



News Release

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MSC adopts new requirement for the assessment of fisheries

London, UK - The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) will further strengthen its ability to catalyse improvements in global fisheries by requiring all fishing activities on a target stock on a single trip to be certified against the MSC's Standard for sustainable fishing.

The decision was reached at the MSC Board meeting in London this week. It followed an extensive, public consultation involving more than 50 interest groups from NGOs to the fishing and commercial sectors, and concluded with a review in December 2017 by the MSC's Technical Advisory Board. The Technical Advisory Board comprises 15 experts in the field of marine science and supply chains, and it provided its formal recommendation to the MSC Board based on a scientific and technical analysis of the issue and the information and feedback provided in consultation responses.

The MSC Fisheries Standard - initially developed in 1997 in consultation with 300 organisations and individuals around the world including NGOs, governments and scientists - has allowed a fishery to define the target stock, management area, fishing gear and vessels - known as the Unit of Assessment (UoA).

In early 2017, the MSC initiated a review of its UoA requirements in response to concerns that the current rule allows a vessel to catch fish from the same stock using both certified and uncertified fishing gear or catch methods on a single trip. Under the new requirements this will not be possible; certified seafood will only enter MSC certified supply chains if it comes from fishing trips on which all activities on the target stock are certified.

*"The MSC welcomes constructive stakeholder engagement and dialogue and I wish to thank the many individuals and organisations who engaged in the consultation and helped deliver this strong outcome in support of sustainability and the MSC program," said **Dr David Agnew, MSC's Science and Standards Director**. "We have run a rigorous, objective and transparent process for developing, and ultimately adopting, these new rules. Third-party scrutiny and stakeholder engagement are central to the MSC's values and our commitment to respond to the constantly evolving field of fisheries science and management. By honouring this commitment, we can maintain our world-leading standards."*

Catalysing change through current and new requirements

The MSC has been effective in incentivising certified fisheries to enter other gears, stocks or areas for assessment, or other fleets and fisheries to enter assessment. For example, in 2011 the Scottish whitefish fleet achieved MSC certification for haddock. Once the fleet saw the benefits, they obtained certification for coley (saithe) two years later, and subsequently the iconic North Sea cod last year. The MSC refers to this mechanism for incentivising successive fisheries to demonstrate their sustainability as its "theory of change". The MSC will continue and deepen its research into its theory of change, and monitor the effectiveness of the new changes to requirements on unit of assessment.

*“The MSC, through the leadership of our engaged partners, is catalysing improvement in how our oceans are fished and managed,” said **Rupert Howes, MSC CEO**. “20 years since the creation of the MSC, certified fisheries today account for 12% of global marine catch. From improving harvest strategies to taking action to reduce impacts on other species, MSC certified fisheries are developing science-based solutions to the challenges of sustainable management. There is a strong evidence base that MSC’s “theory of change” works, and this decision will incentivise further engagement in the program. The commitment that certified fisheries make to sustainability, and ongoing efforts to improve their performance, is making a real and lasting difference to the health of the world’s fish stocks and marine ecosystems.”*

The MSC adheres to the [United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation \(UN FAO\) guidelines](#) for credible marine ecolabelling and certification programmes. As the only wild-seafood certification programme to be a fully qualified member of [ISEAL, the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance](#), and to have achieved recognition by the [Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative](#), the MSC complies with their highly-regarded codes for standard setting. The new requirements on unit of assessment were developed using transparent and credible processes.

The new UoA requirements, which will be released in August 2018, will help support further improvements in fisheries and encourage engagement in the program.

In line with FAO guidelines, fisheries entering assessment for the first time after February 2019 will need to comply with the new UoA requirements, and fisheries which are already under assessment or certified will have three years from August 2018 to make the transition to the new requirements. Compliance will be audited by MSC’s third party Conformance Assessment Bodies.

*“From the publication of the new requirements in August 2018, all fisheries in the MSC program will need to understand how these rules may impact their fishery, and start to work on any changes they may need to undertake to meet the new requirements within the defined timeframes”, added **Dr Agnew**. “Fisheries management is complex, and the MSC certification process is demanding. It is therefore vital that fisheries are given the time to understand, adapt and transition to the new requirements, and continue on their sustainability journey. MSC’s regional teams will be working with all fisheries engaged in the programme to provide guidance on the impacts and support on transitional arrangements where necessary.”*

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Notes for editors:

About the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is an international non-profit organisation. Its vision is for the world’s oceans to be teeming with life, and seafood supplies safeguarded for this and future generations. The blue MSC label and MSC certification program recognise and reward sustainable fishing practices and is helping create a more sustainable seafood market.

The blue MSC label on a seafood product means that:

- It comes from a wild-catch fishery which has been independently certified to the MSC’s science-based standard for environmentally sustainable fishing.
- It’s fully traceable to a sustainable source.

More than 300 fisheries in over 35 countries are certified to the MSC Fisheries Standard. These fisheries have a combined annual seafood production of almost 10 million metric tonnes, representing close to 12% of annual global marine catch. More than 25,000 seafood products worldwide carry the MSC ecolabel. For more information visit msc.org

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