



MAKE STEWARDSHIP COUNT

November 5th 2018

Dear Retailer

Make Stewardship Count is a coalition of 82 marine conservation, environmental and animal rights organizations, leading academics, and other specialists in the conservation and/or sustainable seafood community, who share growing concerns regarding the credibility of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) seafood certification eco-label and are calling for urgent reform.

If we are to end global overfishing and the degradation of our ocean ecosystems, and protect the health and safety of people working in the seafood industry, we must ensure the seafood market is only open to those products demonstrably sourced from responsible operators. We commend your commitment as a retailer to eco-certified products, like those labelled by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), in an effort to help consumers make more sustainable buying choices. However, while these certifications play an important role in sustainable seafood procurement, challenges in the implementation and application of their standards can arise. Stakeholders committed to sustainable seafood sourcing, especially retailers, play a critical role in ensuring certifications uphold their rigour and credibility. We are writing to share how our campaign to reform the MSC is progressing, and to ask for your help in driving this.

Serious flaws in the MSC Standard and implementation processes have gone unresolved and have resulted in the eco-labelling of highly problematic fisheries practices, including those that target depleted populations of fish, kill threatened species of sharks, turtles, seabirds and marine mammals, and lack some of the fundamental components of strong fisheries management.

In January 2018, members of our coalition group sent an open letter to the MSC outlining our concerns. You can read a summary of our concerns on our website, as well as the original letter [here](#). In addition, WWF, the organization that founded the MSC program, publicly shared [similar concerns](#) in March. A critical documentary 'Fish & Fraud - The Ecolabel MSC', by Wilfried Huismann, was recently aired in Germany, and further concerns were raised by the Changing Markets Foundation in its recent report [on certification](#). Other sectors are also now raising concerns with the eco-label. SPAR, one of Austria's leading retailers publicly supported the call for improvement to MSC in their [annual report](#). Also fisheries that are truly 'gold standard' examples of low impact, well-managed MSC certified fleets are increasingly concerned that the weakening of the label is undercutting the value of the eco-label as a true mark of sustainability.

MSC responded to our letter and has met with representatives of our coalition in dialogue. While we welcome continuing dialogue there has yet to be any commitment from MSC to adequately and swiftly address the increasing concerns particularly those involving the independence of companies paid by fisheries to assess and audit them against the certification, the highly problematic Objection process, and the MSC's ineffective oversight of its label.

The MSC has made it very clear that any issues we have regarding the standards will only be addressed as part of the [next scheduled Fishery Standard Review](#) in 2020, and that some key concerns may not be included in the Fishery Standard Review and therefore not get addressed at all.

Under this system, any changes to the MSC Standard and certification process will not come into force until 2022 and fisheries have three further years to implement. This means the critical changes needed to ensure fisheries carrying the MSC eco-label are actually sustainable won't happen until 2025.

For many of the species and ecosystems still being damaged by MSC certified practices, this situation is untenable, and without significant, immediate changes to the Standard, we will continue be at odds with MSC over its poor certifications for some time.

The loss of credibility for the MSC and its certified products will have a knock-on impact for all those who support and promote MSC products, particularly retailers. For this reason we urge you to support our call for an open and transparent Standard review process, and for greater honesty and transparency about what MSC certification actual represents, as some retailers are already doing.

Help establish a strong MSC Fisheries Standard Review process

1. Call on the MSC to establish an open and transparent process for the review of their FULL Standard that ensures the analysis and views of all relevant stakeholders and experts are shared, and the final new Standard is robust and credible.
2. If MSC refuses to do a FULL review, join Make Stewardship Count's parallel review of Principle 2 of the Fisheries Standard, which will be undertaken by a wide range of experts and stakeholders, in an entirely transparent and inclusive way, to contribute to and encourage the debate.
3. Call on MSC to also review and improve their current processes of assessment and auditing of fisheries, the implementation of the Standard. This is needed to address concerns regarding the lack of rigor, transparency, and fairness in this process being highlighted by both NGOs and fishery industry stakeholders

Help reform the MSC

1. Publicly acknowledge the concerns raised by Make Stewardship Count, WWF and others and support the call for reform.
2. Call on the MSC to be honest and transparent about what the label actually represents and ask MSC to stop using the word 'sustainable' in the logo, until all products truly reflect sustainability claims.
3. Publicly commit not to sell any MSC products from the extremely problematic fisheries we have highlighted¹, and to review all MSC products before sourcing to ensure there are no major concerns from NGOs about the certification.

Given that the MSC recently celebrated 20 years of work and announced ambitious goals to expand the number of certified fisheries and products in the program to include 20% of global fisheries catch by 2020, it is imperative that the MSC eliminates the problems with its Standard and implementation processes to regain credibility with key stakeholders – the international conservation community of organizations, researchers, and scientists, as well as with retailers and millions of consumers worldwide.

We hope we can work together to make the MSC label something that you and your customers can trust in the future. Please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss the issues in detail.

Best wishes

The Steering Committee of Make Stewardship Count

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¹ **NEW ZEALAND BOTTOM AND MID WATER TRAWL HOKI FISHERY** - <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/new-zealand-hoki/@assessments>
NORTH SEA DREDGE AND BOTTOM TRAWL FISHERIES CUMULATIVE IMPACT - <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/north-sea-brown-shrimp> & <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/dfpo-denmark-north-sea-plaice/@@view>
NORTH WEST ATLANTIC CANADA PELAGIC LONGLINE SWORDFISH FISHERY - <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/north-west-atlantic-canada-longline-swordfish/@@view>
NFA NORWEGIAN LUMPFISH GILLNET FISHERY - <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/nfa-norwegian-ling-tusk-and-nfa-norwegian-lumpfish/@@view>
MAINE AND EASTERN CANADIAN CRAB AND LOBSTER TRAP/POT FISHERIES - <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/gulf-of-st-lawrence-snow-crab-trap/@@view> & <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/gulf-of-maine-lobster-fishery/@@view>
PAST NORTHEASTERN YELLOWFIN AND SKIPJACK TUNA PURSE SEINE FISHERY - <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/northeastern-tropical-pacific-purse-seine-yellowfin-and-skipjack-tuna-fishery>
THE PNA SKIPJACK AND YELLOWFIN PURSE SEINE FISHERY - <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/pna-western-and-central-pacific-skipjack-and-yellowfin-unassociated-non-fad-set-tuna-purse-seine/@@view>
ECHEBASTAR INDIAN OCEAN SKIPJACK PURSE SEINE TUNA FISHERY - <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/echebatar-indian-ocean-purse-seine-skipjack-tuna/@@view>
THE NZ ORANGE ROUGHY DEEP-SEA BOTTOM TRAWL FISHERY - <https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/new-zealand-orange-roughy>



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- Megan Bailey, Canada Research Chair, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada
- Dr. Cat Dorey, Consultant (Fish, Fisheries, & Science Communication) Australia
- Hannes Jaenicke, Actor and Environmental Activist, Film Producer, Germany
- Robert Marc Lehmann, Marine Biologist, NG Photographer of the Year 2016, Germany
- Callum Roberts, Professor of Marine Conservation, University of York, UK
- Dr. Ralf P. Sonntag, Senior Advisor Marine Conservation, Germany