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Immediate Release

Leading campaigns come together to back UK Parliament call for Independent Review of MSC

- Two leading campaigns On the Hook and Make Stewardship Count including Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall publish first joint letter to ecolabel Marine Stewardship Council
- They back the call from UK Parliament for a transparent and independent review of both the MSC Standard and its application to be conducted by a panel of experts
- The letter outlines why current MSC systems and processes are not transparent or independent enough

London: Two major groups of stakeholders, including Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, world leading NGOs, scientists and MPs, from the On the Hook and Make Stewardship Count campaigns have published their first joint letter to the MSC calling for an independent review of the MSC's Standard and its application in light of significant conservation concerns including shark finning in certified fisheries, impacts on non-target species and compartmentalisation.

The letter follows the UK Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee's (EAC) recent Sustainable Seas inquiry. One session focussed specifically on the effectiveness of the MSC ecolabel and the Committee's MP members raised specific questions about shark finning in certified fisheries and unsustainable compartmentalised tuna fisheries.

The EAC published its final [report](#) on 17 January 2019 in which it recommended that:

"To ensure continued consumer confidence in the Marine Stewardship Council certification, we recommend the MSC addresses specific criticisms raised by WWF, Prof Callum Roberts and others into its five-year review and strengthens its standard accordingly. These criticisms include its unit of assessment, the need to factor in carbon from ships into its standard, concerns about shark finning (where we look forward to the publication of data verifying the reduction of this practice in 2019) and barriers to entry for small scale fisheries."

The report went on to recommend that "[t]he review should be transparent and ideally independently evaluated."

Zac Goldsmith MP who sits on the EAC said: "Addressing stakeholder concerns through a transparent and independently evaluated review is critical to ensuring that consumers can be confident the blue tick logo guarantees sustainability. I look forward to seeing significant actions from the MSC in response to the Committee's recommendations and now the asks of these two major campaign groups."

The EAC report is not the first time that critical improvements to the current Standard have been requested. In January 2018, the Make Stewardship Count coalition of more than 80 NGOs and experts raised serious concerns in an open letter. WWF Germany endorsed this

call for improvements and WWF International published similar requests in March 2018. Just last week, BirdLife International published a new [review](#) which finds that being certified by the MSC does not guarantee that a fishery is addressing bycatch and recommends that the MSC implement serious improvements to their bycatch requirements.

On the Hook and Make Stewardship Count strongly endorse the Environmental Audit Committee's statement that the strengthened standard should be independently reviewed. This letter notes that the signatories were concerned to see that the MSC's public [statement](#) in response to the report publication seemed to indicate that they already consider their review process (the Fisheries Standard Review) to be transparent and independently evaluated and therefore compliant with the EAC's recommendations; the two campaigns joined forces to write this public letter to express their disagreement with the MSC's analysis and call for an independent review.

Charles Clover from the Blue Marine Foundation said: "A number of controversial certification decisions have called into question the effectiveness of the MSC Standard and certification scheme. These risk undermining the ecolabel's credibility and the consumer confidence it commands and the MSC must act now to deal promptly with the range of issues raised by stakeholders and by the EAC inquiry."

The On the Hook/ Make Stewardship Count letter notes that if the MSC is of the view that an independent review of its Standard is satisfied by reference to compliance with ISEAL and GSSI, the signatories have a number of concerns. These concerns include one of ISEAL's Board Members being the MSC's Chief Program Officer, Nicolas Guichoux. Furthermore, that GSSI (Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative) and ISEAL do not act as a review of the MSC's Standard, but rather set out globally applicable minimum criteria under which specific eco-certification and labelling initiatives can develop.

The letter goes on to outline the signatories' suggestions for the format of the independent review that the Marine Stewardship Council should conduct, suggesting that such a review:

- Be externally undertaken.
- Be carried out by an independent panel of experts, including stakeholders from science, NGOs, retail and the fishing industry. Within this format, the review could also incorporate open and transparent technical workshops.
- Not be limited to review topics selected by the MSC, but instead include those improvements to Principle 2 and the certification process requested by Make Stewardship Count, On the Hook and WWF.
- Be fully transparent.
- Cover both the Standard and its application and make recommendations regarding both.
- Be conducted within a reasonable timeframe. The independent review should move faster than the Fisheries Standard Review process, such that its findings can be incorporated into that review.

Professor Callum Roberts from York University said: "I look forward to the MSC responding to the recommendations in this letter and urge them to embrace a fully independent, external review. Such a review will identify and help resolve crucial issues highlighted by stakeholders including the Make Stewardship Count and On the Hook campaigns. It is a necessary first step to rebuilding trust in the MSC logo ensuring it recognises genuinely sustainable and low environmental impact fisheries."

Dr Iris Ziegler from SharkProject said "A truly transparent and independent review must involve experts from stakeholder groups like Make Stewardship Count and On the Hook from the start of the process. This is essential to ensure that the raised concerns are reflected adequately in the proposals and consultations throughout the review and revision process. Unfortunately, MSC hasn't acknowledged this so far."

Notes to Editor

About Make Stewardship Count

The Make Stewardship Count Coalition (<http://www.make-stewardship-count.org>) is an international coalition made up of 83 NGOs and experts that aim to drive urgently needed improvements to the MSC standard and certification process. Our goal is to ensure that MSC's blue sustainability label truly represents the hallmark in protecting ETP species and marine habitats and contributes to the conservation of our oceans and their biodiversity, and to restore the credibility of the label among consumers. It is important that consumers can trust the MSC label and be confident, that it represents seafood products, which are sourced sustainably and responsibly, and are not associated with destructive or wasteful fishing practices. This trust in the MSC label will help encourage consumers to consider sustainable choices when browsing the seafood aisles, and will help to drive healthy improvements on the water.

The coalition wrote a public letter to the MSC in January of 2018, demanding critical improvements be made in the Principle 2 section of the Standard (impact on ecosystem and habitat) and the transparency and independence of the certification process as a whole.

The coalition is represented by a steering committee, currently consisting of Shannon Arnold (Ecology Action Centre), Dr. Cat Dorey (Independent Consultant), Dr. Barbara Maas (NABU International), Kate O'Connell (Animal Welfare Institute), and Dr. Iris Ziegler (Sharkproject), and has engaged with the MSC on several occasions. Recent work by the coalition include, but are not limited to, contributing a submission to the EAC on their "Sustainable Seas" inquiry, engaging with other stakeholder groups such as retailers and fisheries, and advocating for an inclusive and transparent review process. In order to help encourage the necessary improvements to the MSC Standard, the coalition has forwarded 8 priority topics to the MSC to be reviewed and revised in expert workshops throughout the duration of the Standard review process. By addressing these high-priority topics in an open workshop setting with international experts and all stakeholder groups, it is the hope of the coalition that the MSC will begin to make healthy changes to their certification standard and processes taking into account the values of their stakeholders and the dire conditions of our oceans.

For further information please contact the Steering Committee at info@make-stewardship-count.org or Iris Ziegler (i.ziegler@sharkproject.org) for European enquiries and Kate O'Connell (kate.oconnell@balaena.org), Shannon Arnold (sarnold@ecologyaction.ca) for North America

On the Hook campaign

On the Hook was launched in August 2017 to ask the Marine Stewardship Council to urgently review its Standard which currently allows MSC-certified products to be caught alongside unsustainable methods of fishing. In particular, the campaign focussed on the recertification of the PNA tuna fishery in the Pacific, which was recertified in March 2018. The campaign is supported by scientists, retailers, NGOs and MPs.

On the Hook is a coalition formed of individuals and organisations who share concerns about the unsustainable practice of compartmentalisation in MSC certified fisheries. The On the Hook campaign is funded by a number of our members through in-kind and financial contributions, with the majority of financial contributions provided by World Wise Foods. We are very grateful to the many individual and organisational supporters of On the Hook who do not contribute financially but make in-kind contributions, devoting a huge amount of their time and capacity to this campaign. This support is absolutely invaluable.