

THE MSC PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE FISHING

Guide to Principles, Criteria, Sub-criteria and Performance Indicators

Principles and Criteria

At the centre of the MSC is a set of [Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing](#). These were developed by means of an extensive, international consultative process through which the views of stakeholders in fisheries were gathered.

These Principles reflect a recognition that a sustainable fishery should be based upon:

- The maintenance and re-establishment of healthy populations of targeted species;
- The maintenance of the integrity of ecosystems;
- The development and maintenance of effective fisheries management systems, taking into account all relevant biological, technological, economic, social, environmental and commercial aspects; and
- Compliance with relevant local and national local laws and standards and international understandings and agreements.

The MSC's Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing provide the overall requirements necessary for certification of a sustainably managed fishery.

Interpreting the Principles and Criteria

The certification methodology adopted by the MSC involves the application and interpretation of the Principles and Criteria to the specific fishery undergoing assessment. This is necessary, as the precise assessment of a fishery will vary with the nature of the species, capture method used, the ecology of the fishery, etc.

Accordingly, the Certification Body (CB) and its assessment team build a structured hierarchy of 'Sub-criteria' and 'Performance Indicators' in order to carry out the assessments. PIs represent separate areas of important information. These indicators therefore provide a detailed checklist of factors necessary to meet the MSC Criteria in the same way as the Criteria provide the factors necessary to meet each Principle.

The Tables

The following tables illustrate this process of building an assessment tree. Within each table the Principles and Criteria set by the MSC are provided. Under Principles 1 and 2, we have also provided illustrative examples of the 'Sub-criteria' and 'Performance Indicators' that CBs have used when assessing a fishery.

MSC Principles and Criteria

Interpretation of the Ps&Cs

Principle

Criteria

Examples of Sub-criteria

Examples of Performance Indicators

MSC PRINCIPLE 1
A fishery must be conducted in a manner that does not lead to over-fishing or depletion of the exploited populations and, for those populations that are depleted, the fishery must be conducted in a manner that demonstrably leads to their recovery.

MSC Principle 1 Criterion 1
The fishery shall be conducted at catch levels that continually maintain the high productivity of the target population(s) and associated ecological community relative to its potential productivity.

MSC Principle 1 Criterion 2¹
Where the exploited populations are depleted, the fishery will be executed such that recovery and rebuilding is allowed to occur to a specified level consistent with the precautionary approach and the ability of the populations to produce long-term potential yields within a specified time frame.

MSC Principle 1 Criterion 3
Fishing is conducted in a manner that does not alter the age or genetic structure or sex composition to a degree that impairs reproductive capacity.

Adequate knowledge about each target stock

Adequate knowledge about the fishery

Effective strategy to manage exploitation

An effective recovery/rebuilding strategy has been designed and implemented

Effective monitoring of the size/age/sex composition and genetic structure

Appropriate management responses

E.g. There is adequate knowledge of the identity of each target stock.

E.g. Fishing related mortality is recorded/estimated.

E.g. Uncertainties and assumptions are reflected in management advice.

E.g. Measures are in place to rebuild a stock if it is found to be below a specified reference point.

E.g. The age/sex/genetic structure of the stock monitored.

E.g. Changes in structure that would alter reproductive capacity are mitigated through management action.

¹ TAB Directive D-006 states that P1, C2 and shall only be scored and weighted if the target stock(s) in the fishery are depleted .

MSC Principles and Criteria

Principle

MSC PRINCIPLE 2
 Fishing operations should allow for the maintenance of the structure, productivity, function and diversity of the ecosystem (including habitat and associated dependent and ecologically related species) on which the fishery depends.

Criteria

MSC Principle 2 Criterion 1
 The fishery is conducted in a way that maintains natural functional relationships among species and should not lead to trophic cascades or ecosystem state changes.

MSC Principle 2 Criterion 2
 The fishery is conducted in a manner that does not threaten biological diversity at the genetic, species or population levels and avoids or minimises mortality of, or injuries to endangered, threatened or protected species (ETP spp.).

MSC Principle 2 Criterion 3
 Where exploited populations are depleted, the fishery will be executed such that recovery and rebuilding is allowed to occur to a specified level within specified time frames, consistent with the precautionary approach and considering the ability of the population to produce long-term potential yields.

Interpretation of the Ps&Cs

Examples of Sub-criteria

Adequate knowledge about the ecosystem relevant to fishing

Adequate knowledge about the fishery impacts

Strategies within the fishery's management system to address these impacts

Adequate knowledge about ETP spp.

Adequate knowledge about the risks to ETP spp.

Strategies have been developed to avoid or minimise impacts on ETP spp.

Appropriate management measures to allow recovery of affected ETP spp.

Examples of Performance Indicators

E.g. Information available on non-target species directly effected by the fishery

E.g. Effects of fishing operations and gear on habitat and structure are known

E.g. Management objectives are set in terms of impact identification and avoidance/reduction

E.g. There is information on the presence/abundance and temporal distribution of ETP spp.

E.g. Interactions do not pose unacceptable risks to ETP spp.

E.g. Management strategies are in place to avoid or minimise impacts within acceptable minimum levels

E.g. There is sufficient information to assess whether trends showing decreasing non-target spp abundance are due primarily to the fishery and not natural variability

MSC Principles and Criteria

Principle

MSC PRINCIPLE 3

The fishery is subject to an effective management system that respects local, national and international laws and standards and incorporates institutional and operational frameworks that require use of the resource to be responsible and sustainable.

A. MANAGEMENT SYSTEM CRITERIA

Criteria

Criterion A1

The fishery shall not be conducted under a controversial unilateral exemption to an international agreement.

Criterion A2

The fishery demonstrate clear long-term objectives consistent with MSC Principles and Criteria and contain a consultative process that is transparent and involves all interested and affected parties so as to consider all relevant information, including local knowledge. The impact of fishery management decisions on all those who depend on the fishery for their livelihoods, including, but not confined to subsistence, artisanal, and fishing-dependent communities shall be addressed as part of this process;

Criterion A3

Management System shall be appropriate to the cultural context, scale and intensity of the fishery – reflecting specific objectives, incorporating operational criteria, containing procedures for implementation and a process for monitoring and evaluating performance and acting on findings

Criterion A4

Management System shall observe the legal and customary rights and long term interests of people dependent on fishing for food and livelihood, in a manner consistent with ecological sustainability

Criterion A5

Incorporates an appropriate mechanism for the resolution of disputes arising within the system

Criterion A6

Provide economic and social incentives that contribute to sustainable fishing and shall not operate with subsidies that contribute to unsustainable fishing

Criterion A7

Act in a timely and adaptive fashion on the basis of the best available information using a precautionary approach particularly when dealing with scientific uncertainty

Criterion A8

Incorporate a research plan – appropriate to the scale and intensity of the fishery – that addresses the information needs of management and provides for the dissemination of research results to all interested parties in a timely fashion

Criterion A9

Require that assessments of the biological status of the resource and impacts of the fishery have been and are periodically conducted

Criterion A10

Specify measures and strategies that demonstrably control the degree of exploitation of the resource, including, but not limited to:

- setting catch levels that will maintain the target population and ecological community's high productivity relative to its potential productivity, and account for the non-target species (or size, age, sex) captured and landed in association with, or as a consequence of, fishing for target species;
- identifying appropriate fishing methods that minimise adverse impacts on habitat, especially in critical or sensitive zones such as spawning and nursery areas;
- providing for the recovery and rebuilding of depleted fish populations to specified levels within specified time frames;
- mechanisms in place to limit or close fisheries when designated catch limits are reached;
- establishing no-take zones where appropriate.

Criterion A11

Contains appropriate procedures for effective compliance, monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement which ensure that established limits to exploitation are not exceeded and specifies corrective actions to be taken in the event that they are.

MSC Principles and Criteria

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MSC PRINCIPLE 3

The fishery is subject to an effective management system that respects local, national and international laws and standards and incorporates institutional and operational frameworks that require use of the resource to be responsible and sustainable.

Criteria

B. OPERATIONAL CRITERIA

Criterion B12

Fishing operation shall make use of fishing gear and practices designed to avoid the capture of non-target species (and non-target size, age, and/or sex of the target species); minimise mortality of this catch where it cannot be avoided, and reduce discards of what cannot be released alive.

Criterion B13

Fishing operation shall implement appropriate fishing methods designed to minimise adverse impacts on habitat, especially in critical or sensitive zones such as spawning and nursery areas.

Criterion B14

Fishing operation shall not use destructive fishing practices such as fishing with poisons or explosives.

Criterion B16

Fishing operation shall be conducted in compliance with the fishery management system and all legal and administrative requirements.

Criterion B15

Fishing operation shall minimise operational waste such as lost fishing gear, oil spills, on-board spoilage of catch, etc

Criterion B17

Fishing operation shall assist and co-operate with management authorities in the collection of catch, discard, and other information of importance to effective management of the resources and the fishery.