Marine Stewardship Council Fisheries Standard

Published by AGRINFO on 12 Dec 2023; Revised 23 Jul 2024

Marine Stewardship Council publishes updated Fisheries Standard (v3.1)

Marine Stewardship Council Fisheries Standard v3.1

International Trade Centre (ITC) Standards Map: Marine Stewardship Council - MSC

Update

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) published its Fisheries Standard version 3.1 on 22 July 2024. The MSC Board approved amendments that resolve technical issues with v3.0 requirements, including those for fisheries targeting tuna, managed by regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs).

Background

For details on how the MSC Fisheries Standard operates, see the ITC Standards Map.

The Marine Stewardship Council is an international non-profit organisation that promotes best practices for wild capture fishery and seafood traceability. The MSC manages and governs two standards: the MSC Fisheries Standard for sustainable wild-capture fisheries; and the MSC Chain of Custody Standard, a supply chain assurance system for companies trading MSC certified seafood.

The MSC Fisheries Standard is a private standard open to all fisheries that catch marine or freshwater organisms in the wild. The blue MSC label indicates that produce marketed is wild fish or seafood from fisheries that have been certified to the MSC Fisheries Standard. Certification to the Standard is voluntary.

The Standard is based on the Food and Agriculture Organization's Guidelines for the ecolabelling of fish and fishery products (FAO 2009). It meets best practice requirements set by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance, the verification body for sustainability standards. It is also benchmarked against the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI).

The MSC is a third-party certification programme. This means that independent conformity assessment bodies evaluate the standard to ensure the outcomes of assessments are unbiased.

Copyright © **COLEAD 2026,** *AGRINFO is funded by the European Union and implemented by COLEAD.*

The MSC Fisheries Standard has three core principles that every fishery must meet if it wants to sell its certified catch.

- Sustainable stocks: Are enough fish left in the ocean? Fishing must be at a level that can continue indefinitely and keeps the fish population productive and healthy.
- Minimising impacts: What are the environmental impacts? Fishing activity must be managed so that other species and habitats within the ecosystem remain healthy.
- Effective management: Are operations well managed? MSC certified fisheries must comply with relevant laws and be able to adapt to changing environmental circumstances.

Fisheries Standard v3.1 includes strict requirements to reduce impacts on endangered, threatened, and protected species. It provides additional safeguards that fisheries must comply with to avoid bycatch or entanglement. The requirements explicitly cover those species that cannot be targeted as catch by MSC certified fisheries, including marine mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles.

Impacted products

wild fish, molluscs, crustaceans

What is changing?

Fisheries entering their first full assessment are given until **July 2026** before they are required to adopt the updated requirements.

MSC also updated its extended implementation timeframes for MSC Fisheries Standard v3.0, which first came into effect on 1 February 2024.

Why?

The new requirements have been tested with fisheries through an intensive programme that has gathered extensive feedback from independent assessors and fishery partners around the world. This process highlighted areas that needed to be amended, in particular the more efficient application of the new Evidence Requirements Framework, leading to less complexity and cost.

Copyright © **COLEAD 2026,** *AGRINFO is funded by the European Union and implemented by COLEAD.*

Timeline

Fisheries Standard v3.0 came into effect on 1 February 2024. New fisheries can be assessed against v2.01 until **July 2026**.

From **November 2030**, fisheries certified against a version earlier than MSC Fisheries Standard v3.0 must be reassessed against MSC Fisheries Standard v3.1.

What are the major implications for exporting countries?

MSC certified fisheries meet the world's most recognised benchmark for sustainability. The blue MSC label provides enhanced reputation, better visibility, and secure markets. It offers a pathway for improved dialogue with stakeholders, secure livelihoods, and access to new markets.

Recommended Actions

Fisheries that are small-scale or in developing economies can apply for financial support towards meeting the cost of improvements from the MSC's Transition Assistance Fund.

Resources

FAO (2009) Guidelines for the ecolabelling of fish and fishery products from marine capture fisheries. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization.

MSC (2024) Marine Stewardship Council revises approach to Fisheries Standard implementation, Briefing, 31 January.

MSC Fisheries Standard v3.0

Sources

MSC Fisheries Standard v3.1

International Trade Centre (ITC) Standards Map: Marine Stewardship Council - MSC

Visit the AGRINFO website to view the latest AGRINFO Update newsletters and search the database.

Copyright © **COLEAD 2026,** *AGRINFO is funded by the European Union and implemented by COLEAD.*

Disclaimer: *Under no circumstances shall COLEAD be liable for any loss, damage, liability or expense incurred or suffered that is claimed to have resulted from the use of information available on this website or any link to external sites. The use of the website is at the user's sole risk and responsibility. This information platform was created and maintained with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents do not, however, reflect the views of the European Union.*

Copyright © **COLEAD 2026,** *AGRINFO is funded by the European Union and implemented by COLEAD.*