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Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture from the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)

Overview

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) welcomes the opportunity to input into the Productivity Commission review on Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture at this draft report stage. We also support a number of the draft recommendations relevant to wild capture fisheries which will further strengthen the environmental sustainability of Australian fisheries.

MSC makes the following comments with a particular focus on Chapter 7 of the draft report, 'Managing the environmental impact of fisheries.'

MSC, A Global Standard

- The MSC is an international non-profit organisation established to address the problem of unsustainable fishing and to safeguard seafood supplies for the future. Our vision is for the world's oceans to be teeming with life and seafood supplies safeguarded for this and future generations.
- The MSC Fisheries Standard is designed to assess if a fishery is well-managed and sustainable. It has been developed in consultation with scientists, the fishing industry and conservation groups. It reflects the most up to date understanding of internationally accepted fisheries science and best practice management. Certification to the MSC Fisheries Standard is voluntary. It is open to all fisheries involved in the wild-capture of marine or freshwater organisms. This includes most types of fish and shellfish, of any size, type or location. This standard was developed in accordance to the internationally agreed principles of the UN's FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries¹.
- Today, 10% of global wild-caught seafood by volume is certified against the MSC's rigorous environmental standard for sustainable fishing, rising to more than 40% in the Northeast Atlantic and 83% in the Northeast Pacific.
- To become MSC certified a fishery must demonstrate that it meets the requirements of the three MSC Principles for sustainability. These principles are: Principle 1; the fishing activity must be at a level which insures it can carry on indefinitely, Principle 2: fishing operations must be managed to maintain the structure, productivity, function and diversity of the ecosystem, Principle 3: the fishery must comply with the relevant laws and have a management system that is responsive to changing

¹ <https://www.msc.org/about-us/credibility/how-we-meet-best-practice#guidelines-for-the-ecolabelling>



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circumstances. As such, the MSC standard is not just focused on environmental outcomes, but includes all aspects of the fishery across the 3 MSC principles.

- In addition to the MSC fisheries standard, the MSC Chain of Custody (CoC) standard ensures that the MSC ecolabel is only displayed on seafood from an MSC certified sustainable fishery. Certification against the MSC CoC standard reduces mislabelling and substitution of seafood products and ensures that consumers know their seafood products come from a sustainable fishery.

Credible and Robust Third Party Certification

- As mentioned in the Productivity Commission's draft report, third party certification can demonstrate benefits to fishers with market access, social licence to operate and other intangible benefits including financial incentives, increased government confidence and supply chain assurance².
- To ensure that certification is credible and robust, assessments against the MSC standards is carried out by independent, third party assessment bodies. Stakeholder input is incorporated throughout the process and all documents are transparent and publically available.
- MSC is committed to the values of independence, transparency, impartiality and stakeholder participation. As a result, MSC's governance structure is balanced with stakeholders represented from a range of backgrounds preventing the dominance of single party interests.

Global Impact

- The global benefits of the MSC program are also well documented with recognised environmental improvements on the water³ and increasingly with supply chain partners⁴ and management bodies⁵.

² <http://wrlc.com.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/WRL-Fishery-MSC-Cost-and-Benefit-Review-2015.pdf>
https://www.msc.org/documents/measuring-business-impacts/poseidon-report-into-the-impact-of-msc-certification-on-scottish-haddock/at_download/file

³ <https://www.msc.org/documents/environmental-benefits/global-impacts/msc-global-impacts-report-2016>
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165783615300758>

⁴ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X12001054>
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-11/gold-standard-sustainable-tuna-increases-export-opportunities/7401420>

⁵ <https://www.msc.org/newsroom/news/indian-ocean-tuna-commission-reaches-landmark-decision-on-harvest-control-rules>



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Within management regimes, fisheries that have engaged in the MSC program have used their market position to drive significant management reform. For example, within the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), the MSC certified Maldivian pole and line skipjack tuna fishery leverage its market position on the back of MSC certification to help implement much needed harvest control rules in the Indian Ocean. The agreement, reached by member states attending the IOTC annual meeting in late-2015 in La Reunion, marked a turning point in the management of Indian Ocean tuna stocks and will support the long term sustainability of the Indian Ocean skipjack fishery.

Australia's Significant Momentum and Commitment to the MSC:

- Across Australia, 20 fisheries have met the MSC's rigorous standard for sustainable fishing and continue to advocate global best practice by maintaining MSC certification. This strong commitment to MSC on the water is backed up on land with 43 supply chain partners in Australia now handling or selling sustainable seafood (including Coles, Woolworths and ALDI). Recognition of the MSC ecolabel by Australian consumers is now at 24% (1 in 4 consumers)⁶. In the same survey, 71% of Australian consumers said they prefer a product with an ecolabel that has undergone third party certification. One of MSC's most important activities is educating consumers and raising awareness of sustainable fishing. Through a variety of communications MSC allows consumers to understand why sustainable fishing matters, and how they can support it by seeking out the blue MSC label.
- In Western Australia, the State Government's 2012 \$14.5m commitment to MSC has already helped to create management efficiencies including reforming the consultation approach for non-catch sector stakeholders interested in fisheries management. It has also helped to restructure the approach to Harvest Strategy implementation in the State⁷.
- Western Australia's bioregional approach to third party certification using the MSC's standard came after a significant due diligence process which documented the case for third party certification and why MSC's standard was chosen as the most appropriate. Assessment of a fishery against the MSC requirements is still a voluntary step to be decided on by the licence holders within that fishery. However, the benefits that accompany a State-wide MSC pre-assessment approach can offer research and policy staff at the Department of Fisheries the chance to make efficiencies for any improvement works needed.

⁶ <https://www.msc.org/global-impacts/msc-annual-report>

⁷ http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/Documents/management_papers/fmp271.pdf



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- In 2013, the Fisheries and Research Development Corporation (FRDC) undertook a study looking at community perceptions of the sustainability of the fishing industry in Australia⁸. When asked if the market research group thought Australia's fisheries were sustainable, 38% were not sure and 20% said no ($n=1021$). In other market research, it is widely recognised that NGO's and academic institutions are the most credible opinion makers with consumers looking at the sustainable seafood discussion. Fishers use this trust in ecolabels to demonstrate their sustainability.

It is MSC's intent to reinforce stakeholder confidence in regulatory requirements and to recognise fisheries operating at a best practice level. By working closely with the fishing industry and governments, we believe in our mission of promoting ocean sustainability, the MSC is actively contributing to global efforts to improve long-term food security, maintain and strengthen livelihoods, and ensure healthy oceans now and for generations to come.

Yours faithfully,

Patrick Caleo, MSC Asia Pacific Regional Director

⁸ http://wamscpublic.s14.powerwebhosting.com.au/images/1-2013_community_perceptions_australian_fishing_industry.pdf