

ISEAL System Overview



ISEAL Community Member System Overview

Organisation Name	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
Year	2022
Version	1

1) The **STRATEGIES** our system employs to meet its sustainability objectives

The [MSC Fisheries Standard](#) is a voluntary certification program that is open to wild capture fisheries globally, including both freshwater and marine fisheries. Aquaculture systems are not within scope, though some enhancement activities are permitted and the MSC has also jointly developed a [Seaweed Standard](#) with the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC). Additionally, the MSC has a [Chain of Custody \(CoC\) Standard](#) to ensure traceability of seafood along supply chains, which includes three variants designed for different types of organisations: Default; Group; and Consumer-Facing Organisations (CFOs).

Our [vision and mission](#) is of the world's oceans teeming with life and seafood supplies safeguarded for this and future generations and to use our [ecolabel](#) and [fishery certification program](#) to contribute to the health of the world's oceans by recognising and rewarding sustainable fishing practices, influencing the choices people make when buying seafood, and working with our partners to transform the seafood market to a sustainable basis. This is achieved through our [Theory of Change](#). The key sustainability outcomes for the MSC Fisheries Standard are: to ensure target species are harvested from sustainable stocks; to minimise the environmental impact of fisheries; and, to ensure that fisheries have an effective management system to deliver these outcomes. These are achieved by:

- Providing Fisheries and CoC Standards developed based on international best practice, and creating market incentives to comply with these through use of the MSC ecolabel;
- Promoting the MSC program to potential users within the fisheries supply chain, governments, broader stakeholder community, and the public to increase wider public awareness of, involvement in, and commitment to seafood sustainability issues;
- Developing and delivering tools to support small-scale and developing region fisheries on their [Pathway to Sustainability](#);
- Developing and conducting training for certifying bodies to increase their technical capacity and knowledge of the Fisheries Standard; and
- Collaborating with stakeholders to support the above activities.

Our main stakeholders within the commercial and public sectors include, fishers; processors; suppliers; retailers; consumers; food service sectors; academics; scientists; Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs); fisheries and marine and aquatic managers; and the marine conservation community. At the outset of a

new development or review process, Terms of Reference are posted online, and comments are actively sought from overlapping organisations and key stakeholders. Stakeholders play a key role in the MSC program and are consulted during policy development and fisheries assessments, as well as by their demand for certified products.

2) A description of the **STANDARD** that our system has developed

The [MSC Fisheries Standard](#) is composed of three core principles which must be met by every fishery:

- **Principle 1: Sustainable fish stocks** - The fishing activity must be at a level which ensures it can continue indefinitely and the fish population can remain productive and healthy.
- **Principle 2: Minimising environmental impact** - Fishing operations must be managed to maintain the structure, productivity, function, and diversity of the ecosystem.
- **Principle 3: Effective fisheries management** - The fishery must comply with relevant laws and have a management system that is responsive to changing environmental circumstances.

As a third party program fisheries are assessed by accredited independent certifiers (CABs) and not the MSC to determine if each principle is met. Scoring of each Principle is achieved through 28 performance indicators which are used by the CABs to score the fishery. Scores between 60 and 80 on individual performance indicators are considered conditional passes with improvement to an 80 score required within the timeframe of one certification cycle (up to five years). Each Principle must be scored at an overall average score of at least 80 for a fishery to be certified. A score of 100 is possible for a 'near perfect' fishery. The assessors' scoring is reviewed by two peer reviewers drawn from an independent [Peer Review College](#). Experts are appointed to the Peer Review College based on rigorous entry criteria.

The MSC Standard does not have regional adaptations. It does however provide modifications of the Standard to improve accessibility for specific fishery types such as salmon, bivalve and data-poor fisheries. Fishery scores and conditions data (alongside other certificate holder data) are collected continuously and analysed on an annual basis to monitor performance. Score changes across assessment cycles are reported annually in the MSC's [Annual Report](#). A more in-depth analysis of scores, conditions, and other monitoring data are reported biannually in [Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Reports](#), the [first of which](#) was published May 16th 2022.

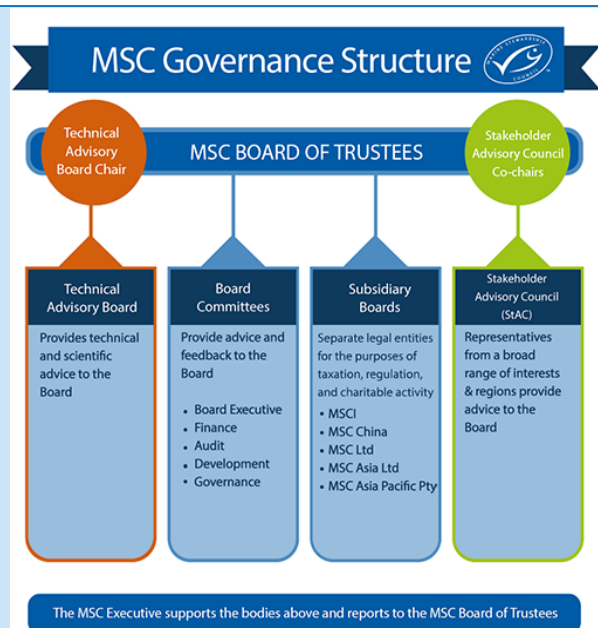
3) How we maintain **RESPONSIBILITY** for decisions taken about and by our system

Options for revising or developing a new MSC Standard, or changes to the assurance or M&E system, taking on board stakeholder comment, are considered by both the [Stakeholder Advisory Council \(STAC\)](#) and the [Technical Advisory Board \(TAB\)](#) before a final decision is taken by the [MSC Board of Trustees \(BoT\)](#).

The TAB comprises of individuals representing a wide range of skills, experience and regional expertise. They provide advice and recommendation on all scientific and technical policy and the assurance system. In a standard review, they guide policy development and provide a final recommendation to the BoT.

The STAC provides advice to the BoT and includes representatives of the seafood industry, conservation community, market sector and academia. The membership of the STAC and TAB should ensure the balance of interests is maintained during our decision-making processes.

The BoT is the MSC's governing body and sets the strategic direction, monitors progress and ensures MSC meets its objectives. Trustees serving on the Board are chosen for their knowledge, expertise and support for the MSC. The BoT is balanced with representatives from different sectors and geographical regions to



reflect the broad mix of people who have a stake in the MSC's mission. Additionally, chairs from the TAB and STAC sit on the BoT.

4) How our system's design demonstrates a **COMMITMENT TO IMPROVEMENT**

The M&E program is an integral component of the MSC's global operations. The current scope of the M&E system covers all Fishery and CoC certificate holders and all ecolabelled products from the inception of the program up to the present moment. Data are collected that pertain to the:

- Certification of fisheries assessed against the Fisheries Standard, including outcomes of assessments against the Fisheries Standard;
- Certification of supply chain companies assessed against the CoC Standard;
- Distribution, recognition, and sale of MSC ecolabelled products;
- Assurance systems for providing confidence in the application of the Fisheries and CoC Standard;
- Records of training activities focused on the MSC Standards;
- Feedback from stakeholders through fishery assessments and external consultations; and
- Self assessment on measures to mitigate risks of forced and child labour.

Collection and validation of these data follows defined protocols outlined in MSC internal manuals. These data are used to produce 20 indicators following methods described in the Annexes of the [M&E Technical Report](#). Indicators are grouped into six broad themes, five of which aim to describe how well the program is achieving its intended sustainability outcomes: *Reach, Accessibility, Environmental performance and improvements, Assurance, Stakeholder input*, and one that monitors *Unintended drawbacks and benefits*.

Data collected for M&E are entered by CABs into eCert, manually extracted from publicly available fishery assessment reports, and obtained from external data sources. M&E data are stored on centrally managed MSC IT systems and multiple cloud services. Access to M&E data for analysis is provided via login procedures granted to trained personnel within the MSC. Auditors and assessors can only edit data for fishery and CoC certificates that are managed by their CAB on eCert. MSC staff only have access to the eCert data that is needed for their role. All personnel with access to eCert within and outside MSC require a username and complex password. Accounts are deleted and access revoked upon leaving the MSC or CAB. Contracts between the MSC and Assurance Services International (ASI), ASI and CABs, and confidentiality requirements in the MSC's Certification Requirements ensure the proper handling and use of confidential data. The MSC also occasionally shares data with external entities. A data sharing agreement is used to ensure proper use of that data that does not breach confidentiality requirements. The MSC applies a number of mechanisms to ensure information security across the organisation. Assurance data is stored primarily on eCert and is used by both the Fisheries and CoC programs. Additional data is generated via the ASI Portal and MSC systems such as the online training platform. All assurance data sources are collated in the MSC Assurance Data Registry (internal document).

The MSC Science and Standards (S&S) department maintains a Quality Management System (QMS) which guides the effective and consistent execution of functions relating to the assurance system (e.g. Technical Oversight and approval/rejection of CAB variation requests). The MSC holds a yearly Tripartite meeting with CABs and ASI to review the effectiveness of the assurance system, conduct calibration to ensure shared understanding of the MSC requirements, and identify risks and improvement opportunities. The MSC also holds a biannual meeting with ASI to review its outputs and performance.

An assurance system annual management review is also conducted to: review and evaluate risks to the assurance system; identify and oversee implementation of risk mitigation and other improvements to the system; review outputs including non-conformities raised against CABs by ASI; and review the performance of the S&S QMS. The annual management review is signed off by MSC senior management. The MSC also has a robust and credible [Complaints Procedure](#) which allows stakeholders to submit complaints about activities carried out by the MSC, including those which relate to the assurance system.

Learnings from performance monitoring and impact evaluation are used alongside stakeholder input to identify priority areas for Standard revisions, and performance monitoring data is used during impact assessments of any proposed changes to the Standard. Outputs of and learnings from conducting M&E are also used periodically to inform revisions to the M&E system, as will be the case in the 2022 M&E review. This review will investigate whether the M&E framework aligns with the [MSC's Theory of Change](#) and

adequately evaluates the impacts of the MSC program; will review the metrics, methods and systems for monitoring and evaluating the intended and unintended impacts of the MSC program; and will seek to further integrate M&E with broader MSC operations.

5) How our standard is monitored and reviewed to ensure its **RELEVANCE**

The MSC Fisheries Standard is reviewed every five years. The CoC Standards are reviewed every three years. All information regarding the Standard reviews are made available on the MSC website and any current standard states when the subsequent review will take place. Comments on the MSC Standards and systems are welcomed at any time via '[Developing our standards](#)'. Stakeholders can sign up to receive emails regarding program developments, the opening of consultations and how to get involved. MSC has staff in many regional offices who identify and engage stakeholders who might otherwise be under-represented. Regional staff contact their local stakeholders specifically for developments that will be of most interest and relevance. The MSC also issues industry media alerts, press releases, and social media updates (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter).

Terms of Reference are made publicly available which include the scope and steps involved in the process. Dedicated webpages are created and we conduct online consultations during which the standards development staff and regional staff hold webinars to improve access to consultation materials recognising language and cultural barriers. In-person workshops are conducted in regions relevant to the specific policies being developed or reviewed, along with online workshops covering different timezones to reach a wider audience. This allows us to ensure engagement with all regions, obtain more focussed information, and helps us to facilitate discussion around policy options. Consultation reports are made available on the MSC website summarising the feedback received.

When revising the M&E framework, following consultation and workshops with key stakeholders, independent M&E experts are commissioned to review the revised M&E framework and ensure it takes into account best practice. Outputs of consultations, workshops, and the revised M&E documents are made publicly available on the MSC website.

6) How the standard is **IMPLEMENTED**

After thorough impact testing of any Standard revisions and the BoT has approved the new Standard, implementation begins and training materials and guidance for CABs, fisheries and other users of the Standard are developed. Implementation timeframes for the new Standard are set following the [UN FAO Best Practice Guidelines for Ecolabelling](#).

The MSC contracts ASI to accredit CABs, verifying that they both conform to ISO 17065 and 19011 and have the expertise to conduct MSC fishery assessments and CoC audits. ASI maintains a [list of accredited and applicant CABs](#). The MSC also requires ASI to be compliant with ISO 17011. Qualification and competency requirements for CAB audit personnel together with verification mechanisms are defined in the [General Certification Requirements](#) as well as the requirements for [fishery assessment team members](#) and [CoC auditors and group auditors](#) respectively. The passing of online training modules for both fishery assessment team members and CoC audit personnel is required as part of the competency requirements.

The M&E team consists of 6 permanent and 3 fixed-term staff, all educated to Masters level or higher in relevant fields. The team is led by the Research Director, and senior management includes two Principal Data Scientists and a Senior Qualitative Research Manager. All permanent staff are professional scientists with peer-reviewed publication records. The Research Director and senior management jointly discuss and monitor the credibility and accuracy of publicised information. Depending on the nature of the report, claims and statements made around outcome evaluations will also be reviewed at a higher level, e.g. the Chief Science and Standards Officer, or the Executive Committee (ExCo). ExCo is formed of MSC department directors, who jointly are responsible for the success and continued good reputation of the MSC's outreach, communications, and standard development functions.

All public facing MSC reports describe the methods, findings, conclusions, and limitations of analyses produced for M&E. They are open to public scrutiny and criticism, and comments submitted to the M&E team are taken into account. Results published in scientific journals are subject to an independent peer review process, which ensures that all claims made are substantiated.

