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The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)  
Fisheries Standard Review: Reviewing the  
requirements to safeguard Endangered,  
Threatened or Protected (ETP) species,  
stocks, or populations

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## **The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Fisheries Standard Review: Reviewing the requirements to safeguard Endangered, Threatened or Protected (ETP) species, stocks, or populations**

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### **BACKGROUND**

The [Marine Stewardship Council \(MSC\) Fisheries Standard](#) is the leading international standard for sustainable fishing and is based on [United Nations FAO](#) guidelines for ecolabelling. More than 15% of the world's wild seafood harvest is now certified as sustainable to this standard. Every five years, the MSC review the Fisheries Standard to incorporate widely accepted new science and fisheries management best practices. MSC also complete a review to improve its implementation and address stakeholder concerns. Stakeholders from all sectors complete a core function in the MSC review, helping to identify issues, develop solutions, and impact test proposed changes.

Objectives of the Fisheries Standard Review are as follows:

1. To include better scientific understanding and fishery management practices in the Fisheries Standard.
2. To make the Fisheries Standard clearer for those using it in fishery assessments.
3. To make the Fisheries Standard less complex and remove barriers to fisheries joining and staying in the program.
4. To make the Fisheries Standard more accessible to fisheries in the Global South and more applicable to high priority species and ecosystems.
5. To improve data collection and evidence-based decision-making.

Full details are provided in the [Fisheries Standard Review Terms of Reference](#).

The Fisheries Standard Principle 2 scoring requirements for Endangered, Threatened, or Protected (ETP) species, stock or population (hereafter species) considers a fishery's impact, both direct and indirect, on species listed as ETP in certain national or international agreements. ETP often includes marine mammals, seabirds, sea turtles and some fish species. In this Fisheries Standard Review, MSC has included projects reviewing the requirements fisheries must meet for 'ETP species' and 'preventing lost gear and ghost fishing'. These projects have been included based on feedback that widely accepted and adopted science and management best practices have progressed and updates are needed. Through initial research, MSC has determined that changes to the Fisheries Standard from these projects may be significant and "changes to intent", meaning that – based on stakeholder feedback – MSC may change the scope of what is eligible for assessment, ETP scoring requirements, and supporting guidance.

Any proposed changes will be open to consultation in 2020 and 2021. Full details of all consultation activities will be posted on the [MSC website](#). The MSC will consult stakeholders to develop options for how the Fisheries Standard should be updated. If an updated Fisheries Standard is proposed, the focus in 2021 will be on reviewing the changes and any draft text. MSC will work with stakeholders to ensure changes are clear and that the new Fisheries Standard delivers the vision and mission of the MSC program.

The following sections provide summaries of the ETP projects being developed by the MSC for public consultation in June-July 2020.

### **PROJECT: REVIEWING WHICH AGREEMENTS ARE USED FOR DESIGNATING ETP**

The MSC received feedback that designation of ETP species (assigning where ETP are scored in an assessment) may be inconsistent between fisheries' assessments that may interact with the same vulnerable taxa. The MSC has identified root causes by discussing issues with fisheries, stakeholders, and third-party assessors who all noted inconsistencies caused by designating according to red lists of varying origin and quality and when using national 'protected' listings, as the definitions behind the national listings tend to be less consistent across listings and possibly less precise.

The purpose of this project is to ensure ETP species are designated consistently across fisheries assessments. Consistent designation is important as ETP species are more vulnerable and therefore require more protective requirements, appropriate actions for improvement, and consideration of cumulative impacts between MSC certified fisheries. Consistent designation is also important so that stakeholders and fisheries are aware of

potential ETP concerns and can put management in place to protect species in advance. This should be in practice even if a fishery is looking to improve many years before entering the MSC program (for example, in a fishery improvement project).

Based on research and findings from information-gathering workshops, the MSC has drafted an alternative proposal for designation of ETP during an MSC fishery assessment, to be evaluated in public consultation.

### **PROJECT: SCORING REQUIREMENTS FOR ETP**

Third-party assessors, fisheries, and stakeholders have noted ambiguity in some of the definitions used in the MSC Fisheries Standard, and information requirements to support scores. To achieve best practice (also known as Scoring Guidepost 80) scores for information bycatch and ETP issues require use of some “higher verifiability” information. Observer coverage and electronic monitoring are examples of “higher verifiability” information that can be included. However, the MSC does not currently prescribe levels of coverage and it is down to the third-party assessors to determine whether coverage is appropriate for the scale and intensity of the fishery. The MSC included this topic in Fisheries Standard Review research after receiving feedback that teams may not be including clear links to “higher verifiability” information when assigning best practice scores, and that appropriate precaution was not being used.

The purpose of this project is to provide clarity in definitions to third-party assessors, fisheries, stakeholders, and other interested parties. Clarity in definitions will ensure the MSC requirements are clearly communicated, increase consistency between assessments, and help to reduce disagreement in assessments when definitions are ambiguous. Regarding information to support scores, the purpose is to ensure widely accepted and adopted best practices for supporting information are incorporated into the Fisheries Standard.

Based on research and findings from information-gathering workshops, the MSC seeks feedback on definitions used and feedback on supporting information requirements, through planned workshops and public consultation.

### **PROJECT: PREVENTING LOST GEAR AND GHOST FISHING**

Stakeholders have raised concerns regarding how ghost gear (abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear) impacts are considered in the Fisheries Standard. Feedback has stated that the implicit way ghost gear issues are handled (e.g. principally through supporting guidance) has led to outcomes which do not demonstrate effective ghost gear management strategies. Additionally, there is a growing evidence base on impacts from ghost gear on the marine environment. In response, the MSC included a ghost gear project within the Fisheries Standard Review with the aim of exploring this concern further and developing options for revising policy if necessary.

The purpose of this project is to explore options to make the consideration of ghost gear impacts explicit in fishery assessments, and to develop new requirements aimed at promoting the implementation of gear loss avoidance strategies and mitigation actions in MSC certified fisheries. Further consultation is proposed to examine the possible scope of new requirements and the extent to which MSC certified fisheries are already aligned with best practice before options for revision are developed.

### **WORKSHOP: WORLD MARINE MAMMAL CONFERENCE**

In December 2019, the MSC held a workshop at the World Marine Mammal Conference (WMMC) titled ‘Incentivising consistent data collection and transparent reporting of marine mammal bycatch in fisheries’. The purpose of the workshop was information-sharing, to create a clear picture of best practice approaches to incentivising collection and sharing of transparent, consistent information on marine mammal bycatch. The draft workshop report is shared as an ‘IWC SC For Information’ paper, including presentation summaries, discussion on bycatch information quality, a synthesis of incentives and disincentives that could encourage sharing of transparent information, and theory and practical steps to engage with fishers.

### **CONSULTATION OPPORTUNITIES**

The MSC will hold a series of consultations throughout 2020 and 2021 for stakeholders to take part in the development of the Fisheries Standard. This will include a series of online workshops, surveys, and one-to-one discussions, where MSC will seek input from stakeholders on potential revisions required to the MSC Fisheries Standard. Registration for consultations in May – July 2020 will open on Wednesday 13 May 2020. [Sign up to register your interest in the FSR and to be notified of upcoming consultation activities.](#)