

Press release

The MSC Seal balks at improvements to their standard and continues to mislead consumers

In January 2018, Sharkproject together with 65 other organisations and scientists published an [open letter to the Marine Stewardship Council \(MSC\)](#). Containing a list of seven key demands, it was a call to the MSC to improve their certification procedures and thereby, once again, become a genuine alternative for consumers wanting to purchase sustainably caught fish.

The seven key demands listed by the supporters are:

- The full impact of said fishery on the marine ecosystem is to be considered.
- All fishing activities of said fishery with regards to the target species must be taken into account during evaluation.
- MSC certified fisheries may not contribute to the destruction of the biodiversity of the seafloor.
- All data pertaining to the certification of said fishery must be transparent, complete and easily verifiable to the environmental protection agency involved in the process.
- All stipulations pertaining to certification must be fulfilled prior to recertification.
- The assessment of a fishery with regards to their intended certification may only be carried out by impartial certification agencies who are completely financially independent of said fishery.
- The MSC must be proactive in its assessments of the scientific standard and the sustainability targets of the programme.

This appeal garnered worldwide interest and was also supported by the WWF, who issued a [press statement](#) in support of the action. Despite this, the MSC has yet to implement a single change or even state its intent to do so. Quite the contrary, they have, in fact, awarded their blue MSC seal to more, completely non-sustainable fisheries. Here is a sample of what they are certifying in three particularly shocking examples:

- The PNA – A tuna fishery in the western central pacific (Parties to the Nauru Agreement) were recertified despite the fact that their ships have been proven to practice finning. This underhandedness was once again criticised in an [open letter compiled by 45](#) environmental and species protection agencies, and even signed by retailers and other fisheries.
- Hoki-fishery in New Zealand was also recertified as sustainable, despite records showing that they discard catch, fish in breeding areas, make false claims regarding fishing methods as well as providing unreliable information regarding bycatch of threatened and protected species. The NABU and NABU International Nature Conservation Foundation [opted out of the certification process](#) after “clearly outlining this grievance to the certification agency within the course of the MSC process.”
- For the first time in the history of the MSC they have certified a fishery that lures fish on the open seas using drifting FADs (fish aggregating devices). The Spanish Echebaster was awarded the MSC seal for a fleet in the Indian Ocean despite the fact that they were not only catching the certified bonito but also large amounts of yellowfin tuna and silky sharks. In January of 2016 a mere five ships caught almost 8.000, mostly young and still immature silky sharks. A formal objection to the certification launched by Sharkproject, the International Pole & Line Foundation (IPNLF) and the WWF, was unsuccessful. Once it became apparent that the decision would not be unbiased or scientifically based [Sharkproject and the IPNLF left the proceedings](#) ahead of time.

These examples show that, if the MSC seal is to once again become a trustworthy guideline, there must be fundamental changes made with regards to the requirements for and implementation of certification. The consumers are in agreement: sustainable fishing can not involve the deaths of dolphins, sharks, sea turtles, whales and other threatened and protected species or the destruction of delicate marine environments. This is the standpoint of the vast majority of European consumers as confirmed by a [survey](#) carried out by YouGov Germany.

This is why Sharkproject formed a coalition with the signatories of the letter and other scientists/organisations under the name "[Make Stewardship Count](#)". It has continued to grow and currently comprises 82 members. The aim of the coalition is, within the framework of the upcoming inspection of the MSC standards, to discuss our demands with all who are involved in an open and transparent process so that improvements can be implemented together. The MSC is called upon to facilitate this process.

It is to this end that Sharkproject, as a member of the coalition, asks everyone who is interested in sustainable fishing and the future of our oceans for their help. In November the coalition sent an [open letter to all of the large retailers](#), both in Europe and worldwide, asking them to support them and their demands, in the interests of their customers. "The first retailers are following our call and we are hopeful that more responsible retailers and fisheries will follow suite." said Iris Ziegler, responsible for the international coordination with Sharkproject and a member of the management team of the coalition.

Whether the review of the MSC standards, due to begin this year, will be able to restore public faith in the blue seal and make it once again a trustworthy alternative for consumers, rests in the hands of the MSC and their preparedness to deal with the demands of the critics openly and constructively.

The criticism and reports regarding the MSCs current certification process are growing ever louder. Even consumers no longer see the current standard as sustainable and share our doubts that the certification process is being carried out impartially. A critical report of the upcoming inspection and necessary improvements is an important milestone for both truly sustainable fishing and for the future of our oceans.

Sharkproject International, January 15th 2019

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