



## **Marine Stewardship Council**

### **General Statement for the Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management**

**January 2024**

The MSC celebrates and congratulates the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and all its members and participants for the adoption and launch of the Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management (SCFM). It has been proven that well-established fisheries management systems maintain stocks at healthy levels consistent with sustainable goals, whereas in fisheries with less effective management, stocks and trends are worse. Fish stocks are the ultimate renewable food resource. Sustainable fishing should be at the center of the 'blue food' revolution, as we create resilient food systems for the future.

To that end, the mandate of the SCFM to provide technical and policy guidance on fisheries governance and management for the conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources based on the best available science as well as the ecosystem and precautionary approaches, is crucial.

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) expects that the SCFM and all its members and participants will help identify significant global issues and trends in fisheries management and sustainable development that require urgent measures, offering guidance and recommendations for addressing them, promoting information sharing, cooperation to support good and coordinated practices in policies and actions, and finally to integrate ecological, social, economic, nutrition and gender considerations into management plans and policies.

MSC considers and would like to recall that fisheries management is a wide topic that covers and integrates several areas. Thus, MSC believes that, to generate real impact and change through the SCFM, it is important to focus its scope recalling the mandate. Priorities should be to provide technical guidance and solutions to develop management plans, to define management goals in fishery policies, to design sustainable harvest strategies, to transform and evolve systems, not only individual tools, and to always do it with an integral understanding of modern fisheries management considering the ecosystem approach, the science evidence-based management concept and the precautionary approach. Let's not forget the goals to achieve, the conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources.

In regard of the specific agenda of this first session of the SCFM, MSC would like to share the following findings and suggestions to the different items to be discussed.



## Small-scale fisheries

Small-scale fisheries (SSF) provide around half of all global seafood catch and support the livelihoods of millions worldwide, contributing as a major source of employment, income for local economies and food security for people. Despite their scale, these fisheries can still have a significant impact on the oceans as they can interact with key habitats and species which play a fundamental role on the ecosystems.

Therefore, effective management of these fisheries towards sustainable levels is fundamental to achieve our common goals. These goals are well established in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the FAO Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries.

To support the contribution of SSF to these goals, MSC provides tools, expertise, training and funding to help improve the sustainable management of these fisheries. However, collaboration is crucial and MSC will continue to work with governments, fishery improvement stakeholders, supply chain operators and others to make sure small-scale fisheries are supported in becoming sustainably managed.

The SCFM should play a fundamental role to achieve these goals. To that end, MSC invites the SCFM and all its members and participants to invest efforts to generate management solutions for the following challenges, among others: a) fisheries operating under open access regimes; b) single biological units (stocks) harvested by several coastal management units; c) strong fragmentation and weak organization of users; d) monitoring, control and surveillance solutions for geographically isolated fisheries; e) integration of small-scale fishers in the decision-making processes; and f) participation of small-scale fishers into the quota or other catch control systems.

## Biodiversity

Fisheries management must integrate the protection of marine biodiversity to allow nature to be productive, resilient and adaptable to environmental changes so it can keep providing food, economic and cultural benefits. Overfishing and bycatch are two of the leading drivers of biodiversity loss in our oceans. Therefore, special effort must be focused on transforming the way fishing is done to minimize its impacts and safeguard biodiversity. Research shows that with effective fisheries management which considers wider ecosystem impacts, high levels of sustainable food production are possible while also maintaining biodiversity.



To monitor this progress, we need credible, measurable, science-based indicators for efforts to maintain marine biodiversity. MSC programme is recognised as an official indicator of the post-2020 Kunming – Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership. These recognitions reflect the scientific reliability of the data and the rigor of the MSC programme, and that it is helping to combat overfishing and biodiversity loss.

MSC will keep engaging with fishers, stakeholders and governments to support the protection of biodiversity and the accountability of these efforts. Certification against MSC standards offers fisheries and governments a credible tool to demonstrate that key targets under SDG14 are met. MSC will keep supporting innovative research via grants offered from our Ocean Stewardship Fund (OSF) to fisheries, to understand the impact of fisheries on marine biodiversity as well as funding research into measures which mitigate those impacts.

MSC would like to invite the SCFM and all its members and participants to contribute to these efforts, particularly developing management solutions within fisheries management plans for: a) the integration of ecosystem-based fisheries management as a principle of policies and laws; and b) a better inclusion of mitigation measures of environmental impacts of fishing non-target species, direct and indirect interactions with protected species and impacts on specific habitats.

#### Eradication of the illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

The damaging impacts of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing on marine life, ocean health, the livelihoods of those fishing legitimately, and human rights are already well known. IUU fishing is also a major global problem which undermines the international community's efforts to protect oceans for a sustainable future.

We need to develop frameworks and tools to help fishers improve the quality of data they collect and strengthen the monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement systems to properly detect non-compliance and violations to the regulations.

Another fundamental action to combat IUU fishing is to ensure seafood is traceable back to its supply fishery, properly identified and segregated, to guarantee the information flow along the supply chain actors up to better-informed final consumers.

Fostering private-public and cross jurisdiction cooperation, can incentivize fishers to adopt best practices in harvesting, better compliance levels, increase the



transparency of fishery operations and supply chains, and accountability to suppliers and consumers.

These challenges cannot be overcome without an effective multi-stakeholder collaboration. MSC believes that the SCFM should play an important role to seek for practical solutions in several areas related to fighting IUU fishing. Facilitating adapted reporting tools such as catch documentation schemes, continuing the efforts to quantify IUU fishing and exploring the use of all technological solutions for more efficient monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement systems at all scales, are amongst the crucial ones. MSC also invites the SCFM and its members and participants to reinforce existing Regional Fisheries Management Organizations and promote the creation of new ones where shared and transboundary stocks are harvested by several fleets, developing clear and inclusive decision-making and transparent dispute resolution rules that create trust and higher compliance, and with coordinated monitoring and enforcement measures across jurisdictions.

MSC also considers fundamental and invites the SCFM and its members and participants to work jointly with the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade to develop seafood traceability solutions. This should include providing interoperative chain of custody documentation systems to help close loopholes across jurisdictions, and promoting information exchange leading to reciprocal trust and accountability within the market and society in general. Finally, MSC believes that the SCFM should play a key role to support the expansion of the adoption of the FAO Port State Measures Agreement.

#### Effects of climate change on fishery management

Fishing provides huge potential to contribute to reduced human impacts to climate by producing blue foods, including fish, shellfish and seaweeds, which are usually both lower in carbon emissions and require fewer resources than land-based animal proteins per kg edible product.

Nevertheless, climate change, and particularly ocean global warming, is already creating changes that affect the structure and productivity of marine ecosystems and generate significant challenges for fisheries management. The combined effects of climate change, overfishing, habitat interaction, and poor fisheries management are placing unprecedented pressure on our oceans. This presents a major challenge to businesses, economies, and communities that rely on fishing for their livelihoods and nutrition.



Many fisheries are already experiencing the impacts of climate change firsthand, particularly through changes in distribution of target species, the amount of available catch, bycatch, and gear interactions with protected and endangered species. More research is needed to understand how we best manage fish stocks in unprecedented circumstances, ensuring healthy oceans and sustainable fisheries in a changing climate. This requires international collaboration and more efficient fisheries management frameworks.

To achieve and maintain sustainability in the context of climate change, fisheries managers, scientists and governments will need to think beyond the current socio-economic structures in place in the form of national regulations and traditional technologies. Thus, MSC invites the SCFM and all its members and participants to investigate how policies could be improved to ensure fairer share of fish stocks shifting across management boundaries due to climate change.

Moreover, MSC invites the SCFM to help develop dynamic and adaptive management systems with responsive harvest strategies that will make fisheries more likely to be resilient to the impacts of climate change, as well as better tools for monitoring evolving environmental conditions to adapt stock assessments considering new sources of uncertainty. Finally, the definition and adoption of transparent conflict-resolution mechanisms, not only at international level but also among different users, will be crucial for an effective fisheries management in the current changing environment.

### Final considerations

As established at the last COFI session during the adoption of the SCFM, and reassured now, MSC will contribute to all the above-mentioned challenges and solutions and will provide its more than 25 years of experience on certifying sustainable fisheries and traceable supply chains. More than 600 fisheries representing circa 20% of global marine wild capture are part of the MSC programme bringing a huge, diverse, and detailed knowledge of their environmental performance and their successful fisheries management systems. MSC is keen to share and facilitate its experience and expertise to the SCFM and all its members to contribute to find practical and adapted solutions for more efficient fisheries management to achieve sustainable and resilient fisheries globally.