

Guidelines for Supporting Fishery Improvement Projects

Ratified by: Blue Ocean Institute, David Suzuki Foundation, Ecology Action Centre, Environmental Defense Fund, FishChoice, FishWise, Living Oceans Society, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Natural Resources Defense Council, New England Aquarium, Ocean Conservancy, Shedd Aquarium, Sierra Club British Columbia, Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, Vancouver Aquarium Ocean Wise, World Wildlife Fund – U.S.

Working together, conservation groups and the seafood industry can be a powerful force for improving the sustainability of seafood and the health of ocean ecosystems.

Members of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions support the efforts fisheries are making to improve the sustainability of their seafood products. There are many different ways to address management and environmental problems in fisheries, including policy change, targeted strategies such as bycatch reduction, and comprehensive fishery improvement projects. We believe all of these methods are valuable and play an important role in helping fisheries become more sustainable over time.

Recently, the seafood industry has expressed increasing interest in fishery improvement projects and members of the Conservation Alliance are often asked their position on this specific strategy. While members of the Conservation Alliance support efforts to help fisheries improve, it is important to ensure that fishery improvement projects that receive recognition in the marketplace are making measurable progress toward environmental sustainability. To be considered for recognition by members of the Conservation Alliance for moving toward sustainability, a fishery improvement project must take measureable steps within a defined timeframe to achieve a level of sustainability consistent with an unconditional pass of the Marine Stewardship Council standard.

The goal of this document is to define the kind of fishery improvement projects members of the Conservation Alliance will support and establish guidelines for communicating about these projects to buyer and consumer audiences.

This document includes:

- A brief explanation of the role seafood buyers can play in creating incentives for fisheries to address environmental problems;
- The Conservation Alliance's accepted definition of a fishery improvement project;
- The Conservation Alliance's accepted process for running a fishery improvement project that is eligible for recognition; and
- Guidelines for how the Alliance aims to recognize fishery improvement projects at different stages in the process.

This document is a first step toward defining how members of the Conservation Alliance will support fishery improvement projects. As work on this strategy evolves over time, we expect that our guidelines will evolve as well.

The Role of Seafood Buyers in Improving Fisheries

In 2008, the Conservation Alliance released the [Common Vision for Environmentally Sustainable Seafood](#), a guide that outlines six steps businesses can take to develop and implement a sustainable seafood policy. One of these steps is for retailers, suppliers and processors to buy environmentally responsible seafood. To fulfill this step, buyers that purchase seafood from sources with serious environmental problems can pursue a variety of strategies to help those sources move toward sustainability. One such strategy is engaging suppliers, producers and other industry partners in a fishery improvement project.

If a company is unable to work with its seafood sources to improve their environmental performance, it can temporarily stop purchasing from these sources until improvements are made that meet the criteria required by the company's sustainable seafood purchasing policy. We recommend that companies that take this approach also convey the problem areas in the fishery that need to be addressed for sourcing to resume.

Fishery improvement projects need to be accountable for meeting specific milestones and deadlines for improvement. If a fishery does not make measurable improvements in its environmental performance over time, we recommend buyers and suppliers engaged in the improvement project stop buying seafood from that source.

The decision about whether to engage one's supply chain in an improvement project or stop buying until improvements are made rests with the buyer and will depend on the specific requirements of the company's sustainable seafood policy. Both approaches are legitimate when structured to create incentives for measurable, positive change in our oceans and seafood supply – which is the ultimate goal.

Definition of a Fishery Improvement Project

A fishery improvement project is a multistakeholder effort to improve a fishery. These projects are unique because they utilize the power of the private sector to incentivize positive changes toward sustainability in the fishery. Participants may vary depending on the nature of the fishery and the improvement project, and may include stakeholders such as producers, nongovernmental organizations, fishery managers, government and members of the fishery's supply chain.

The ultimate goal of a fishery improvement project is to perform at a level consistent with an unconditional pass of the MSC standard. However, we recognize that for some fisheries performance at this level is a long-term goal and we do not control a fishery's decision to pursue certification.

A fishery improvement project must have the following characteristics:

- Draw upon market forces, which might include suppliers, retailers, food service, fishing industry, etc., to motivate fishery improvements.
- A workplan with measureable indicators and an associated budget.
- Explicit willingness from participants to make improvements (e.g., a signed memorandum of understanding, email correspondence stating a commitment, etc.).
- Willingness from participants to make the investments required to make improvements as outlined in the workplan and budget.
- A system for tracking progress.

To be considered for public recognition for moving toward sustainability, an improvement project must have the characteristics listed above and also:

- Have a scoping document completed by a third party experienced with applying the Marine Stewardship Council Fishery Assessment Methodology (see step one, below).
- Have a workplan specifically designed to address deficiencies in the fishery to achieve a level of sustainability consistent with an unconditional pass of the MSC standard (see step two, below).
- Employ a system for tracking and reporting progress against the indicators in the workplan (see step three, below).
- Include active participation by supply chain companies, at a minimum local processors and exporters.

Process for Fishery Improvement Projects

To be considered for recognition for moving toward sustainability, fishery improvement projects must follow the process described below.

STEP ONE – Scoping

During the scoping phase, the fishery's performance is reviewed against the MSC standard and any other potential areas of concern in the fishery that have been identified. The scoping phase includes:

- **A stakeholder mapping and engagement process.** Identify which parties make most sense to bring into the process. Consider who will play an essential role in making improvements in the fishery including government representatives, industry (fishers, processors, exporters, etc.), environmental NGOs and the scientific community.
- **An MSC pre-assessment.** Conduct an MSC pre-assessment to determine where the fishery falls short of the MSC standard. This assessment must be completed or audited by an entity accredited to apply the MSC's Fishery Assessment Methodology.
- **A scoping document/white paper.** Develop a synthesis of the assessment and potential strategies the fishery could implement to increase its sustainability.

STEP TWO – Workplan Development

Based on the scoping document, a workplan is developed that lists the activities that will help the fishery meet the deficiencies identified in the MSC pre-assessment. Workplans include:

- **A list of activities.**
- **Responsible parties.** Organizations/people responsible for completing each activity.
- **Timeframes.** An estimate of the timeframe needed to complete each activity (e.g., < six months, six to 12 months, 12 months+).
- **Metrics and key performance indicators.** Milestones to enable the project participants to track progress, or lack thereof, over time and to communicate about the changes in the fishery.
- **An associated budget.** Costs and funding opportunities for each activity as appropriate. There are generally two sets of costs: (1) process costs (e.g., costs associated with developing the scoping document, holding stakeholder meetings, developing the workplan), and (2) implementation costs (e.g., costs for the fishery to actually make changes).

See Appendix A for a template workplan (*in progress*).

STEP THREE – Implementation and Tracking Progress

The implementation phase includes:

- **Implementing the workplan.**
- **Tracking and reporting on progress.** Progress should be reported publicly every three to six months according to the objectives and timeline outlined in the workplan. Additional reporting may occur if significant milestones are met in the interim.

We recognize that the tracking of implementation is a work in progress. The key goals of tracking are to ensure fishery improvement projects adhere to the definition above and make progress against the milestones laid out in the workplan, and the work is as transparent as possible. This will include a move to make pre-assessment public moving forward. Organizations managing improvement projects must aim to track progress so that they can credibly and publicly report:

1. The actions taken by the project to encourage improvements;
2. The impact of these actions, in terms of changes in fisheries policy, management or fishing practices;
3. The results on the water.

Recognizing Fishery Improvement Projects

Recognition of fishery improvement projects can help to engage additional seafood businesses in existing projects as well as spur demand from buyers and suppliers for new projects to improve other fisheries with environmental problems.

We will strive to communicate about improvement projects that meet the definition and process for potential recognition outlined in this document according to the conditions in the chart below. NGOs and their business partners may choose to engage with FIPs meeting the minimum requirements for FIPs (first set of bullets in “Definition” section of document) to encourage these fisheries to further develop FIPs that meet the full definition.

The ultimate decisions about engaging their supply chain, sourcing from or communicating about fishery improvement projects rests with companies and will depend on the requirements of their sustainable seafood policies. Consequently, we will present options and make recommendations to our buyer partners according to the guidelines below but cannot require or guarantee their specific actions.

To enable communication with buyers and consumers about fishery improvement projects, it is the responsibility of organizations coordinating the projects to provide timely information on their development, progress and conclusion. The workplan and, if possible, the scoping document or MSC pre-assessment must be available for Alliance members to review prior to communicating with buyer partners about options for sourcing from an improvement project.

When sourcing from a fishery in an improvement project, it is important to be able to trace the product back to the specific fishery in order to distinguish it from other products in the marketplace. We recommend that all fishery improvement projects include a path toward traceability in their workplans, particularly when the improvement project covers only a segment of a larger fishery.

		Fishery Improvement Project Stage		
		Step One: Scoping FIP is in development and areas of concern are identified	Step Two: Workplan FIP has completed its workplan and made it publicly available	Step Three: Implementation FIP is making progress according to the indicators and timelines in its workplan, achieving milestones such as policy changes, improvements in fishing practices, or impact on the water
NGO Activity	Communicate as appropriate with relevant buyers that a FIP is in development and present options for them to engage their supply chain	√	√	√
	Present options for relevant buyers to make strategic procurement decisions*	√	√	√
	Provide options for buyers to communicate about the FIP to consumers if they are procuring the product		√	√
	Profile the FIP in NGO consumer-facing communications that provide an opportunity to tell the story of the FIP			√
	Integrate key milestones into relevant seafood ranking reports			√

When a fishery improvement project ends, Alliance members will make individual decisions about whether to recommend that companies continue, start or refrain from sourcing from the fishery. These decisions will be based on the level of sustainability the fishery can be verified to achieve, each organization's criteria and the procurement policies of buyer partners. If the recommendation is to refrain from sourcing, we recommend that Alliance members or their buyer partners communicate the additional improvements that are needed in the fishery's environmental performance to change the recommendation.