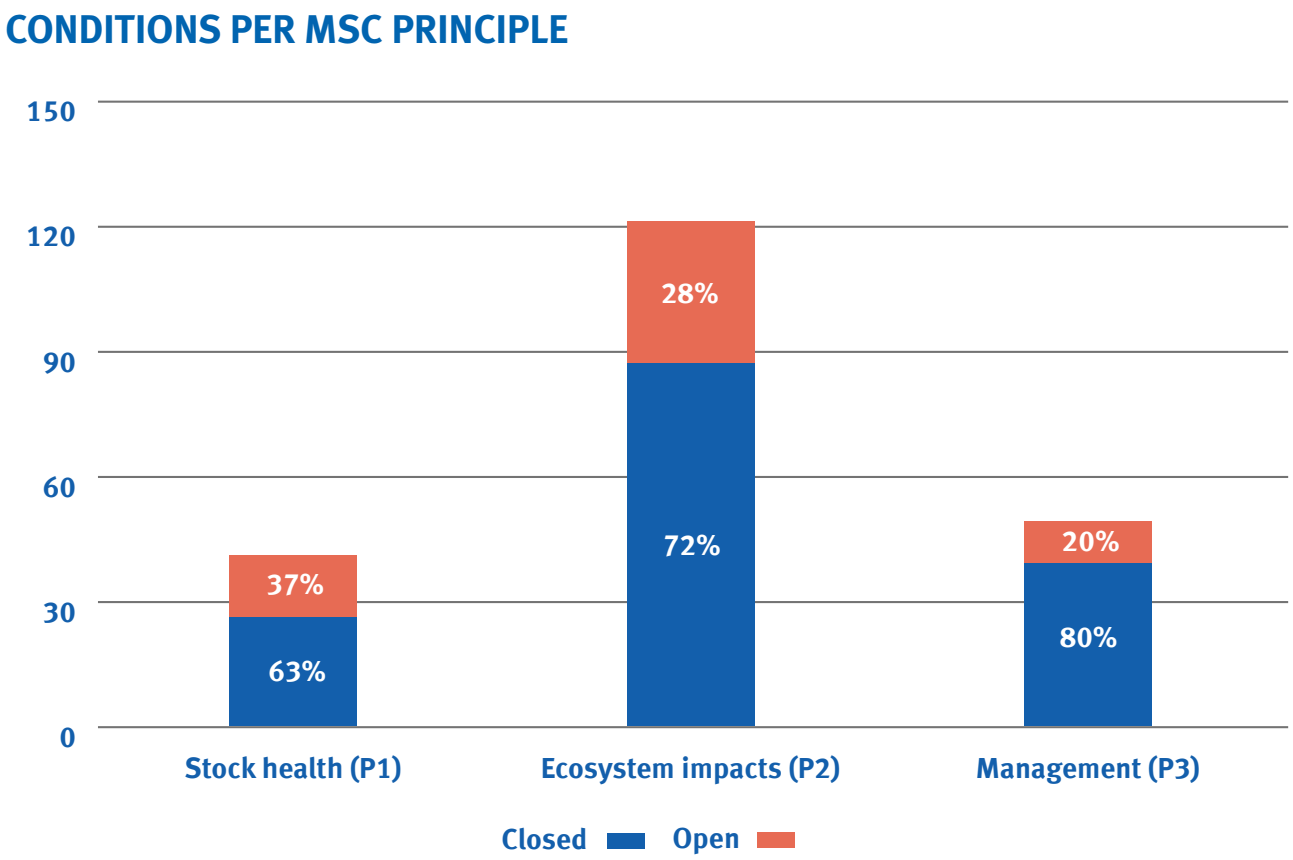


Figure 9: Number of conditions certified fisheries received by Principle. Orange is proportion of conditions currently open, blue those conditions that have been fulfilled.

Photo credit: Rick O'Brien @rickettes

Categories of Improvements

As part of this report, the actions required to close each condition were classified into one of three categories: technical, governance, or research, and the results are displayed in Figure 5.

'Technical' refers to any proactive change a fishery must adopt regarding its practices, such as modifying gear to reduce bycatch or improving the harvest strategy.

'Governance' specifies conditions that require change to be made to the management/governing structures of the fishery.

'Research' describes conditions where undertaking research (increasing knowledge to improve certainty) is sufficient for closing the condition—e.g. collecting information on the surrounding habitat or undertaking an 'Impact assessment' on the impact the fishery has on the surrounding ecosystems.

Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of the conditions were categorized as 'technical,' while the other two categories had very similar numbers of conditions (18 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively). Sustainable fishery management necessitates a blend of technical, governance, and research measures.

Technically, tools like catch limits, gear restrictions, and area closures ensure that fish populations aren't over-exploited and habitats are protected. Governance measures, such as policy frameworks, regulations, and stakeholder engagement, provide the necessary structure and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance and adaptability. Research, on the other hand, offers insights into fish population dynamics and ecosystem health, enabling data-driven decisions and continuous improvement of management strategies. Together, these components foster a balanced approach to fishery management, ensuring resource longevity and ecosystem health.

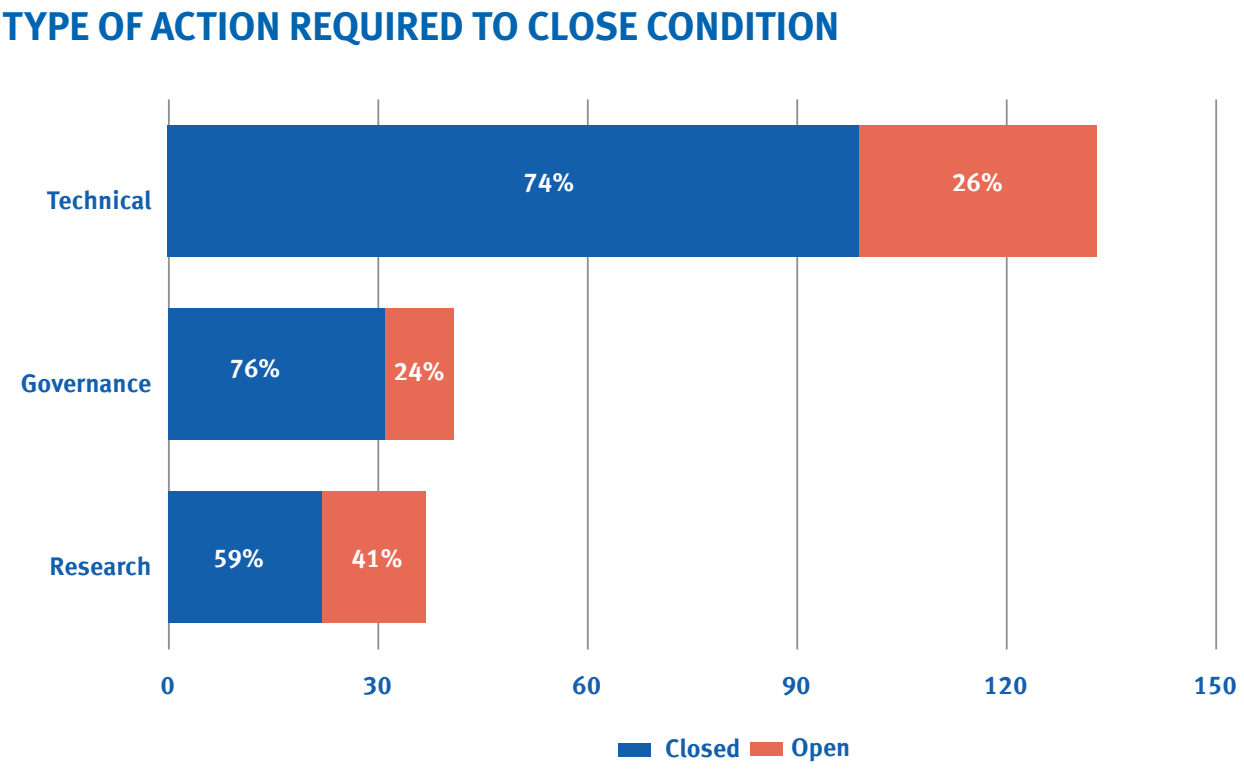


Figure 10: Number of conditions received by certified fisheries by category of action required to close them. Orange is proportion of conditions currently open, blue those conditions that have been fulfilled.

Principle 2 Improvements: Minimizing Bycatch and Ecosystem Impacts

Figure 11 examines the distribution of Principle 2 conditions raised across three categories: habitats and ecosystem, bycatch and other species, and Endangered, Threatened and Protected (ETP) species.

'Habitats and ecosystem' pertains to efforts to minimize the impact on benthic habitats and surrounding ecosystems.

'Bycatch and other species' refers to efforts to reduce the non-target or unwanted component of the catch, which also includes bait species.

'ETP' relates to mandates for decreased interactions with, and enhanced understanding of, ETP species.

While the conditions seem to skew towards the first two categories, constituting a combined 77 per cent, a component-by-component examination shows a more even distribution: 25 pertain to the Performance Indicators of bycatch of primary species, 26 to bycatch of secondary species, 28 to protection of ETP species, 26 to habitats, and 16 to ecosystems.

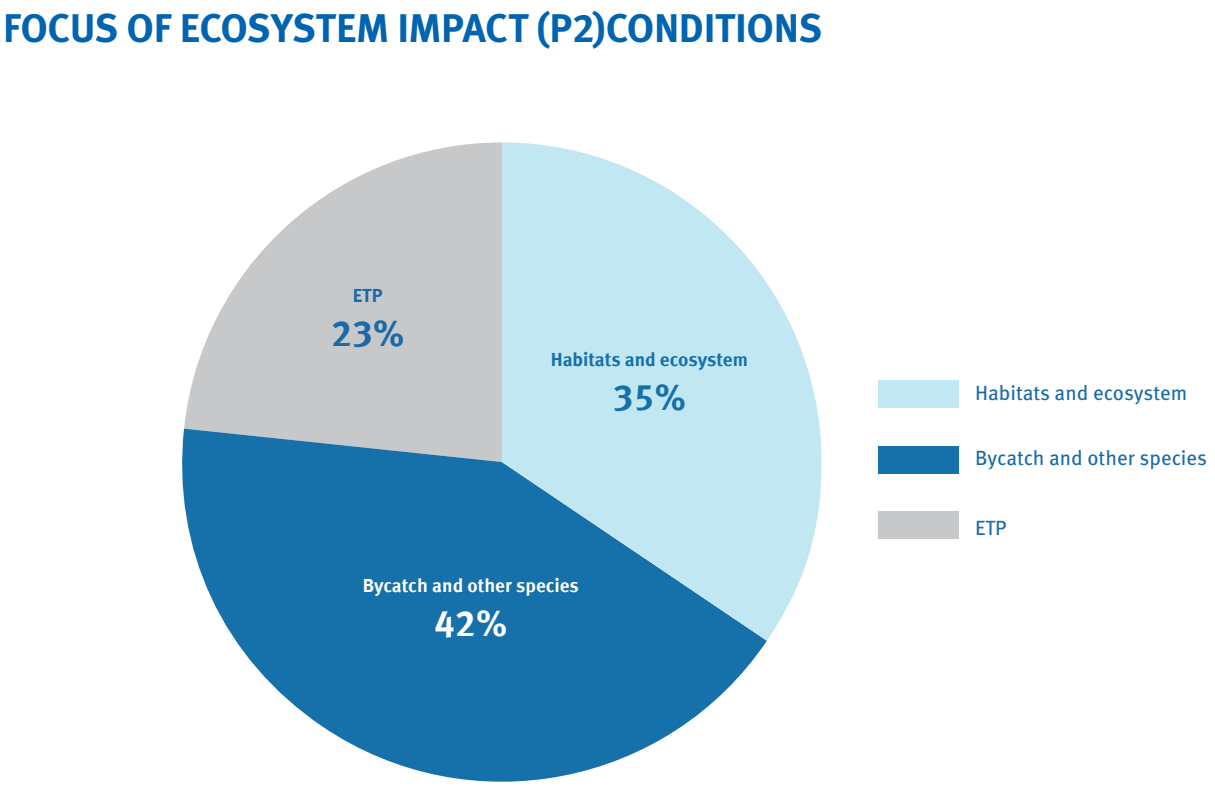


Figure 11: Principle 2 conditions received by certified fisheries by category of improvements needed.

Case Studies: How Conditions Lead to Change on the Water

BYCATCH MONITORING

OCI Grand Bank yellowtail flounder trawl fishery

Credit: Jeff Rotman / Alamy Stock Photo

The OCI Grand Bank yellowtail flounder trawl fishery was certified in 2010 but with two conditions against PIs of the Primary Species component (2.1.1 and 2.1.2). For the first condition, fishery stakeholders had to demonstrate bycatch of the main retained species, particularly cod, was "highly likely to be within biologically based limits" and, in the case it wasn't, that management measures would prevent the fishery from impeding the recovery of the stock. For the second, they had to put in place a management strategy that would ensure that witch flounder bycatch would remain within biologically based limits.

To meet these conditions, the fishery installed the TrackWell system on all its vessels. The TrackWell gear records all data relevant to fishing activities—including all logbook information, water temperatures, depth, fishing area coordinates, etc.—and can send it to computers on land. This enabled the footprint of the fishery to be calculated with unprecedented accuracy. Furthermore, other measures such as the mesh size of the nets (150 to 155 mm) and move-on protocols have kept bycatch of cod low, and the use of "flying doors" and raised sweeps have helped minimize the fishery's impact on habitats and Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs).

COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT

Cedar Lake Walleye and Northern Pike fisheries

Cedar Lake Walleye and Northern Pike fisheries. Photo credit: IISD (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Many fishery improvements are often necessary to prepare for MSC certification, but these improvements are seldom included in the analysis of MSC program impacts because they happen prior to the formal public certification processes. Cedar Lake serves as an example of such a fishery. Situated 460 kilometers northwest of Winnipeg, Manitoba, this inland fishery achieved MSC certification in November 2022. To meet the certification requirements, a collaborative effort was undertaken by the Chemawawin First Nation, Cedar Lake Fisheries Inc., and the federal and provincial governments.

Several improvements were implemented as part of the preparation process. These included the establishment of collaborative, adaptive management practices, as well as the implementation of harvest control rules. Additionally, the group developed the Collaborative Stock Monitoring program, which actively involves community fishers in the monitoring and management of the harvested fisheries. These efforts demonstrate a commitment to sustainable practices and highlight the importance of community engagement in ensuring the long-term viability of the fishery.

"After the collapse of the fishery in 1996, Chemawawin Cree Nation has come a long way in the development of an economically viable and a sustainable fishery on Cedar Lake. We have to be proud of what can be accomplished by partnering with industry and government." - Chief Clarence Easter of Chamawawin Cree Nation.

STOCK ASSESSMENT

Canada Pacific halibut (British Columbia) and Pacific hake mid-water trawl

The Canada Pacific halibut (British Columbia) and Pacific hake mid-water trawl fisheries are the only certified groundfish fisheries in British Columbia. These two fisheries play a crucial role in managing the catch from over 70 species of groundfish in BC, as part of an integrated approach.

To ensure proper management of two ETP (Endangered, Threatened, or Protected) species, yelloweye and rougheye rockfish, specific conditions were placed on PI 2.3.2b (ETP species management). Over the course of several years, through close collaboration between academia, industry, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), stock assessments were conducted to address these conditions. The yelloweye condition was addressed first, followed by the rougheye condition. Additionally, updated quotas were established for these two species across all of BC's commercial groundfish fisheries.

Completing the stock assessment for the rougheye rockfish complex was particularly challenging, given the elusive nature of the species. Nonetheless, it was a significant achievement and marked the first formal assessment for the rougheye rockfish complex. The successful collaboration among stakeholders and the completion of these assessments demonstrate the commitment to sustainable management practices in preserving these important groundfish species.

SPECIES SURVEYS

Canada 3LN redfish

The Canada 3LN redfish fishery was certified in 2015 and targets the Acadian redfish (Sebastes fasciatus). However, another species—the Deep water redfish (Sebastes mentella) is almost identical and deemed IPI (Inseparable or Practically Inseparable), and both species are managed as one stock. A condition was placed on PI 2.1.3, requiring the client to provide evidence of data being collected that would be sufficient to detect an increased risk to this population. The fishery, in collaboration with DFO, first produced a report demonstrating how the two species could be distinguished—through anal fin counts (AFCs) and established monitoring that could detect an increase in the proportion of Deepwater redfish being harvested. Next, it administered surveys that found that S. mentella did not constitute more than 10 per cent of catch. Species samples were taken and catch profiles of the fishery were reported that confirmed these findings, closing the condition.

MSC Conservation ambassador Tiare Boyes.
Credits: Ivan Dubinsky

Continued Improvement Built In

Through the condition-setting mechanism, the MSC program is designed to deliver continuous improvement within fisheries. Scores can change and conditions can be added or closed out during surveillance audits, according to scoring and performance against action plans. Fisheries can also be subject to 'expedited audits,' triggered if new information or research reveals previously unknown or revised impact likely to significantly affect scoring outcomes.

The MSC program criteria, including the Fisheries Standard, undergo regular reviews and updates. Following ISEAL procedures (the organization that defines credible practice for sustainability systems), a thorough review of the MSC Fisheries Standard is conducted every 5 years to ensure the Standard aligns with the latest scientific, policy developments, and widely adopted best practice in fishing. These reviews involve multiple rounds of public consultations with stakeholders such as harvester groups, seafood companies, scientists, NGOs, governments, and other interested parties.

Through this process, ambiguity in requirements can be clarified, and where appropriate, Performance Indicators redefined to reflect changes in global best practice. As the Fisheries Standard evolves, certified fisheries must keep pace.

One challenge is to maintain program accessibility to fisheries worldwide. To help address this, the In-Transition to MSC (ITM) program and associated fund aim to support fisheries aspiring to align with MSC performance standards.

Photo credit: Rick O'Brien @rickettes

The Ocean Stewardship Fund

Ambitious plans to accelerate change

In 2018, the MSC launched the Ocean Stewardship Fund (OSF) to support fisheries on their pathway to sustainability and to invest in new scientific research. Five percent of annual royalties from MSC certified product sales are allocated to the fund, which has continued to expand in scope and scale every year since its inception. In 2022, the fund opened to third-party donations, and in April 2023, MSC announced it was aiming to raise US$100 million in the next decade to accelerate progress in sustainable fishing globally.

Supporting fisheries at all stages of their sustainability journey

Five strands of funding are available under the Ocean Stewardship Fund, including:

- Student Research Grants
- Science and Research Fund
- Innovation Fund
- Recertification Assistance Fund
- Transition Assistance Fund

Since its inception in 2018, the OSF has provided over £3.9 million (approximately US$4.75 million) to 106 fisheries and projects around the world.

Funding progress in Canada

In Canada, over £230,000 (approximately CAD$380,000) has been awarded to eight Canadian fisheries and institutions since 2020.

Recertification Assistance Fund:
Seven Canadian fisheries have been awarded grants under this fund that supports fisheries with long-standing commitments to sustainability and contributes to the audit costs of the fishery's second recertification.

The Science and Research Fund:
In 2020, the University of Windsor was awarded a grant of £50,000 (approximately CAD$82,000) to support research aimed at protecting the Greenland shark, the world's longest-living vertebrate. The project aided the Canada 0AB 2+3KLMNO Greenland Halibut fishery, certified one year earlier, with a condition of their certification to gather more accurate data on bycatch and help assess the status of the Greenland shark population in the fishery area.

Photo credit: University of Windsor; HusseyLab

Canadian fisheries that received the OSF Recertification Assistance Fund:

2023:

- Canada Scotia-Fundy haddock fishery

2021:

- Gulf of St Lawrence northern shrimp trawl fishery
- Canada Highly Migratory Species Foundation (CHMSF)
- British Columbia Albacore Tuna North Pacific
- OCI Grand Bank yellowtail flounder trawl fishery
- Eastern Canada Offshore Scallop

2020:

- Pacific hake midwater trawl fishery
- Canada Scotian shelf northern prawn trawl

Little was known about the survival rates of Greenland sharks once caught and returned to the ocean. With the help of the fishery, the team of scientists used state-of-the-art tagging technology, called Pop-Off Satellite Archival Tags (PSATs), to help assess the mortality rate and provide vital data for improving the fishery. The fishery is currently on track to close their condition and is also trialling excluder devices aimed at reducing shark bycatch. The results of the study are further being used to develop a safe handling and release guide for harvesters and to inform a Greenland shark working group that was established.

Stakeholder Input

To help ensure that the high bar for sustainability in the MSC program remains credible, transparent, and subject to the rigor of external input, the opportunity for stakeholders to comment at critical stages of a fishery's assessment is an important part of the MSC certification process.

There has been a wide breadth of stakeholder groups and individuals that have participated in MSC assessments of Canadian fisheries. This highlights how diverse the Canadian stakeholder landscape is and how involved these actors are in ensuring that Canadian fisheries, species, and marine resources are protected and sustainably managed for the future.

The scope of this analysis covers 230 fishery assessment reports published since 2008 pertaining to Canadian fisheries certified as of 2022. Withdrawn fisheries were excluded from this analysis.

Stakeholder Consultation Process

All stakeholders have the opportunity to provide input on the scoring of a fishery or any other structural part of the certification report, and the Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) is required to consider the input and respond to it. If a stakeholder brings forward valuable information that should be included in the report, the CAB would review their report and update the fishery scoring if necessary. If a stakeholder remains unsatisfied that their input has not been reflected in the finding of the fishery performance against MSC requirements, an objection can be taken to an independent adjudication process. This is a further, independent, fair and open process to resolve stakeholder disagreements with the assessment team's decision.

Diversity of Canadian Stakeholders

Over the years Canadian stakeholder participation in the MSC fishery certification process has been extensive and impactful. Since 2008, 78 different organizations or individuals representing conservation organizations (eNGOs), scientists, government bodies, and industry groups have commented on 230 fishery reports.

Conformity Assessment Bodies proactively reach out to stakeholders at the beginning of the assessment or audit process to invite their participation, and while not every report states how many stakeholders were consulted, the 40 (out of 230) assessment reports that did mention this contacted anywhere between 1 to 81 stakeholders with an average of 20.

Number of Stakeholder Comments

Stakeholders submitted 1,135 comments in 71 of the 230 assessment reports. These comments originated from 78 different organizations or individuals and include the MSC's technical oversight which provided 396 comments. Fishery reports are subject to technical oversight (TO) by the MSC Fisheries Team. TO findings and non-conformities are reported internally on an annual basis to inform continuous improvement of certifier performance - an integral part of the MSC assurance process.

Excluding MSC technical oversight, there were 739 stakeholder comments submitted to 51 assessment reports, most of which were made by conservation organizations or government bodies. Other stakeholder types that left significant number of comments included Nature preserves and aquariums, scientists, and consultants or consulting groups. Conservation groups submitted the most comments: 488 made in 41 distinct reports, 24 of which were at the initial assessment or reassessment stage. The Ecology Action Centre has been the most active stakeholder, having submitted comments on 30 different reports.

PROPORTION OF COMMENTS LOGGED BY STAKEHOLDER TYPE

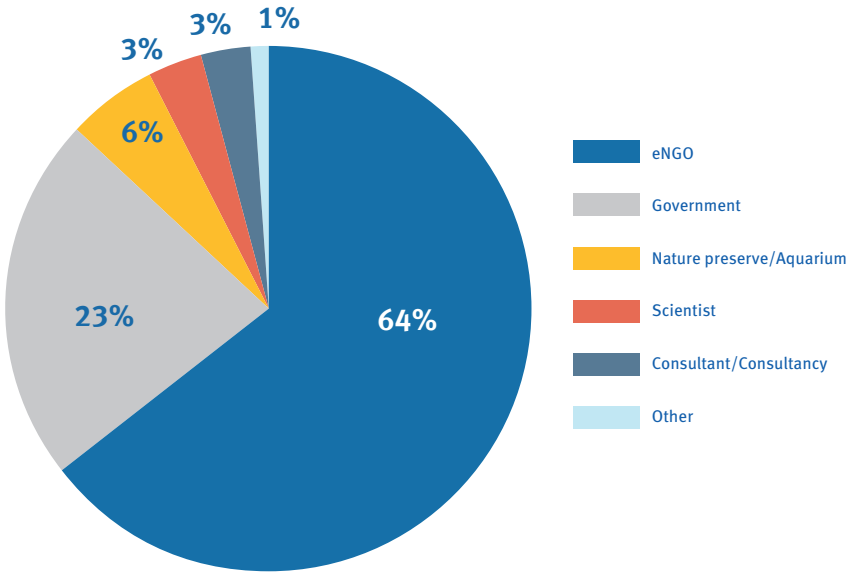


Figure 12: Proportion of comments received during MSC assessments by stakeholder types.

Besides the Ecology Action Centre and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), (123 of whose 167 comments came from one report), the top stakeholders submitted very similar numbers of comments, demonstrating the importance Canadian groups and organizations attribute to sustainable fisheries and the MSC certification process.

NUMBER OF REPORTS STAKEHOLDERS COMMENTED ON

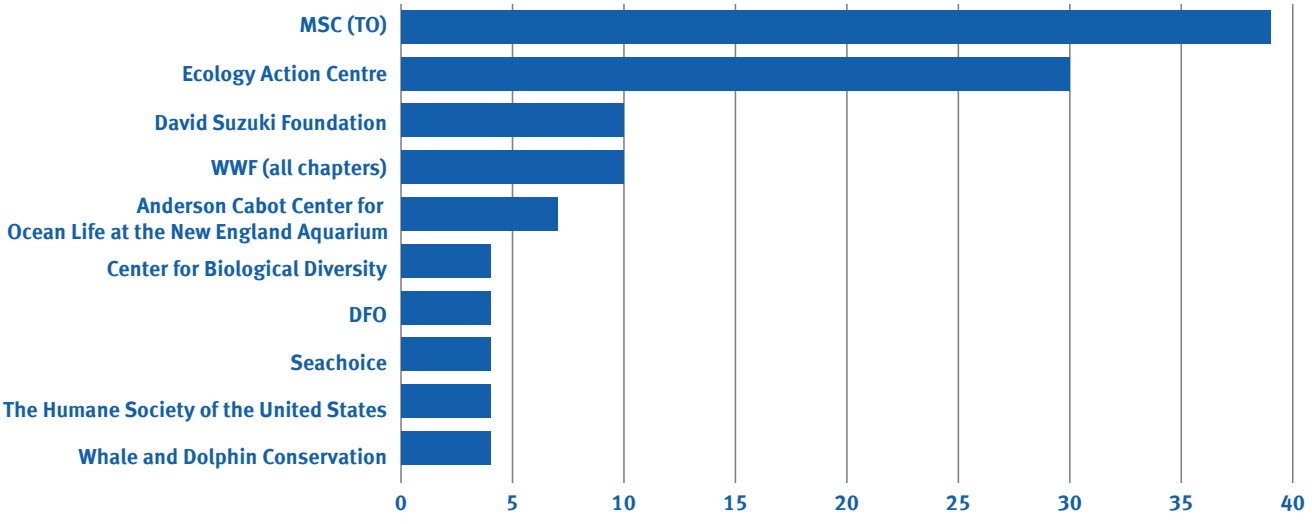


Figure 13: Number of reports commented on per stakeholder.

Focus of Stakeholder Comments

The majority of input from conservation organizations was focused on Principle 2 (P2). P2 is also the Principle with the most performance indicators, and where fisheries received the most conditions, so it is not surprising that conservations organizations comments tended to focus here.

ENGO INPUT PER PRINCIPLE

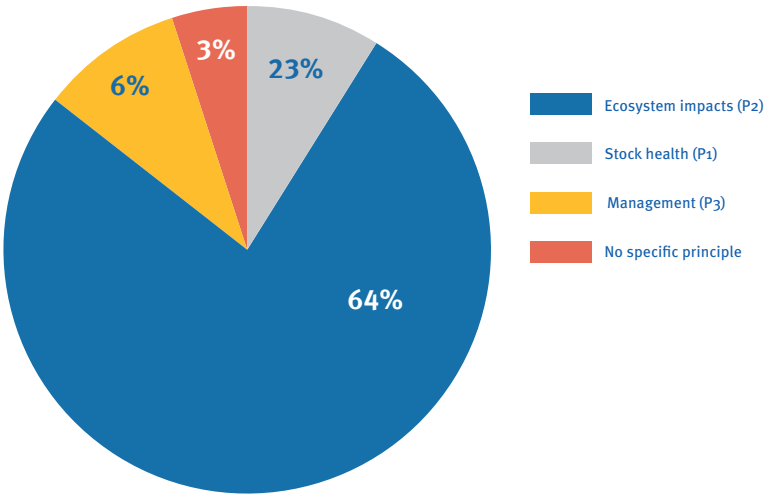


Figure 14: eNGO comments received during MSC assessments by Principle.

As organizations primarily focused on conservation and protecting ETP species, eNGO focus on P2 Performance Indicators has been concentrated on the ETP, primary species, and bycatch components of the Fisheries Standard, with fewer comments on habitats and ecosystem. It should be noted that most of the comments left on primary species and bycatch Performance Indicators (PIs) dealt with the bycatch of sharks that were scored under either of these two components.

Government comments, almost all of which came from DFO, generally did not fall under a specific Principle as almost all of them dealt with factual corrections and errors in the report text. Even those that could be categorized as one of the three Principles tended to nonetheless mostly fall under the "no specific Principle" category. The rest of DFO comments almost exclusively dealt with Principle 2, a common theme among Canadian stakeholders.

ENGO PRINCIPLE 2 COMMENTS BY COMPONENT

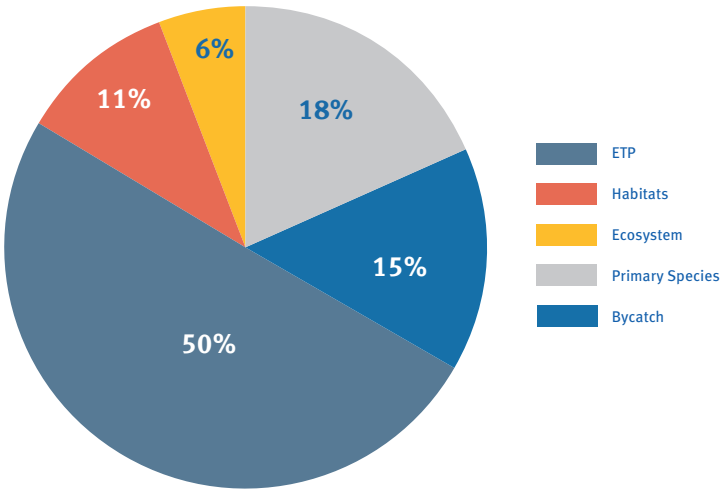


Figure 15: eNGO Principle 2 comments received during MSC assessments by component.

Outcomes of Stakeholder Input

Four new conditions were added thanks to stakeholder input, highlighting the importance of stakeholder engagement in the assessment and audit process. One of these conditions resulted from a comment left by the Ecology Action Centre and a UBC scientist, and the other three from a wide range of stakeholders (mostly conservation groups) that left comments regarding a fishery's take of primary species. All have since been closed, resulting in four improvements on the water that would not have occurred without stakeholder participation.

Furthermore, on 32 different occasions, scores were changed because of one of these stakeholder comments:

- 20 from MSC technical oversight
- Six from WWF Canada
- Two from the Anderson Cabot Centre for Ocean Life at the New England Aquarium
- Two from the Ecology Action Centre
- One from the Dalhousie University Department of Biology
- One from ISSF

Without their input, these 32 scores would have less accurately reflected the particular fishery performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard. This demonstrates that the process is working and that the hard work of stakeholders ensures that the Fisheries Standard is applied correctly.

There were also two instances where recommendations were made based on comments made by conservation groups (Oceans North and Ecology Action Centre).

Finally, there were 406 instances where the text was amended due to stakeholder input, with 144 of those coming from external stakeholders (i.e. not MSC technical oversight).

It should be noted that the process works both ways. On two occasions a condition was dropped due to stakeholder comments- once for a comment left by MSC technical oversight, and the other for a comment left by an environmental non-profit.

Discussion

MSC certified fisheries in Canada have made remarkable progress since the first fishery achieved certification in 2008. Positive changes on the water driven by the MSC program and achieved through the time, effort and investment of fisheries are resulting in healthier stocks, reduced impacts to ecosystems and habitats, and mitigated impacts to ETP and bycatch species, among other benefits.

MSC certified catch surged from 73,878mt (7.6 per cent of the national total) landed by two fisheries in 2008 to approximately 466,397mt (61.5 per cent of the national total) landed by 26 fisheries in 2021 – a nearly 1,300 per cent increase in volume of catch.

The MSC Fisheries Standard sets a clear bar for fishery performance, and the certification process serves as a robust and rigorous benchmark for fisheries aiming to demonstrate the sustainability of their practices. Over the past 15 years, the voluntary participation of Canadian fisheries in the program has provided invaluable insights into fishery performance, management, and the improvements made to achieve and maintain MSC certification.

This report covers certified fisheries that have accomplished two full MSC assessment cycles (10 years in the program) as a case study for the improvements that can occur through MSC certification. Not included are fisheries currently suspended or withdrawn from the program because without ongoing third-party audits, we cannot confirm that any improvements implemented during certification remain in place.

Our analysis of Canadian MSC certified fisheries uncovers a significant improvement in their sustainability metrics over time. Although by achieving certification, these fisheries already operated at a high level of performance, results show an improvement in average scores, surpassing the best practice score of 80 and reaching 88 or above across all Principles by the end of their second assessment. These improvements, especially across Principles 2 and 3 signify a marked transition towards a reduced environmental footprint and improved management practices.

The majority of these improvements were catalysed by conditions set to maintain certification. Addressing these conditions requires forward planning, investment, and effort. Canadian fisheries have used different approaches to close out these conditions including technical modifications, research, impact assessments, and governance reforms – all of which provide insights into the multifaceted strategies that fisheries adopt to meet the MSC Fisheries Standard and its high bar of global best practice.

In total, the fisheries considered in this report resolved 152 distinct conditions with the resulting improvements further elevating them towards or above best practice.

It is important to acknowledge that the scope of improvements catalysed by voluntary commitment to MSC certification is underrepresented in this report. Many improvements in a fishery's performance occur pre-certification, in preparation for the first assessment and are thus not captured during the MSC assessment process or subsequently in this report.

A hallmark of the MSC process is its transparent and participatory nature. Stakeholder input, a crucial component of the certification process, enriches assessments, ensuring their credibility and thoroughness. The active involvement of diverse Canadian stakeholders, from conservation organizations to government bodies, attests to the significance of MSC certifications and their impact on Canadian fisheries and marine environments. Stakeholder participation and feedback during certification has led to material changes in assessment outcomes and scoring. In some cases, this has resulted in new conditions and further fishery enhancements being required. Many of these same stakeholders also contribute extensively during MSC Standard reviews, ensuring the Standard against which fisheries are certified aligns with globally accepted best practices.

MSC certification has played a pivotal role in steering Canadian fisheries towards sustainable practices. We recognize that both achieving and maintaining certification is no small feat and requires significant effort and investment. The achievements of these fisheries over almost 15 years, combined with their diligent work in addressing conditions, highlight their commitment to ecological preservation and sustainable harvesting.

On the market side, consumer and retailer expectations, and the level of scrutiny around the products they purchase continue to increase. Furthermore, our understanding of best practice continues to evolve with the latest scientific, environmental, and policy shifts. This is the reason why the MSC program is characterized by regular reviews and evolutions, ensuring alignment with these advancements such that the MSC Fisheries Standard continues to underpin the most credible wild-capture certification program in the world.

In October 2022, the MSC released its new Fisheries Standard, Version 3.0, following the most comprehensive review to date. The new standard includes more stringent requirements around the protection of Endangered, Threatened, and Protected (ETP) species; explicit consideration of the impacts of ghost fishing and ghost gear; and a new tool to assess the quality of the information presented during assessments, among other things. Certified fisheries will be required to transition to version 3.0 by November 2028 and the MSC is committed to supporting its fishery partners through this transition.

The MSC program, which connects certified fisheries to sustainability-minded consumers and markets, would not exist without the commitment and investment of fishery partners. It is the demonstrable fishery improvements powered by a credible, transparent, and collaborative process that will position MSC certified fisheries well in meeting the growing expectations of markets.

As a top seafood producer and among the leading countries in adoption of the MSC program, our hope is that Canada continues to invest in the sustainability of its fisheries and in MSC certification. In a time of environmental urgency and need for more immediate progress to protect our planet, Canada can leverage its strong standing in MSC certification to demonstrate progress against its SDG commitments, especially SDG 14 (life below water) where global progress has been notably slow. We also hope to continue strengthening market recognition for MSC certified seafood so that more fisheries realize value in market access and strengthened reputation, especially as sustainability grows in importance as a key sourcing and purchase consideration.

It is undeniable that the decade ahead will hold many challenges. Globally, climate change is causing unprecedented changes to our oceans which will require fisheries and management bodies to adapt. Meanwhile, seafood, especially sustainable seafood, has a vital role to play in feeding our growing global population. The MSC is committed to supporting its partners to ensure that certified sustainable Canadian seafood continues to find its way onto the plates of consumers worldwide.

Partner Quotes

"Clearwater Seafoods has been committed to seafood sustainability since our inception in 1976. Since our first certified fishery in 2006, Clearwater has been engaged with the Marine Stewardship Council to provide 3rd party assurance of our sustainability practices. Through our Canadian, Argentine, and UK fishing operations, we are involved with 7 fishery certificates and 3 Fishery Improvement Projects as well as Chain of Custody certificates around the world. The MSC program provides a transparent evaluation process and a traceability program which gives our customers the reassurance they are looking for that our products are wild, sustainable, and traceable"

Catherine Boyd, Director Sustainability and Public Affairs at Clearwater

"The MSC Fisheries Standard and certification is the most rigorous in the world. Canada's wild Pacific halibut fishery achieved MSC certification in 2009. It took a lot of time, effort and financial investment to accomplish this, not just due to the MSC process itself but also because changes had to be made to our fishery so it could meet the standard. And the process doesn't end with the initial certification; every year the fishery undergoes a surveillance audit and must be re-certified every five years.

Our fishery has always been considered to be well-managed. MSC certification takes that a step further and provides independent, transparent assessment of the fishery to verify that it meets rigorous requirements for sustainable fishing. It provides verification of sustainability and allows consumers to be confident that the seafood they are buying today will be available for generations to come."

Robert Hauknes, 3rd Generation Wild Pacific Halibut Fisherman and President of the Pacific Halibut Management Association of BC

"DFO's mandate is to manage our fisheries sustainably, so we are pleased to provide information that demonstrates how fisheries align with MSC's standards. Working collaboratively with industry clients through the MSC process also provides opportunities to build strong relationships between the Department and the fishing industry."

The Honourable Diane Lebouthillier,
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

Photo credit: Rick O'Brien @rickeries

Annex

The following pages show, for each target species, the MSC certificates of Canadian fisheries. This does not mean that all catches for that species have been assessed and certified, as explained in Figure 1.

Below is an exhaustive list of all fisheries that have engaged with the MSC program since 2008, some of which withdrew after several years.

All these fisheries, their status and the reports of the independent auditors are publicly accessible on the MSC "Track a Fishery" webpage.

Different fishing methods are also mentioned; more explanations can be found at msc.org.

CERTIFIED FISHERIES (as of January 2023)

Certificate:	AQIP Gulf of St Lawrence Greenland halibut fixed gear fishery
Certified since:	October 2020
Target species:	Greenland halibut (Reinhardtius hippoglossoides)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); NAFO Subareas 4RST
Method:	Gillnet

Certificate:	AQIP snow crab trap
Certified since:	December 2020
Target species:	Snow crab (Chionoecetes opilio)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); CFAs 12A, 12C, 13, 14, 15, 16, 15
Method:	Trap

Certificate:	Canada 3LN redfish
Certified since:	May 2017
Target species:	Acadian redfish (Sebastes fasciatus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); NAFO Divisions 3LN
Method:	Bottom trawl, Midwater trawl

Certificate:	Canada 0AB 2+3KLMNO Greenland Halibut Bottom Trawl and Gillnet
Certified since:	December 2019
Target species:	Greenland halibut (Reinhardtius hippoglossoides)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); NAFO Divisions 0A, 0B, NAFO Subarea 2 + Divisions 3 KLMNO
Method:	Bottom trawl, Gillnet

Certificate:	Canada Atlantic halibut
Certified since:	May 2013
Target species:	Atlantic halibut (Hippoglossus hippoglossus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); Waters off the coast of Canada near Nova Scotia and Newfoundland including part of the Grand Banks and Georges Bank. Northwest Atlantic Fishing Organization (NAFO) divisions 3NOPs, 4VWX, 5Y and 5Zc (Canadian portion of 5Z). UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) area 21
Method:	Longline, Otter trawl, Gillnet, Handline

Certificate:	Canada Highly Migratory Species Foundation (CHMSF) British Columbia Albacore Tuna North Pacific
Certified since:	March 2010
Target species:	Albacore tuna (Thunnus alalunga)
Location:	FAO Area 67 (Pacific, Northeast); Fishing operations take place in FAO Fishing Area 67 Pacific Northeast within Canada EEZ, the U.S. EEZ and the North Pacific Ocean
Method:	Troll

Certificate:	Canada northern and striped shrimp
Certified since:	June 2011
Target species:	Northern prawn (Pandalus borealis), Striped shrimp (Pandalus montagui)
Location:	FAO Areas 18 (Arctic Sea), 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); SFAs 1, 4, 5, and 6, EAZ and WAZ
Method:	Shrimp trawl

Certificate:	Canada Pacific halibut (British Columbia)
Certified since:	September 2009
Target species:	Pacific Halibut (Hippoglossus stenolepis)
Location:	FAO Area 67 (Pacific, Northeast); IPHC area 2B
Method:	Longline

Certificate:	Canada Scotia-Fundy haddock
Certified since:	October 2010
Target species:	Haddock (Melanogrammus aeglefinus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); NAFO subareas 4X5Y (the Southern Scotian Shelf/Bay of Fundy/Gulf of Maine) and 5Zjm (the Canadian portion of Eastern Georges Bank)
Method:	Gillnet, Handline, Longline, Otter trawl

Certificate:	Canada Scotian Shelf Northern prawn trawl (previously the Scotian Shelf component of the Canadian Northern prawn trawl fishery)
Certified since:	August 2008
Target species:	Northern prawn (Pandalus borealis)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); SFAs 13, 14, and 15
Method:	Otter trawl

Certificate:	Cedar Lake Walleye and Northern Pike Fisheries
Certified since:	November 2022
Target species:	Northern pike (Esox Lucius), Walleye (Sander vitreus)
Location:	FAO Area 02 (America, North - Inland waters)
Method:	Gillnets

Certificate:	Clearwater Seafoods Eastern Canadian Offshore Clam
Certified since:	July 2012
Target species:	Arctic surf clam (Mactromeris polynyma)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest)
Method:	Dredge

Certificate:	Eastern Canada offshore scallop
Certified since:	March 2010
Target species:	Atlantic scallop (Placopecten magellanicus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); The Eastern Canada Offshore Scallop Fishery (ECOSF) operates within the Canadian EEZ, in the following Scallop Fishing Areas (SFAs): St. Pierre Bank (SFAs 10, 11, & 12), The Eastern Scotian Shelf (SFA 25), Browns and German Bank (SFA 26), and Georges Bank (SFA 27)
Method:	Dredges

Certificate:	FBSA Canada Full Bay sea scallop
Certified since:	July 2013
Target species:	Atlantic scallop (Placopecten magellanicus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); SFAs 28 and 29W
Method:	Dredge

Certificate:	Gaspésie lobster trap spring fishery
Certified since:	March 2015
Target species:	American lobster (Homarus americanus)
Location:	FAO Fishing Area 21 Northwest Atlantic; NAFO Division 4T LFAs 19, 20, and 21
Method:	Trap

Certificate:	Gulf of St Lawrence Northern shrimp trawl fishery
Certified since:	September 2008
Target species:	Northern prawn (Pandalus borealis)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); SFAs 8, 9, 10, and 12
Method:	Otter trawl

Certificate:	Iles-de-la-Madeleine lobster
Certified since:	July 2013
Target species:	American lobster (Homarus americanus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); LFA 22
Method:	Trap

Certificate:	Lake Erie Multi-species Commercial
Certified since:	August 2015
Target species:	American yellow perch (Perca flavescens), Walleye (Sander vitreus)
Location:	FAO Area 02 (America, North - Inland waters); Lake Erie QZ1, QZ2, QZ3 (W), QZ3 (E), MU1, MU2, MU3
Method:	Trap, Gillnet

Certificate:	Maritime Canada inshore lobster trap fishery (combination of the PEI lobster trap fishery and the Bay of Fundy, Scotian Shelf and Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence lobster fishery)
Certified since:	February 2021
Target species:	American lobster (Homarus americanus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); LFAs 23-25, 26A, 26B, 27-38
Method:	Trap

Certificate:	Newfoundland & Labrador snow crab
Certified since:	April 2013
Target species:	Snow crab (Chionoecetes opilio)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); 2J – South Central Labrador, 3K – Northeast Coast, 3LNO – Grand Banks, 3Ps – South Coast
Method:	Pot

Certificate:	North West Atlantic Canada harpoon swordfish
Certified since:	June 2010
Target species:	Swordfish (Xiphias gladius)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); Atlantic Waters - NAFO Areas 3, 4, 5 and 6 and international waters within the ICCAT Northern Swordfish Boundary Area
Method:	Harpoon

Certificate:	North West Atlantic Canada longline swordfish
Certified since:	April 2012
Target species:	Swordfish (Xiphias gladius)
Location:	Atlantic Waters - Atlantic Canadian EEZ and international waters within the ICCAT Northern Swordfish Boundary Area (North of 5°N and west of 30°W).
Method:	Longline

Certificate:	OCI Grand Bank yellowtail flounder trawl
Certified since:	October 2010
Target species:	Yellowtail flounder (Limanda ferruginea)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); Grand Bank, in Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO) Divisions 3L, 3N and 3O. The fishery occurs both within the Canadian 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and in waters on the Grand Bank that extend beyond the Canadian EEZ.
Method:	Bottom trawl

Certificate:	Pacific hake mid-water trawl This fishery lies in both US and Canadian waters. Management of the coastal Pacific hake fishery is shared among the Joint Management Committee (or JMC, as established by the Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America on Pacific Hake/Whiting), who recommends the annual TAC, and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in the US and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) in Canada. NMFS and DFO are responsible for domestic management of their country's fisheries.
Certified since:	October 2009
Target species:	North Pacific hake (Merluccius productus)
Location:	FAO Area 67 (Pacific, Northeast); Canadian EEZ waters off the British Columbia coast, not including the Gulf of Georgia
Method:	Midwater trawl

Certificate:	Scotian Shelf snow crab trap
Certified since:	July 2012
Target species:	Snow crab (Chionoecetes opilio)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); DFO crab management sub units N-ENS, S-ENS, 4X (eastern Nova Scotia).
Method:	Pot

Certificate:	Waterhen Lake walleye and northern pike commercial gillnet fishery
Certified since:	June 2014
Target species:	Northern pike (Esox Lucius), Walleye (Sander vitreus)
Location:	FAO Area 02 (America, North - Inland waters)
Method:	Gillnet

WITHDRAWN FISHERIES

Certificate:	British Columbia chum Salmon (combined with British Columbia salmon in April 2017)
Certified:	January 2013 – January 2018
Target species:	Chum salmon (Oncorhynchus keta)
Location:	FAO Area 67 (Pacific, Northeast): West Coast Vancouver Island, Inner South Coast and Fraser River
Method:	Gillnets, Trolling lines, Seine Nets

Certificate:	British Columbia pink Salmon (combined with British Columbia salmon in April 2017)
Certified:	July 2011 – April 2017
Target species:	Pink salmon (Oncorhynchus gorbuscha)
Location:	FAO Area 67 (Pacific, Northeast): West Coast Vancouver Island, Inner South Coast and Fraser River
Method:	Gillnets, Trolling lines, Seine Nets

Certificate:	British Columbia Salmon
Certified:	April 2017 – October 2022
Target species:	Chum salmon (Oncorhynchus keta),
Location:	FAO Area 67 (Pacific, Northeast): West Coast Vancouver Island, Inner South Coast and Fraser River
Method:	Gillnets, Trolling lines, Seine Nets

Certificate:	British Columbia sockeye Salmon (combined with British Columbia salmon in April 2017)
Certified:	July 2010 – April 2017
Target species:	Chum salmon (Oncorhynchus keta), Pink salmon (Oncorhynchus gorbuscha), Sockeye salmon (Oncorhynchus nerka)
Location:	FAO Area 67 (Pacific, Northeast): Fraser River, Inside Fisheries, North Coast, West Coast Vancouver Island
Method:	Gillnets, Trolling lines, Lift Nets, Seine Nets, Beach seines, Barriers, fences, weirs

Certificate:	British Columbia spiny dogfish
Certified:	September 2011 – September 2016
Target species:	Spotted spiny dogfish (Squalus suckleyi)
Location:	FAO Area 67 (Pacific, Northeast): British Columbia
Method:	Hooks And Lines

Certificate:	Canada sablefish
Certified:	July 2010 – August 2013
Target species:	Sablefish (Anoplopoma fimbria)
Location:	FAO Area 67 (Pacific, Northeast): British Columbia
Method:	Longline

Certificate:	Canada/Newfoundland 3Ps cod
Certified:	March 2016 – March 2021
Target species:	Atlantic cod (Gadus morhua)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest): NAFO Subdivision 3Ps
Method:	Gillnets, handlines, pole-lines, longlines, Danish seines

Certificate:	Canadian 4VWX Purse Seine herring fishery
Certified:	November 2016 – May 2022
Target species:	Herring (Clupea harengus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest): NAFO Subareas 4VWX
Method:	Purse seines

Certificate:	Eastern Canada offshore lobster
Certified since:	June 2010- December 2020
Target species:	American lobster (Homarus americanus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); LFA 41
Method:	Trap

Certificate:	Gulf of St Lawrence fall herring gillnet fishery
Certified:	November 2015 – November 2020
Target species:	Herring (Clupea harengus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest): NAFO Subarea 4T
Method:	Gillnets

Certificate:	Fogo Island Co-operative Society Limited cold water shrimp (combined with the Northern and Striped Shrimp fishery in July 2012)
Certified:	October 2011- July 2012
Target species:	Northern prawn (Pandalus borealis)
Location:	FAO Areas 18 (Arctic Sea), 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); SFAs 4, 5, and 6,
Method:	Shrimp trawl

Certificate:	Gulf of St Lawrence snow crab trap
Certified:	September 2012 – April 2023
Target species:	Snow crab (Chionoecetes opilio)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest): CFAs 12, 12E, 12F, 19
Method:	Trap

Certificate:	NAFO Division 4R Atlantic herring purse seine
Certified:	October 2014 - October 2019
Target species:	Herring (Clupea harengus)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest)
Method:	Surrounding Nets - With purse lines (purse seines)

Certificate:	Scotian Shelf shrimp (combined with the Canada Scotian Shelf northern prawn trawl fishery since January 2014)
Certified:	June 2011 – January 2014
Target species:	Northern prawn (Pandalus borealis)
Location:	FAO Area 21 (Atlantic, Northwest); SFAs 13, 14, and 15
Method:	Otter trawl

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