

Private standards and public policy are not always aligned or coordinated. To realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) new partnerships and forms of co-regulation will be needed to enable sustainable production, trade and consumption. This series of case studies illustrates how private standard systems, businesses and governments are working together for better sustainability outcomes. It is developed by the ISEAL Alliance, the global association for credible sustainability standards. For more, visit [our webpage](#).

SURINAME AND MSC: COLLABORATION FOR CERTIFICATION

Cooperation between the government, the fishing industry and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) enabled Suriname's seabob fishery to become the first credibly certified shrimp fishery in the tropics. While certification helped secure access to important export markets, the process also led to wider improvements in fisheries management.



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FACT FILE



Country:
Suriname



Sector:
Fisheries
(shrimp)



Private standard:
Marine Stewardship
Council

SDG-related outcomes:



BACKGROUND – SURINAME'S GROWING FISHING INDUSTRY

The small nation of Suriname lies along the north coast of South America. With most of the country swathed in dense rainforest, the majority of Suriname's half a million inhabitants live along the narrow coastal plain where fishing is essential to community livelihoods. In the mid-1990s, as an alternative to the traditional catch of Penaeus prawn which was then in decline, local fishers began catching Atlantic seabob (*Xiphopenaeus kroyeri*). This small, white tropical shrimp is abundant in the country's shallow coastal waters and across the wider Caribbean. Suriname soon became the third largest producer of Atlantic seabob in the world.

As Suriname's exports have grown, so has the pressure to ensure the fishery's sustainability and long-term viability. Customers in Europe and North America, the main markets for Suriname seabob, are increasingly demanding seafood from traceable, sustainable sources. Recognising this, a European shrimp trader began discussions with shrimp fishers and the government in Suriname about using the sustainability standards developed by the MSC to create a verified sustainable supply of Suriname seabob.

10% MSC CERTIFIED

Only 10% of MSC certified seafood comes from countries in the Global South.

US\$20M INVESTMENT

The Suriname government has reinforced its own commitment to sustainable fishing by investing US\$20m in enforcement vessels and strengthening its monitoring and surveillance.



This was an ambitious first. While some 87% of cold-water prawn or shrimp is MSC certified, no shrimp fisheries in the tropics were certified at the time. Indeed, MSC certification in the Global South is much less widespread than in higher latitudes, with developing countries accounting for only around 10% of the volume of the total certified catch. Often this is due to a lack of scientific data and formal management plans. To overcome this obstacle, the Suriname government, MSC and the Suriname fishing industry established a pioneering partnership, setting an example for other tropical fisheries in the wider region.

CERTIFICATION AS A CATALYST FOR COLLABORATION

The MSC is widely recognised as the world's leading certification scheme for wild-caught seafood. It provides credible third-party verification that a fishery's operations are sustainable and well managed, ensuring that fish stocks aren't overexploited and there aren't unacceptable impacts on other species or marine ecosystems. Products bearing the MSC label can be traced back to a certified sustainable fishery through a transparent and robust chain of custody system.

The MSC audit process is highly transparent, and has been designed to allow all relevant stakeholders to be consulted and involved. As a result, the MSC process not only led to certification, but also became a catalyst for strengthening overall fisheries management in Suriname.

In 2009, an initial assessment against the MSC standard revealed that, like many other fisheries in the Global South, the Suriname seabob fishery lacked the comprehensive, long-term scientific data needed to meet the requirements of the usual MSC certification process. In particular, it lacked a formal stock assessment and had gaps in its data collection practices. Moreover, while the Suriname fishery had already put in place certain measures to prevent turtles and other species being caught as accidental 'bycatch', there was not yet a strategy in place for managing interactions with endangered, threatened and protected species in the area.

However, a lack of data does not necessarily mean a fishery is operating unsustainably. To make certification more accessible for small-scale and developing world fisheries, the MSC has developed a risk-based framework which provides a way for certification bodies to judge the potential impacts on species, habitats and ecosystems in the absence of formal data. The Suriname seabob fishery was one of the first to be partially assessed using this risk-based approach.

SUPPORTING NATIONAL ACTION ON SUSTAINABLE FISHING

The MSC audit process jumpstarted a broader policy process when the Surinamese government took steps to address the lack of data on the sustainability of fish stocks. The government commissioned a full stock assessment, with fishers and scientists collecting 300,000 samples from catches over the course of two years. Together with existing government data, this enabled stock levels to be estimated and sustainable catch limits to be determined.

This work led to a new national seabob fishery management plan, given ministerial approval in 2010. The management plan – the first of its kind in Suriname – formally set out objectives and management processes for ecologically responsible and sustainable fishing, which minimises impacts on the target species, the marine ecosystem, and breeding and nursery grounds of shrimp and other fish species.

“ Thanks to the enthusiastic collaboration of fishers, government and industry, the Suriname seabob fishery successfully overcame many challenges on its path to certification. We hope that the improvements it made and the benefits we are now seeing will inspire fisheries in countries similar to Suriname to work towards MSC certification. ”

Dirk-Jan Parlevliet,
CEO of shrimp processor Heiploeg

It includes harvest control rules for reducing fishing if stock levels show signs of decreasing, plus regular monitoring, periodic stock assessments, focussed research into potential impacts on the ecosystem and requirements for reducing bycatch.

During the MSC audit process, a seabob working group was established. The group, which meets monthly, includes representatives from the commercial fishing industry, the Suriname government Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries, and local artisanal fishers. Civil society organisations, such as WWF, can also join the group in an observer capacity. The seabob working group plays a key role in overseeing the fishery and its management, and provides a forum for discussing and resolving disputes and other issues that may arise. This sort of multistakeholder collaboration, bringing together public, private and civil society partners, embodies SDG17, which aims to strengthen the implementing partnerships for sustainable development.

To further increase transparency and accountability, the Surinamese fisheries department launched a website (www.seabob.sr) which includes information on the fishing fleet, management plan, stock assessment and other details. In addition, regular audit reports are made public on the MSC website.

As a result of these efforts, the Suriname seabob fishery achieved MSC certification in 2011, becoming the first tropical shrimp fishery in the world to do so. The certification included various conditions for improvement, all of which were successfully completed, enabling the fishery to be re-certified in 2017. As a result of adhering to MSC's standard, the fishery's sustainable management has contributed to various targets and outcomes under SDG14 (on life below water), including significant reductions in bycatch of unwanted species.

Since the start of the MSC process, the Suriname government has reinforced its own commitment to sustainable fishing by investing US\$20m in enforcement vessels and strengthening its monitoring and surveillance programmes. This will help protect the seabob fishery and other Surinamese fisheries from illegal, unlicensed and unreported fishing. Coupled with improvements to data collection and fisheries management, this will help Suriname to meet SDG target 14.4 (effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans).

The use of the MSC standard and certification in Suriname is also a text-book example of how voluntary sustainability standards enable sustainable production and consumption patterns, the main objective of SDG12. By providing a mechanism to create a more sustainable supply chain between fishers in Suriname and consumers in Europe, this enables public and private actors across different countries to achieve a number of sustainability outcomes.

LESSONS FOR POLICY-MAKING

The MSC certification of Suriname's seabob fishery provides an example of how a transparent and inclusive certification process can create a broader collaboration between fishing industry partners, government actors and other stakeholders.

It also reflects how sustainability practices defined in international standards can be integrated in national policies, which in turn facilitates certification. By introducing the first formal fisheries management plan in the country, based on sustainability principles and overseen by a transparent multi-stakeholder group, the process has helped to strengthen fisheries management in Suriname. It provides a model that can be followed by other fisheries overall in the Global South.

