



MAKE STEWARDSHIP COUNT

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Watchdog Group Warns Certifier Over its Fisheries Standard Review

London (15 June 2020) As the sustainable seafood certifier Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) opens a new review of their global fishery certification standard, the 90 plus members of the Make Stewardship Count coalition are putting the eco-label body on notice that they will be watching the process closely. The coalition, which has [identified critical changes needed](#) to the blue tick label, notes that the MSC is under increasing scrutiny by marine conservation and industry experts concerned about the credibility of the seafood certification.

In February, the MSC Board of Directors released a list of 16 topics to be covered in its Fisheries Standard Review, including requirements for ghost gear, low trophic species, shark finning and endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species, along with the accessibility of the MSC label for various small-scale fisheries. The Standard Review public engagement begins this week, with a series of expert workshops on ETP species, fishery information quality, and shark finning.

Shannon Arnold, Senior Marine Coordinator at Halifax-based Ecology Action Centre said, "In the past, many of us have spent considerable time giving expert input to the MSC reviews and have heard the MSC promise to improve its Standard, only to find changes were often minimal at best leaving lots of wiggle-room for high impact fisheries to continue getting certified. Many stakeholders came out of the last Fisheries Standard Review frustrated with decisions that appeared to lack scientific rigour. Because of this, we will be following the review process closely, and speaking out if we feel it has gone off track."

The coalition recently released a [paper](#) highlighting additional concerns with the council's lack of transparency and clarity in its engagement with stakeholders. Dr. Cat Dorey, an

independent fisheries advisor and co-author of the report said, “Stakeholders need to know their engagement is valued, and how certification decisions are reached. Failure to insure adequate clarity and transparency will only increase an already high level of stakeholder discontent. It is imperative that these workshops do not take place behind closed doors, and all outcomes need to be shared publicly for further consultation.”

Make Stewardship Count advises that the MSC stands to lose significant public confidence as a result of the certification body’s lack of attention to a number of critical issues. According to [polling](#), the bycatch of ETP species, the deliberate encirclement of dolphins and shark finning, as well as habitat destruction that occur in MSC certified fisheries are major issues for consumers, who feel the MSC is failing in its promise to be a “gold standard” for sustainable seafood.

Current requirements on shark finning will be reviewed and the coalition calls on MSC to implement a Fins Naturally Attached (FNA) policy as a prerequisite for fisheries entering certification. Experts have called for the MSC to implement a FNA policy since the 2010 Fishery Standard Review and again, most recently, in 2019 during the Fishery Certification Process review, but with no success. “Shark finning is an issue that rightly causes major public concern,” noted Dr. Iris Ziegler of Sharkproject International, “Shockingly, fisheries with confirmed cases of finning continue to hold the sustainability certification and the MSC continues to ignore the evidence supporting Fins Naturally Attached as the globally accepted best practice.”

The Mexican Pacific tuna fishery, in which vessels deliberately encircle pods of dolphins thousands of times a year, and proposed certifications of two eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna fisheries are further examples of fishery certifications that many experts question and that potentially misrepresent what buyers expect when they see the MSC label.

“The vast majority of consumers believe that the MSC blue tick label should not be awarded to fisheries that allow the deliberate chasing and encircling of dolphins”, notes Kate O’Connell, marine wildlife consultant at the Animal Welfare Institute, “In addition, many conservation organisations believe that it is premature to consider certification of eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna, which is just beginning to recover from severe depletion and while there are major gaps in management practices that have allowed illegal fishing and trade in the species to continue.”

The coalition fears that the pace of the MSC review will not keep up with the rapid environmental changes that certified fisheries are confronting. Any revisions to the

Standard will not be released until 2022 at the earliest, and will not be fully implemented by all certified fisheries until March of 2035, according to the [timeline provided](#) by the Council.

"While we appreciate that the MSC has processes to follow, climate change will wait for no one and extinction is irreversible," Dorey said. "Change must come much faster if we want to see healthy marine environments, and indeed a habitable planet in the future!"



The Make Stewardship Count Coalition is an international coalition of more than 90 NGOs and experts that aim to drive urgently needed improvements to the MSC standard and certification process. It is important that consumers can trust the MSC label and be confident that it represents seafood products that are sourced sustainably and responsibly, and are not associated with destructive or wasteful fishing practices.

<https://www.make-stewardship-count.org/>