



MSC Fisheries Standard

Summary of changes

Version 3.0



Marine
Stewardship
Council

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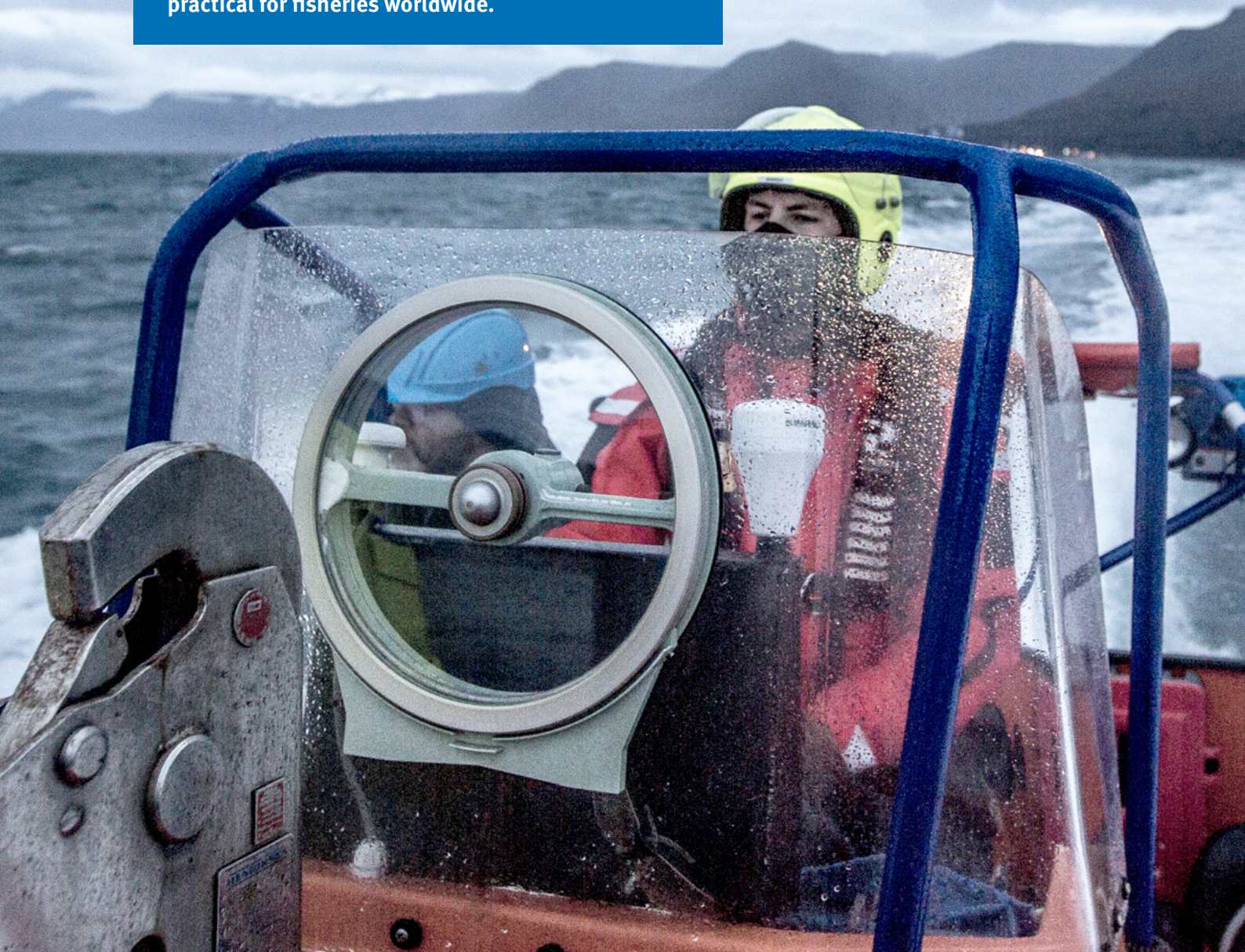
Introduction

The MSC Fisheries Standard is the leading international standard for sustainable fishing and is used to assess if fisheries are well-managed and environmentally sustainable.

The latest version of our Standard (version 3.0) was published in October 2022, following the most comprehensive review to date.

Our revised Standard includes better protections for marine life and stronger fisheries management and compliance requirements.

We believe the improvements strike the right balance between setting a high ambition to protect the ocean and ensuring our requirements are practical for fisheries worldwide.



Reviewing our Standard

We regularly review our Standard to ensure it remains the leading measure of fisheries sustainability. The most recent review began in 2018 and concluded in June 2022.

To support the development of our new requirements and guidance, we collected and analysed a wealth of information from different sources, including:

- Independent research
- Advice from the MSC governance bodies
- Impact assessments and pilot testing
- Stakeholder consultations

Stakeholder consultation



Transitioning to version 3.0

- Fisheries seeking certification for the first time will need to adhere to the revised Standard (version 3.0) from 01 May 2023.
- Certified fisheries have at least three years before they are required to begin the transition to version 3.0. This is in compliance with the [UN FAO Best Practice Guidelines for Ecolabelling](#).
- We have introduced a new policy that requires all certificate holders to have completed reassessment to version 3.0 within six years of it being published (01 November 2028).

Summary of Changes to our Requirements



Evidence Requirements Framework

The new Evidence Requirements Framework provides assessors with a comprehensive method to evaluate the quality of evidence used to determine if a fishery is sustainable and well-managed.

- Assessors must evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a fishery's monitoring system to determine the accuracy of the information provided.
- Assessors must consider the method of information collection, the extent of the fishery's activity that is monitored and how the information has been reported and provided to the assessment team.
- To be used to score information performance indicators and scoring issues throughout the Standard, including environmental impacts, shark finning scoring issues and compliance with management regulations.

All fisheries are required to have a monitoring system which involves independent verification of catches and reporting to management agencies.

At the SG80, the monitoring system must also be designed to generate precise estimates of catch and include at least some level of independent observation.

- This could be provided by an observer programme or electronic monitoring.

Furthermore, fisheries which operate on the high seas and are managed by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations must have independent observation covering at least 30% of annual fishing activities to meet SG80:

- This is assessed against the Endangered, Threatened and Protected and Out-of-Scope Species scoring issue under Principle 2.

A lower level of coverage is permitted only if it is designed to achieve a target level of precision, is legally binding and is supported by analysis that is publicly available.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

New requirements for harvest strategies

Fisheries managed by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations will be required to achieve effective stock-wide harvest strategies within a set timeframe.

- Fisheries will be required to meet specific milestones in order to deliver state-of-the-art harvest strategies (achieving a score of SG 100), including Management Strategy Evaluation and agreeing effective catch and/or effort constraints.
- In recognition of the significant increase in performance required and time needed to reach these agreements, fisheries will be given additional time:
 - Fisheries with previously certified stocks will be given a maximum of five additional years to deliver the new level of performance required.

Certified fisheries can choose to adopt the new harvest strategy requirements (found in Section SE) early, provided the following criteria are met:

- Early application of Section SE must be announced before 01 May 2023.
- A majority agreement from all fisheries targeting a certified stock to undertake early application of the new requirements.
- All certified fisheries targeting the same stock will be put on the same timeline for delivering state-of-the-art harvest strategies, creating a unified effort to influence RFMO decisions.
- Assessment to the new Standard (version 3.0) at their next reassessment, meaning all revised requirements must be met.

Visit the [MSC website](#) to find out more

Preventing shark finning

We have further strengthened our requirements to increase confidence that shark finning does not take place on MSC certified fishing trips.

- Any fishery that retains sharks must now have a Fins Naturally Attached (FNA) policy in place – with no exceptions.
- The new Evidence Requirements Framework will provide greater confidence that an FNA policy is in place and being applied.
- Our shark finning requirements also include a new definition for shark, ensuring that more species are covered.
 - This now includes *selachimorpha* (true sharks) and *rhinopristiformes* (e.g. shovel nose rays, guitar fishes).
 - If the fishery operates within a jurisdiction that defines additional species as sharks, such as skates or chimaeras, the assessment must consider those additional species.
- Vessels involved in a conviction for shark finning in the past two years are already ineligible for certification.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

Endangered, threatened and protected species

We have strengthened our requirements to ensure fisheries further reduce impacts on endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species.

- A new classification system to ensure classification of ETP species is more consistent and objective.
- More species, including all marine mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles (out-of-scope species), will be automatically subject to the new requirements and afforded greater protections under our Standard.
- This system will ensure a more precautionary approach is taken to the assessment of sharks.
 - Our definition for sharks, in relation to ETP species, has been expanded to include all chondrichthyans.

Impacts of fisheries on ETP populations will be assessed more explicitly.

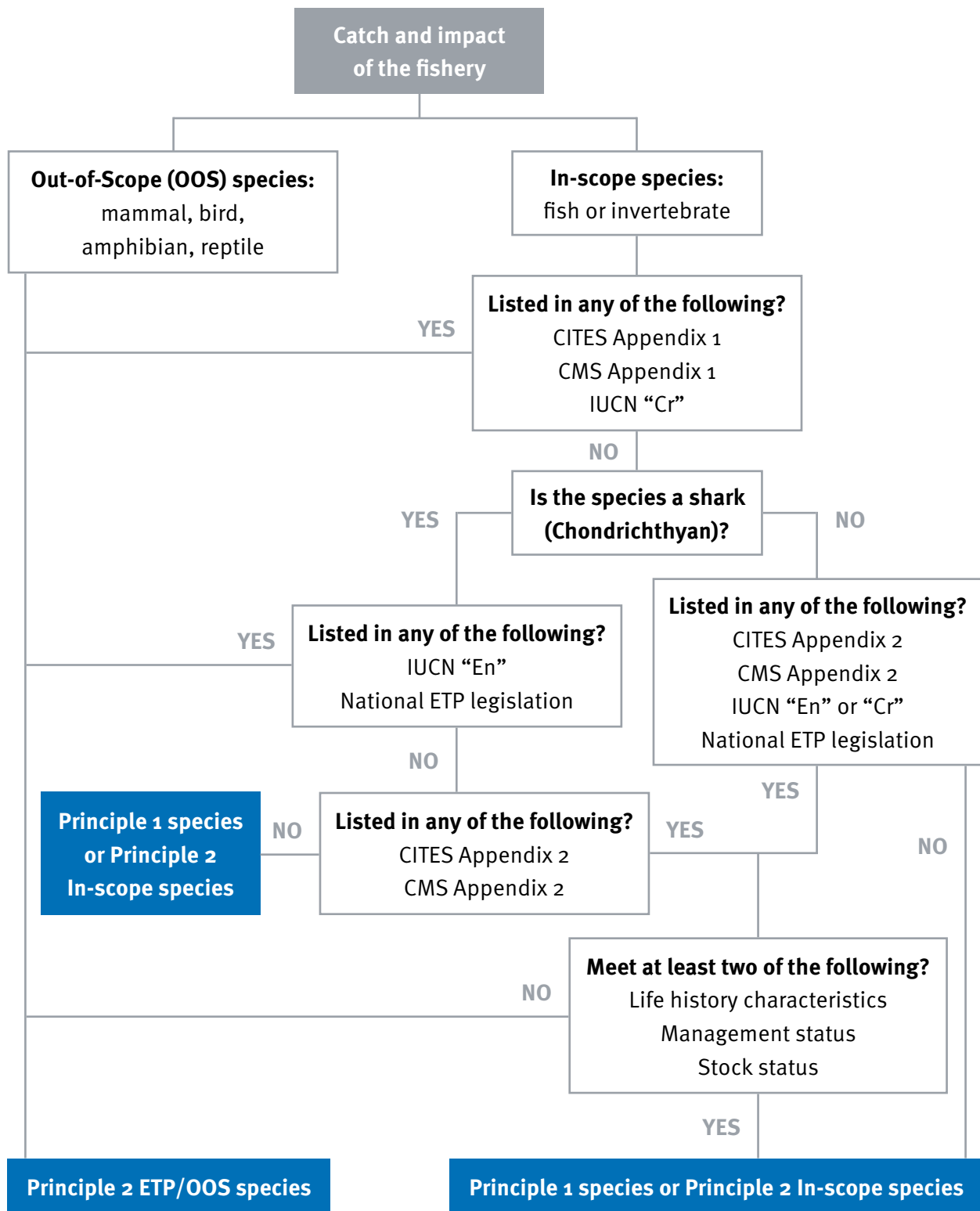
- Fisheries must demonstrate how they are reducing these impacts through the application of best practice management measures.
- We have redefined the way a fishery's impact on ETP species recover is evaluated.
- Assessors must now consider whether a species is able to recover to a minimum of '50% of unimpacted levels within three generations or 100 years, whichever is shorter' – known as *Favourable Conservation Status*.

New Evidence Requirements Framework to ensure assessment of ETP species is consistent and based on a robust and consistent standard of information.

- Provides a systematic approach to judging the quality of information provided by a fishery.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

New ETP classification system



Preventing gear loss and ghost fishing

We have strengthened our requirements to further prevent gear loss and reduce its impact.

- Assessors must now explicitly consider the impact of ghost gear and ensure fisheries are implementing best practice approaches to reduce gear loss.
- Fisheries are now required to implement effective management strategies to minimise gear loss and its impact – including those using Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs).
- This includes monitoring lost gear and implementing marking and retrieval programs, demonstrating lost gear has a low impact and modifying gear.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

Risk-Based Framework

The Risk-Based Framework (RBF) has been updated to ensure it delivers precautionary and robust outcomes and is aligned with the Standard's default assessment tree.

- The Productivity Susceptibility Analysis tool has been tailored to better assess the impact of fisheries on marine mammals, seabirds, amphibians and reptiles (out-of-scope species). Clarification of language to ensure the RBF is applied more accurately and consistently, including:
 - Triggering requirements which describe when the RBF should be used.
 - Requirements describing the assessment of target species and key low trophic level species.
- The RBF has also been moved into the new MSC Fisheries Standard Toolbox.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

Clarifying our requirements for habitats

We have clarified our requirements and guidance to ensure the impacts of fisheries on habitats are assessed more accurately and more consistently.

- Habitats will now be classified as ‘More Sensitive’ or ‘Less Sensitive’ depending on how long it takes to recover from the impacts of fishing.
 - This replaces the terms ‘Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem’ (unless specifically designated by UN FAO criteria) and ‘Commonly encountered habitats’.
- ‘Move on’ rules will no longer be a minimum requirement for fisheries interacting with ‘More Sensitive’ habitats, however fisheries must demonstrate appropriate measures are in place if sensitive habitats are encountered.

Visit the [MSC website](#) to find out more

Clarifying our requirements for ecosystems

We have clarified our requirements and guidance to ensure fisheries' impacts on ecosystems are assessed more consistently.

- Addition of two new clauses to clarify and define how ecosystems and ecosystem elements are identified during an assessment.
 - Explicit identification and description of the assessed ecosystem.
 - Identification and assessment of all impacted key ecosystem elements, and clarification of which ecosystem elements should be considered.
- New Evidence Requirements Framework to better evaluate the information provided to demonstrate a fishery's impact on an ecosystem.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

Monitoring, control and surveillance

Updated guidance to ensure monitoring, control and surveillance systems include well-integrated mechanisms and tools to improve compliance with regulations:

- Assessors must ensure systematic non-compliance is not evident within a fishery, as a minimum requirement for certification.
- Clarification of scoring issues to ensure fisheries are assessed on individual compliance components rather than receiving an ‘all-or-nothing’ score.
- New scoring issue to assess fishers’ compliance with management rules.
- New Evidence Requirements Framework to support the evaluation of fisheries’ compliance where appropriate.

Visit the [MSC website](#) to find out more

Clarifying the assessment of inseparable stocks

We have developed new guidance on reference periods for inseparable or practicably inseparable stocks.

- Assessors should now use a five-year average reference period to better understand catch composition.
- In certain circumstances assessors can use a different time period, if justifiable. This includes situations where the fishery lacks data, or the life history of the species does not allow for a five-year reference period.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

Clarifying the assessment of dynamic stocks

We have developed new guidance to support the assessment of stocks which experience large fluctuations in population size, such as small pelagics and short-lived invertebrates such as squid and crabs. This includes guidance on:

- Adapting to the impact of long-term climate change and incorporation of ‘buffers’ into stock management plans e.g. managing stocks around a biomass target range instead of a single point.
- Examples of robust management systems that take into account fluctuations in stock size.
- The application of our Standard to a wider variety of species and fishery types to ensure a more precautionary approach is taken.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

Clarifying the assessment of squid, crab and octopus

New guidance has been developed to clarify the assessment of squid, crab and octopus fisheries and improve accessibility.

- New requirements to allow proxy methods to be used as alternatives to the maximum sustainable yield, and guidance on the use of proxies for squid fisheries.
- Additional guidance on the assessment of male-only crab harvests.
- Additional guidance for octopus fisheries on the application of the Standard requirements.

Visit the [MSC website](#) to find out more

Modified assessment trees

We have clarified requirements for our modified assessment trees for introduced species, salmon and bivalves.

- The modified trees will now be referred to as ‘Sections’ rather than ‘Annexes’.
- Clarification of eligibility criteria for introduced species; fisheries will remain eligible for certification but no further introduction of the species is permitted.
- Inclusion of Section SD (Introduced species) as a permanent part of the Standard, rather than a pilot.
- CABs will also be required to use the Inseparable or Practicably Inseparable (IPI) stocks announcement template when assessing salmon fisheries that include such stocks.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

Key Low Trophic level stocks

We have clarified our requirements and developed new guidance to ensure key low trophic level (LTL) species are assessed more consistently.

- Assessors are now permitted to use spawning stock indicator or total biomass indicator to assess key LTL stocks.
 - If total biomass indicator is used, it must be demonstrated that management measures are in place to protect key LTL stocks and the environment.
- Similarly, a precautionary reference point should be used for the management of key LTL species, which is not less than 20% of the total biomass (Bo) or the spawning stock level (SSBo) that would be expected in the absence of fishing.
- Stocks designated as key LTL during an assessment will now remain as such throughout the certification period, unless new information is available during a surveillance audit.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

Making our Standard more efficient

We have clarified the language and structure of the Standard to ensure assessments can be carried out more efficiently and that outcomes are more consistent:

- Clarification of language and removal of duplication across Principle 2, including removal of 15 scoring issues with no reduction in expected performance.
- Clarification of definitions, including ‘Measures’, ‘Partial Strategy’ and ‘Strategy’.
- Simplification of Principle 2 components:
 - Endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) and out-of-scope (OOS) species (marine mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles) will be assessed under a single component (ETP/OOS).
 - All fish and invertebrates assessed under ‘In-scope species’ component.

Visit the [MSC website](#) to find out more

Addition of new scope criteria

We have developed new scope criteria, which assessors must apply when considering a fishery for certification:

- Vessels convicted in the past two years of a serious crime will be excluded from the MSC program.
 - Serious crime includes illegal fishing, trafficking and piracy and the definition aligns with that used in the [UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime](#).
- The MSC program already excludes fisheries which target marine mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, those using destructive practices or entities convicted of forced and child labour. Vessels involved in a conviction for shark finning in the past two years are also ineligible for certification.

[Visit the MSC website to find out more](#)

Fisheries Certification Process

We have updated the Fisheries Certification Process (FCP) and published two new versions:

FCP version 3.0 - Incorporates changes to the MSC Fisheries Standard version 3.0 and additional changes to the assessment process.

– Used for assessments against v3.0 of our Standard.

FCP version 2.3 - Incorporates changes to the assessment process.

– Used for assessments against V2.01 of our Standard. To supersede FCP v2.2 from 01 May 2023.

Changes to the assessment process include:

- Clarified requirements on the timing, duration and coordination of the harmonisation process.
- Revised traceability reporting, stating how product is moved and traced within a fishery.

Visit the [MSC website](#) to find out more

Contact us

If you have any questions about the revised MSC Fisheries Standard and Fisheries Certification Process, please contact Standards@msc.org or your local Fisheries Outreach representative.

Visit the MSC website to access all Fisheries Standard and Fisheries Certification Process documents.



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