



MAKE STEWARDSHIP COUNT

Last Chance for Leading Sustainable Seafood Ecolabel to get it right

Experts fear that Marine Stewardship Council's draft sustainable seafood certification standard won't go far enough to protect marine species

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Zurich, Switzerland – Make Stewardship Count, a global coalition of more than 90 marine conservation experts, organizations, and researchers, are raising concerns regarding the new Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Standard, set to be released on February 1, 2022 for final consultation. The coalition fears that the new Standard won't go far enough to improve sustainable seafood certification and help drive much needed changes in the world's fisheries.

The coalition has been closely engaged in the MSC [Fisheries Standard Review](#) (FSR), and has just released a new set of [scorecards](#) evaluating the multi-year process against a list of [critical flaws](#) in the current seafood certification program. The coalition identified these flaws at the outset of the FSR and has since been calling for the MSC to meaningfully address them.

Progress seems to be stalled on changes needed to ensure MSC certified fisheries are not engaging in shark finning, are not endangering vulnerable and protected species, are reducing waste of marine life and improving their impacts on ecosystems. The new scorecards show more red (below expectations) than in the previous phases of the FSR consultations, and relevant proposals released by MSC to date show potential for fisheries to exploit loopholes in the language and continued certification of fisheries despite high bycatch of threatened species, insufficient data presented to objectively justify scoring as "sustainable", and a demonstrated lack of improvement over the course of certification.

The [scorecard](#) also highlights that while the MSC did make an initial effort to increase engagement opportunities during the Review, the final critical stage of consultations has been dogged by a lack of clarity and transparency. With only weeks before the new draft Standard is to be revealed, few details or proposed changes are known to even the most active stakeholders.

In light of these findings, the coalition worries that the MSC Standard will continue to allow for the certification of fisheries that pose unacceptable risk to vulnerable marine life, thereby eroding public trust in the credibility of the sustainable seafood certification.

Despite the coalition's concerns, they remain hopeful that the MSC Board at its upcoming meeting will ensure the draft Standard to be released will address the issues flagged by the coalition and other conservation groups around the world during the multi-year consultation process.

Shannon Arnold, Senior Marine Program Coordinator, Ecology Action Centre, Halifax, Canada, said:

"If the MSC fails to hold fisheries to a higher level of sustainability expectations, the label will no longer act as an incentive for change. We worry that without some significant changes in the new draft Standard, at best, MSC will just continue to reward status quo and, at worst, become a block for other efforts around the world seeking to raise the bar on fisheries management and practice on the water."

Kate O’Connell, Marine Wildlife Consultant, Animal Welfare Institute, USA, said:

“According to the latest coalition scorecards, the Marine Stewardship Council’s stated goal of a ‘big blue future’ that ensures a healthy ocean and planet appears to be drowning in a sea of red. We remain deeply concerned that the review will not adequately address the cumulative impacts of both MSC and non-MSC fisheries on vulnerable species, nor will it mandate a progressive reduction in bycatch of endangered, threatened and protected marine wildlife.”

Iris Ziegler, Head of International Cooperation, SHARKPROJECT International, Switzerland, said:

“Fins Naturally Attached (FNA) is globally recognised as the best practice to prevent shark finning but based on what we have seen in proposals thus far, we are concerned that we will still not see FNA without exemptions required of fisheries by the new standard. When the world’s leading fisheries sustainable certification program may not agree to implement such a policy, even after their own research concluded it is now best practice in management and after such extensive scientific input and broad support from stakeholders - I doubt that this ecolabel will help drive positive improvements for sharks by 2030 and thereby help to reverse the crisis these top predators are facing in all oceans.”

Cat Dorey, Independent Advisor, Australia, said:

“There’s still time to get this right, but the MSC needs to act now. With the vast amount of input, proposals, consultations and expertise that have been offered from groups around the world, the MSC has everything they need to make the new Standard one that will promote abundant, thriving oceans. We hope they will step up and do what’s needed, and we’ll be watching closely to see that they do.”

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BACKGROUND

[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.

[Request for Transparency scorecard](#): It's crucial that MSC adopts best practices for transparent consultation during this review. Stakeholders must understand who is invited to engage and why, how best to engage, how input is used, and how and why decisions are made at each step of the way. We are rating MSC against our [best practice recommendations](#) that draw from the leading literature on consultation as well as our members' many years of experience engaging with the MSC programme.

[Critical changes needed to improve MSC Standard scorecard](#): The MSC Standard should reflect global best practices in fisheries management and drive positive change on the water. We are watching to see how the current FSR addresses the [critical flaws](#) the Make Stewardship Count coalition of experts has identified in the current standard, to reduce the ecological impacts of certified fisheries.

Final decisions on the draft standard will be made by the board of the MSC on January 24, 2022, with the standard being released for consultation on February 1, 2022. The standard will then be open for consultations for 60 days, closing on April 4, 2022.