



Get Certified

Your guide to the MSC fishery assessment process

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Let's get started

The aim of this guide is to give you an overview of what to expect during each stage of the MSC assessment process.

We hope it will help to ensure that your fishery's assessment is efficient and effective and give you the best possible chance of a positive outcome.

If you have questions at any stage, your local MSC representative is happy to help.



www.msc.org/fisheries-contacts

Which fisheries can apply?

The MSC promotes equal access to its certification program for wild-capture fisheries, regardless of their size, scale, location or technology.



Types of fisheries that are eligible:

- single species
- multi-species
- trawl
- long line
- hand raked
- pots
- freshwater
- marine
- inshore
- offshore
- demersal
- pelagic
- enhanced



Types of fisheries that are not eligible:

- Fisheries targeting amphibians, reptiles, birds and/or mammals.
- Fisheries using destructive fishing practices (such as poison or explosives).
- Entities that have been successfully prosecuted for forced and child labour violations within the last two years.
- Fisheries conducted under a controversial unilateral exemption to an international agreement.
- Purely aquaculture (although some forms of enhanced fishery are eligible for assessment).

Eligible enhanced fisheries

Enhanced fisheries are wild-caught fisheries that involve some kind of human intervention other than the harvest process.

The MSC has three enhanced fishery categories:

- catch and grow fisheries, e.g. rope grown mussels.
- hatch and catch fisheries, e.g. wild capture salmon where some stocking takes place.
- habitat modified fisheries, e.g. providing casitas (artificial habitats) to attract and retain lobster.

If you think your fishery may be an enhanced fishery, your certification body can help you check whether it falls within the scope of the MSC program.

The MSC Fisheries Standard

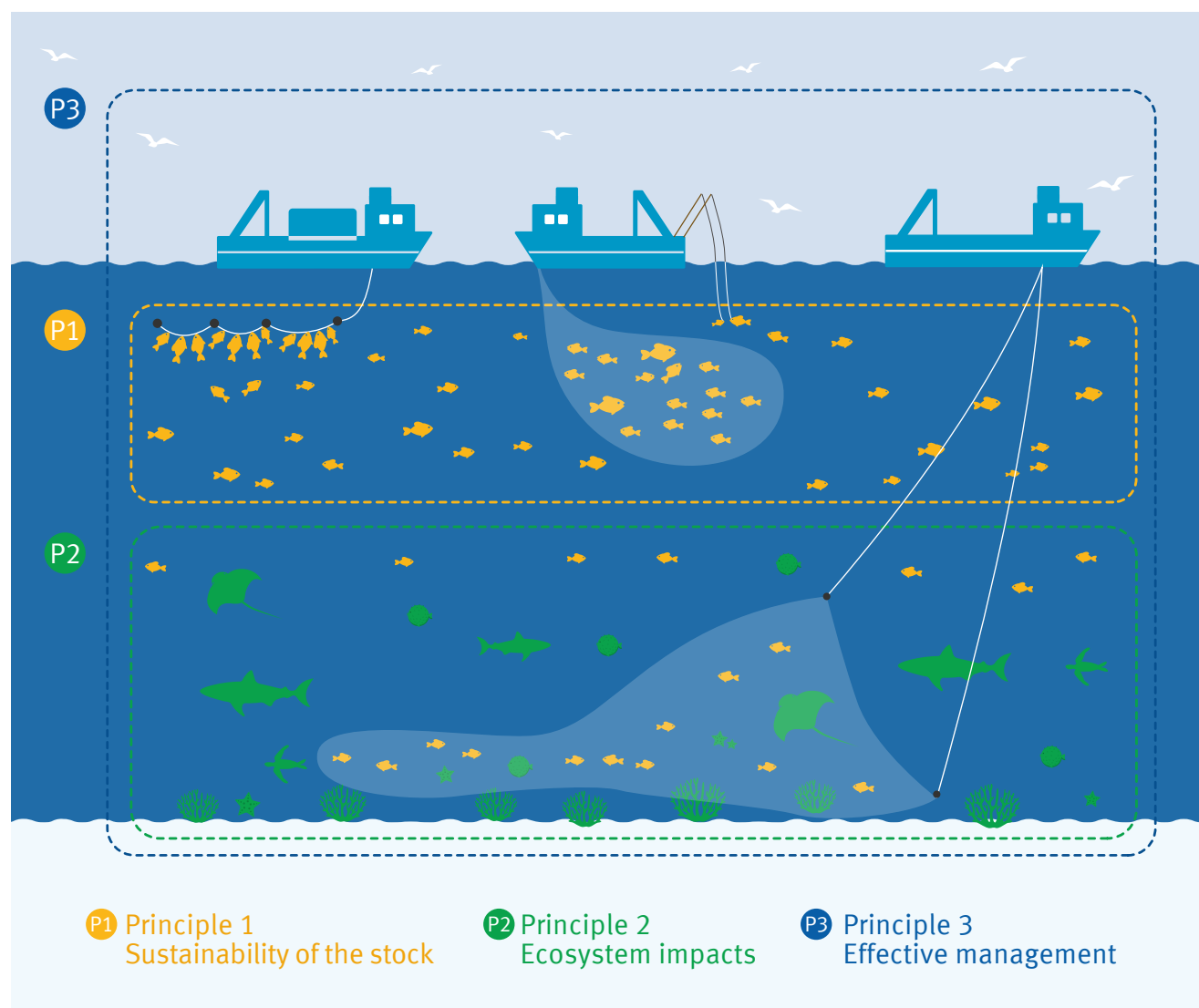
The MSC Fisheries Standard brings together over 20 years of collaboration with scientists, the fishing industry and conservation groups. It reflects internationally accepted fisheries science and best practice management.

The three principles of the MSC Fisheries Standard

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 local, national and international laws and have an effective management system in place.



How does the scoring process work?

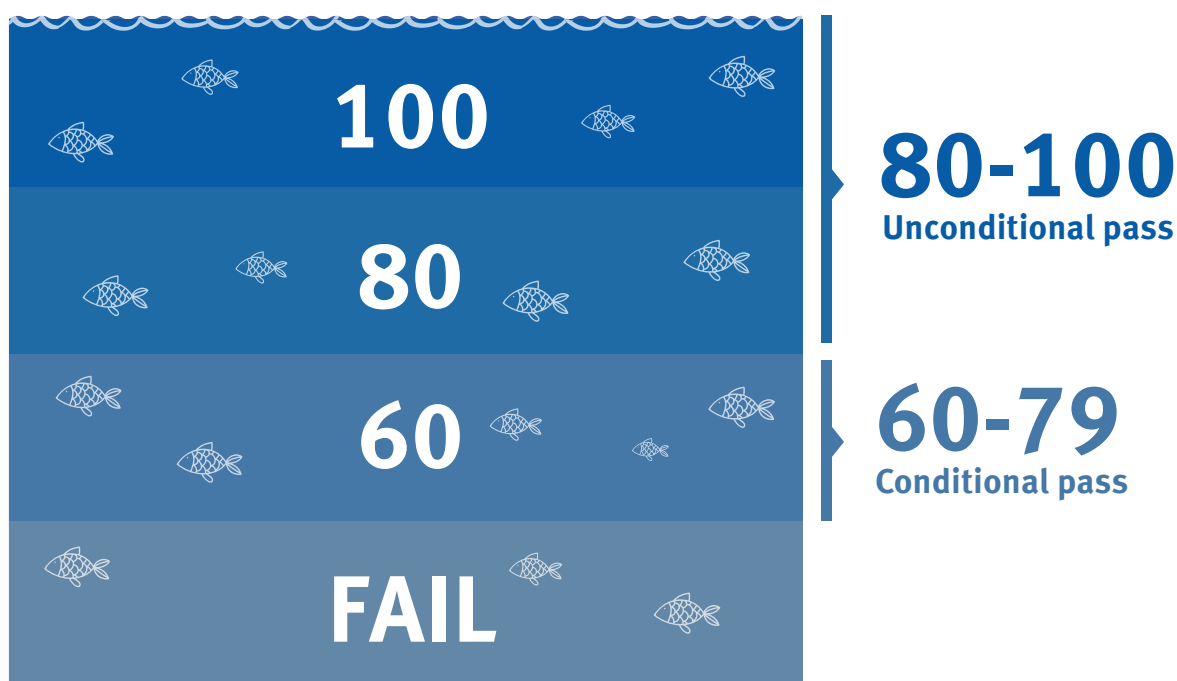
There are 28 performance indicators in the Fisheries Standard that sit under the three principles.

Your fishery is assigned a score for each performance indicator where 60 is the minimum acceptable performance, 80 is global best practice and 100 is near perfect performance.

To be certified, your fishery must score:

- at least 60 for each of the 28 performance indicators
- an average score of 80 across all performance indicators under each of the three principles.

If your fishery scores between 60 and 79 for any performance indicator, you are required to improve your fishery's performance against that indicator so that it scores 80 or above within five years. This improvement is called a condition.



Who's who

Key players and their roles and responsibilities in the assessment process.



You: The fishery client

An individual, organisation, or group of organisations who make a formal application for their fishery to be assessed. Previous fishery clients have included government agencies, fishing industry associations, fisheries cooperatives, local management authorities and collaborations between fishing industry associations, conservation and community groups.

Fishery clients are responsible for:

- entering into a legal contract with an accredited certification body (this means they must be a legally constituted body)
- funding the cost of certification
- ensuring the certification body is aware of stakeholders who should be contacted to be involved in the assessment
- ensuring that the assessment team has unrestricted access to data and information about the fishery
- implementing any improvements (conditions) placed on the fishery if/when the MSC certificate is issued.



The certification body, or Conformity Assessment Body (CAB)

An independent body approved by Assurance Services International to conduct MSC assessments and make a final determination if the fishery meets the MSC Fisheries Standard.

The certification body is responsible for:

- establishing the fishery assessment team
- taking the fishery client through the assessment according to the MSC Fisheries Certification Process
- issuing the fishery certificate
- conducting surveillance audits and evaluations for the duration of the fishery certificate.



The assessment team

Fisheries scientists with specialist knowledge who have been selected by the certification body to conduct the assessment.

The assessment team are responsible for:

- assessing fisheries against the MSC Fisheries Standard
- using information provided by the fishery, management agencies and stakeholder groups to score the fishery against the Standard
- using existing information and reports to make a precautionary decision.



Peer reviewers

Independent experts are selected to peer review the assessment report and provide their qualified, professional, experienced opinion on:

- the conclusions reached
- the conditions raised
- each performance indicator's score and provided rationale.



Stakeholders

Any individuals or organisations that are interested in, or affected by, the fishery assessment.

Stakeholders are responsible for:

- bringing any issues and concerns they have regarding the conduct or performance of the fishery to the attention of the assessment team
- providing well-informed and substantive arguments for their positions, including evidence that can assist the assessment team.

Preparing for assessment

Assessments against the MSC Fisheries Standard are conducted by accredited independent certification bodies known as Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs).

Choosing an assessment body

Preparation and good project management are key to ensuring a smooth, timely and cost-effective assessment. Many fishery clients have found it useful to designate a member of staff or hire a project manager to monitor the assessment process and act as a point of contact for the certification body and assessment team.

Recommendations:

- Get quotes from two or more certification bodies to ensure you get the best value for money.
- Ensure they have a good knowledge and understanding of your fishery or of other similar fisheries.
- Ask any questions or share any uncertainties that you may have.
- Check their availability suits your timescales and that the timings they have suggested are feasible given the complexity of your fishery, the timing of any seasonal part of the fishery that they may wish to observe, and the stakeholders involved.
- Commission an optional pre-assessment, more detail on a pre-assessment can be found on page 15.
- Ask them to provide testimonials from recent fishery clients.

The role of the certification body is to provide an independent, third party assessment of your fishery against the MSC Fisheries Standard. They have a responsibility to consult with you and other stakeholders to establish the facts of the assessment.

The certification body is not obliged to conduct new research or undertake stock assessments to assess a fishery. A lack of data or documentation about a fishery may result in higher uncertainty about the performance of the fishery, which may result in lower scores and usually increase the cost of assessment.

All certification bodies listed on Assurance Services International website have been approved by this independent organisation to conduct MSC fishery assessments.

A full list of accredited certification bodies is available at: <http://www.asi-assurance.org/s/find-a-cab>. Search for those listed with Scope: MSC Fisheries.

The assessment team members receive regular training and are regularly monitored to ensure that they are complying with MSC requirements.

Defining the contract

Once you have chosen a certification body, you need to sign a contract with them for the assessment. The content of the contract is not specified by the MSC and is confidential between you and your certification body.

Costs and sources of funding

The fishery client pays the certification body for the assessment. Anecdotal information from certified fisheries suggests the cost can vary from USD \$15,000 – \$120,000.

The cost depends on:

- the complexity of your fishery
- the availability of information
- the level of stakeholder involvement.

The certification body determines the cost of the assessment based on its likely complexity. The initial assessment may take up to 18 months and is followed by four annual surveillance audits.

If you decide to have your fishery reassessed at the end of a certification period, costs will again depend on complexity and how much information is available from the initial assessment.

There are a range of funding sources and opportunities to assist fishery certification. Your regional MSC contacts can provide you with up-to-date advice on relevant funding options in your region.

Deciding on the Unit of Assessment

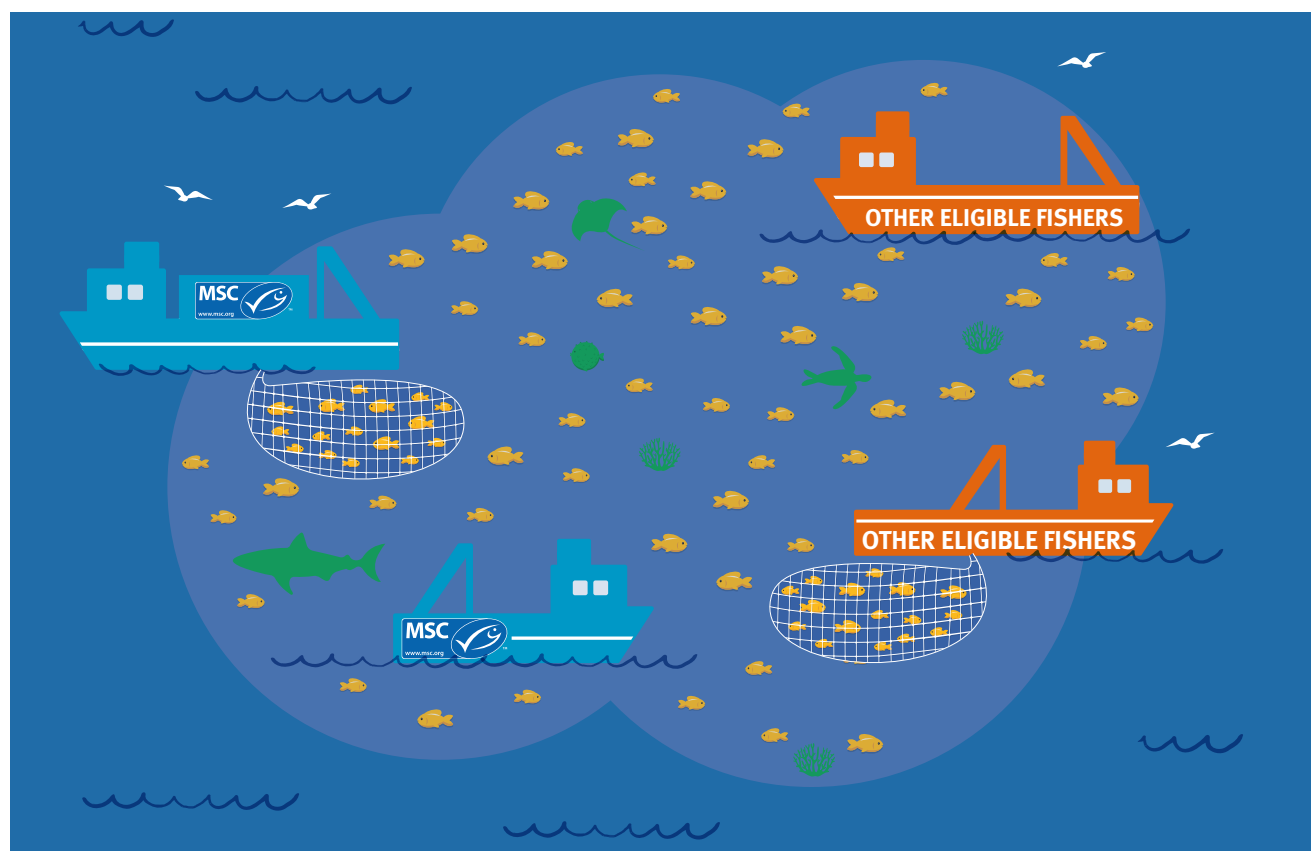
At the beginning of the assessment process, you and your certification body decide on the Unit of Assessment. The Unit of Assessment defines what is being assessed against the Fisheries Standard and includes:

- the target stock(s)
- the fishing method or gear
- the fleets, vessels, individual fishing operators and other eligible fishers pursuing that stock.

The Unit of Certification

The Unit of Certification is the Unit of Assessment minus other eligible fishers. Once the Unit of Certification has been defined, only seafood from Unit of Certification can carry the MSC label in the marketplace. Seafood from other eligible fishers cannot carry the MSC label in the marketplace but may be included later with a certificate sharing agreement.

The Unit of Assessment



Vessels within the Unit of Certification



Target stock



Other eligible fishers who fish on the same stock



Environmental impacts considered by the assessment team

Preparing the information

A fishery assessment is based on expert analysis of information. This information can include:

- data on fish stocks
- data on landings and environmental impacts
- management information about the fishery
- interviews with stakeholders
- scientific papers and reports

See the checklist at the end of this guide for what information you should aim to provide.

What about fisheries with limited data?

Your fishery may not have access to the detailed scientific data that is typically evaluated in an MSC assessment. This is particularly true for small-scale and developing world fisheries. If data are limited, the assessment team can use the MSC's Risk-Based Framework, which is built into the MSC Fisheries Certification Process.

The Risk-Based Framework enables the assessment team to conduct a structured risk assessment to determine if a data-limited fishery is operating sustainably and ensures the MSC program and its associated benefits are accessible to all fisheries. The Risk-Based Framework can be used to assess both target and non-target species, habitats and ecosystems.

For more about the Risk-Based Framework see www.msc.org/data-limited-fisheries

Gaining the support of stakeholders

We recommend that you contact relevant stakeholders at the very beginning of the assessment process to build trust, reduce the likelihood of any unforeseen setbacks and help your assessment go smoothly. The MSC welcomes the input and involvement of stakeholders throughout the assessment process to ensure that assessments are well-informed and comprehensive.

For more information on how stakeholders can get involved in the assessment process, see www.msc.org/engage-with-a-fishery-assessment

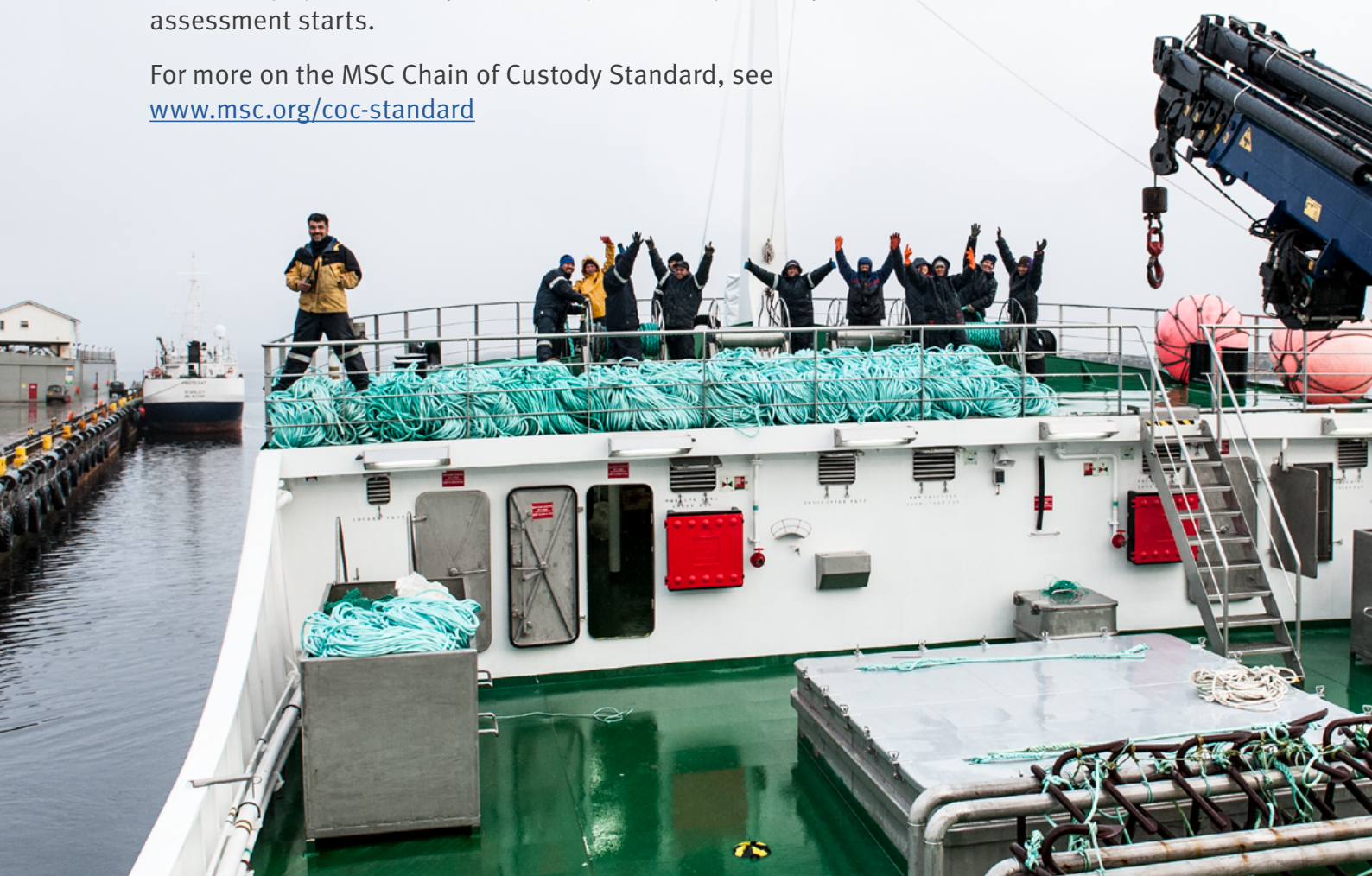
MSC Chain of Custody certification and fishery traceability

The MSC Chain of Custody Standard gives assurance that products bearing the MSC label come from a certified sustainable source. Certification of the supply chain is necessary for seafood from your fishery to be sold as MSC certified on packs or menus. We suggest you contact your relevant customers early in the fishery certification process to recommend they become certified against the MSC Chain of Custody Standard.

Your certification body may determine that vessels or other entities involved in getting your seafood to market require their own Chain of Custody certificate. This might be the case where traceability between harvest and first sale is insufficient, or where complex harvesting takes place (for example, using both certified and non-certified gear types).

Your certification body will ask your fishery to demonstrate traceability from harvest to first sale report. It is best to think about the identification, segregation and traceability systems and procedures your fishery has in place even before assessment starts.

For more on the MSC Chain of Custody Standard, see www.msc.org/coc-standard



The pre-assessment

A pre-assessment is an optional preliminary review to inform whether your fishery is ready to enter full assessment.

The pre-assessment consists of:

- a meeting between you, the fishery client, and the certification body
- a site visit (optional)
- a review of available data
- identification of any stakeholder issues or interests
- a pre-assessment report outlining the extent to which your fishery meets the MSC Standard
- a description of potential obstacles that need to be addressed before your fishery meets the requirements of the MSC Standard.

Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs)

An increasing number of fisheries are making the necessary changes to become sustainable with the hope of achieving certification. This has led to considerable growth in organised efforts to improve fisheries, often called Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs).

If the results of the pre-assessment show that your fishery is not meeting the MSC Fisheries Standard, tools and technical assistance are available to help your fishery make the improvements required.

The MSC's Capacity Building Program supports fisheries worldwide that are improving towards sustainability and MSC certification. It's part of the MSC's commitment to provide equal access for all those seeking certification, particularly small-scale fisheries and those in the developing world.

The MSC's Capacity Building Toolkit is a comprehensive guide for fishery clients, managers, scientists, consultants and other stakeholders engaged with fisheries working towards MSC certification. It provides practical information on the MSC Fisheries Standard, showcases examples of best practice, describes what information is checked during an assessment and outlines possible actions that could be implemented during a FIP.

For more information on FIPs, to download these tools, or to find a consultant see www.msc.org/fips

GOOD TO KNOW

A pre-assessment is a good chance to judge whether a particular certification body is right for you. You are under no obligation to use the same certification body for pre-assessment, assessment and post certification surveillance and auditing. Although there may be time and cost savings associated with doing so.

Requirements on forced and child labour

The Marine Stewardship Council condemns the use of forced or child labour and recognises the importance of social issues when considering sustainability.

Fishery clients and at-sea supply chain entities are required to complete a statement on the measures, policies and practices in place to prevent forced and child labour.

Certification bodies check that a statement has been submitted. The contents of the statement will not be audited, but anyone who is concerned about forced and child labour will be able to review the statement on the MSC website.

Fishery clients or at-sea supply chain entities that do not submit the form will not be eligible for certification. You can read the statement at www.msc.org/docs/statement-template





Full assessment

Full assessment is the detailed, public, rigorous process that your certification body follows to determine if your fishery meets the MSC Fisheries Standard.

The process starts when you, the fishery client, sign a contract with your certification body and they notify the MSC that your fishery is entering full assessment.



1. Information gathering and initial scoring

At this stage, gather all available information about your fishery and provide it to the certification body using the structured Client Document Checklist, see page 24 for checklist details.

The certification body assigns an assessment team who analyses all relevant information, including technical papers, reports and data about your fishery. They use this information to complete an initial scoring of your fishery's performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard.

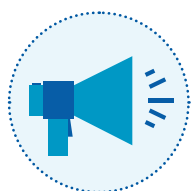
The initial scoring includes draft scoring rationales and supporting information. Any gaps in the information are highlighted for the certification body to address during the site visit. The certification body compiles this in the Announcement Comment Draft Report.

You are then able to review the initial scoring, provide any information that was missing and decide whether you want to proceed to announcement.

GOOD TO KNOW



The Client Document Checklist is aligned to the structure of the MSC Fisheries Standard assessment tree to help you organise information for the assessment team.



2. Announce full assessment

When you are ready to proceed to full assessment, the certification body announces to stakeholders that the fishery is undergoing full assessment and publishes the Announcement Comment Draft Report on the MSC Track a Fishery website and the fisheries update newsletter.

The Announcement Comment Draft Report also includes the Unit(s) of Assessment (UoA(s)): the target species, gear type, and fishing area. The announcement identifies the assessment team and provides details of the site visit.

GOOD TO KNOW



The average time taken for a full assessment is 12-18 months. The length depends to some extent on your preparation as well as the nature and complexity of your fishery.



3. Stakeholder input

After the announcement, stakeholders can provide written input on the Announcement Comment Draft Report, including any references or information that may be useful for the assessment team to consider. Stakeholders have time to prepare for the site visit where they can discuss the fishery with the assessment team, either in person or remotely. Stakeholders have 60 days to provide their comments on initial assessments, and 30 days for reassessments.



4. Site visit and scoring

The site visit is organised by the certification body. At the site visit, the assessment team interview you, the fishery managers and the stakeholders and consider all information and issues.

The assessment team then use all information to revise the draft scores where necessary and score the fishery's performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard.



5. Client and peer review

The certification body compiles a Client and Peer Review Draft Report summarising:

- your fishery's performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard
- your fishery's average score across each of the three core principles
- proposed certification outcome
- details of any conditions to improve your fishery's performance.

The certification body gives your fishery time to comment on the draft report and draft an action plan to show how your fishery will address conditions.

At the same time, the certification body arranges for independent experts known as peer reviewers (typically fisheries scientists) to review the draft report. Third party scientists approve the selection of peer reviewers to ensure they give an independent review of the certification body's report.



6. Further public review of draft report

Once you and the independent peer reviewers have a completed review of the draft report, the certification body publishes the Public Comment Draft Report on the MSC Track a Fishery website.

The report includes a draft determination as to whether your fishery is recommended for certification.

We advise that you review the report and make sure you are comfortable with any changes that have been made since the Announcement Comment Draft Report.

Stakeholders who were previously involved at announcement or the site visit have 30 days to provide input on the draft report.

If your fishery has not been recommended for certification, the assessment process should have contributed to a better understanding of your fishery. Once you have addressed the issues that prevented your fishery from becoming certified, you can re-apply for assessment at any time.



7. Final draft report and determination

The Final Draft Report is published on MSC Track a Fishery website and includes the assessment team's final determination of whether your fishery should be certified. It is issued once the assessment team has considered all input during the assessment and have revised the report accordingly.



8. Public certification report and getting your certificate

If the assessment determination was certification and no objections have been raised, your fishery is successfully certified. Certification lasts for a maximum of five years subject to surveillance audits. The certification body issues and publishes a Public Certification Report on the MSC Track a Fishery website, outlining the assessment process and any improvements your fishery needs to make (also called conditions). Later, the certification body issues the fishery certificate. If your clients become certified against the MSC Chain of Custody Standard, products from your MSC certified fishery can carry the MSC label on packs or menus.

Action plans for improvement

If your fishery scores between 60 and 79 for any performance indicators, you are required to make improvements to ensure that your fishery scores 80 for the relevant performance indicator within five years.

It is important to develop an action plan outlining:

- the improvements that have been set for your fishery
- how they will be addressed
- who will address them
- when they will be addressed
- how the action is expected to improve the performance of the Unit of Assessment
- how progress on meeting conditions will be demonstrated to the assessment team.

The objections procedure

If stakeholders believe a certification body has made an error in procedure, scoring or condition setting, they may submit a notice of objection during the 15-working day period after the final report is published. This provides a mechanism for any disagreement with the assessment of the fishery to be resolved by an independent adjudicator. Following appropriate consultations, the adjudicator decides if the objection should be upheld.

Maintaining MSC certification

MSC certification lasts up to five years. During this time your fishery may need to make required improvements and will undergo regular surveillance audits.

Surveillance audits

The certification body reviews your fishery's progress, and the status of any improvements being made, during annual surveillance audits.

Annual surveillance audits may involve an onsite audit, an offsite audit, or a review of information. They may be undertaken up to six months earlier or later than the anniversary date of your certificate. Stakeholders are invited to provide information to the assessment team and an annual surveillance report is produced. If the assessment team identify the need to complete an interim audit, they can do so.

Reassessment

Reassessment should commence before the fourth anniversary of an existing certificate, so that the new certificate can continue from the five-year expiry of the existing certificate.

There are two types of reassessment.

Full reassessment: Requires that all steps and activities involved in initial full assessment are carried out.

Reduced reassessment: If there are no outstanding conditions by the end of the third audit, all valid stakeholder issues have been addressed and the fishery entering reassessment is covered under the previous certificate.

Assessment checklist

Here's a handy checklist to help you track your progress through the MSC assessment process.

Familiarise yourself with the MSC Fisheries Standard

- ☐ Familiarise yourself with MSC's performance indicators and assessment tree
- ☐ Download the MSC Fisheries Program Documents to see the full details of the MSC Certification Process and Fisheries Standard

Prepare for the assessment

- ☐ Choose a certification body
- ☐ Define the contract with the certification body
- ☐ Decide on the proposed Unit of Certification with certification body
- ☐ Prepare the information required by your certification body. See the Client Document Checklist
- ☐ Get in touch with stakeholders interested in your fishery
- ☐ Investigate sources of funding
- ☐ Think about Chain of Custody certification

Pre-assessment (optional)

- ☐ Arrange a pre-assessment to inform whether your fishery is ready to enter full assessment
- ☐ If your fishery is not advised to continue to full assessment, find out more about Fishery Improvement Projects as well as the tools and consultants available to help you reach the MSC Fisheries Standard

Arrange the full assessment

- ☐ Assessment team complete initial scoring and draft the Announcement Comment Draft Report
- ☐ Review the certification body's draft report
- ☐ Decide whether to proceed to announcement
- ☐ Communicate the assessment to your interested stakeholders and partners
- ☐ Attend the site visit
- ☐ Develop action plan
- ☐ Keep in touch with your certification body throughout the assessment
- ☐ Celebrate and promote your fishery's MSC Certification!

What information will a certification body use to assess your fishery against the MSC Fisheries Standard?

Stock assessment reports by scientific bodies such as regional scientific bodies (e.g. ICES or working groups of RFMOs), national bodies (e.g. IMARES – Netherlands, DFO – Canada, etc.) and/or local bodies for:

- ☐ Target species (the species that will be under MSC assessment)
- ☐ Other retained species
- ☐ Discarded or slipped species

Most recent scientific advice, scientific surveys or research publications on biology and ecology for:

- ☐ Target species (the species that will be under MSC assessment)
- ☐ Other retained species
- ☐ Discarded or slipped species
- ☐ Endangered, Threatened or Protected (ETP) species
- ☐ Habitats
- ☐ Ecosystems

Logbook or landings data:

- ☐ Target species (the species that will be under MSC assessment)
- ☐ Other retained species
- ☐ Discarded or slipped species
- ☐ Endangered, Threatened or Protected (ETP) species

Information on vessels/fishers pursuing the stock:

- ☐ Description of how the client group or fishery under assessment operates
- ☐ Description of fishing gears the client group or fishery under assessment uses
- ☐ Any available catch or effort data from the client group or the fishery under assessment
- ☐ Description of how all vessels or fishers pursuing the stock operate
- ☐ Description of fishing gears that all vessels or fishers pursuing the stock use
- ☐ Proportion of catch between all vessels or fishers pursuing the stock including the client group

Overlapping MSC assessments:

- ☐ MSC assessment reports for other fisheries on the same stock

Reports, maps and other documents:

- ☐ Local, national and international regulations and laws (quotas, closed season, closed areas, technical measures etc.)
- ☐ Code(s) of conduct or other licence conditions
- ☐ Observer reports and video monitoring
- ☐ Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) or Automatic Identification System (AIS) maps or reports
- ☐ Any management plans, policy documents or information that affect the fishery at the national or regional level
- ☐ Management reviews and internal audits
- ☐ List of protected marine species in jurisdiction
- ☐ Habitat maps
- ☐ Inspection reports and details of infractions

Traceability

- ☐ Information on traceability at the fishery, to ensure that product is eligible to enter certified Chains of Custody.



DOWNLOAD THE FULL CHECKLIST AT:

www.msc.org/docs/client-document-checklist

A guide to the MSC Fisheries Standard



Principle 1: Sustainable fish stocks

Stock evaluation

- There is a sustainable population of a fishery's main catch or the population is rebuilding.

Harvest management strategy

- There is a precautionary harvest strategy and no shark finning.
- There are harvest control rules, so if the population drops below sustainable levels, the fishery will reduce its catch.
- There is reliable information and the main catch is regularly monitored.
- There is a robust assessment of the main catch population.

Principle 2: Minimising environmental impact

What else does the fishery catch, and is it sustainable?

- There are sustainable populations of any other species regularly caught.
- There is a management strategy and a way to reduce unwanted death for these species.
- There is reliable information about these species.

What else does the fishery catch? Does it catch any birds, reptiles, amphibians or mammals?

- There is no threat to the populations of these species.
- There is a management strategy and reduction of unwanted death for these species.
- There is reliable information on the risk of the fishery on these species.

Impact on endangered, threatened or protected (ETP) species

- There is no threat to ETP species populations.
- There is a management strategy to minimise effect on ETP species.
- There is reliable information on the risk of the fishery on these species.

Impact on habitats

- The fishery causes no serious or irreversible harm to habitats.
- There is a strategy to minimise fishery impact on habitats.
- There is information on vulnerable habitats and the impacts of the fishing gear.

Impact on the ecosystem

- The fishery causes no serious or irreversible harm to the ecosystem.
- There is a management strategy to protect ecosystems.
- There is reliable information on ecosystem function and impact.

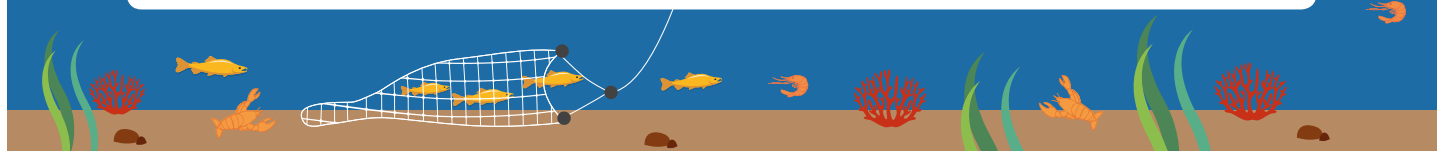
Principle 3: Fishery management

Governance and policy

- There is an effective legal or customary framework that supports achieving Principle 1 (P1), Principle 2 (P2) and recognises rights of people dependent on fishing for food or livelihood.
- There is an effective consultation process with stakeholders.
- There are long-term management objectives that are consistent with the Fisheries Standard.

Fishery specific management system

- There are clear fishery specific objectives for achieving P1 and P2.
- There are effective decision-making processes.
- There are compliance and enforcement systems.
- There is performance evaluation of fishery management.



Find out more:

www.msc.org/fisheries
info@msc.org



@MSCbluefish #chooseMSC



/marine-stewardship-council



/sustainableseafood

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