



# MSC FISHERIES STANDARD VERSION 3.0: CONSIDERATIONS FOR TUNA FISHERIES

October 2022

## THE MSC'S FISHERIES STANDARD REVIEW

The MSC Fisheries Standard is the most widely used global benchmark for assessing the sustainability of wild capture fisheries. It is used by fisheries, governments, NGOs and consumer-facing companies throughout the world to assess, improve and demonstrate the sustainability of fishing activities and seafood products.

The MSC regularly reviews the Standard to ensure it continues to reflect new science, the evolution and uptake of best practice in fisheries management and the wider challenges facing the ocean.

The latest Fisheries Standard Review was the most comprehensive ever. Begun in 2018, it included workshops, surveys and virtual conferences involving hundreds of stakeholders together with independent research. In June 2022 the MSC's Board of Trustees unanimously approved the new MSC Fisheries Standard (version 3.0).

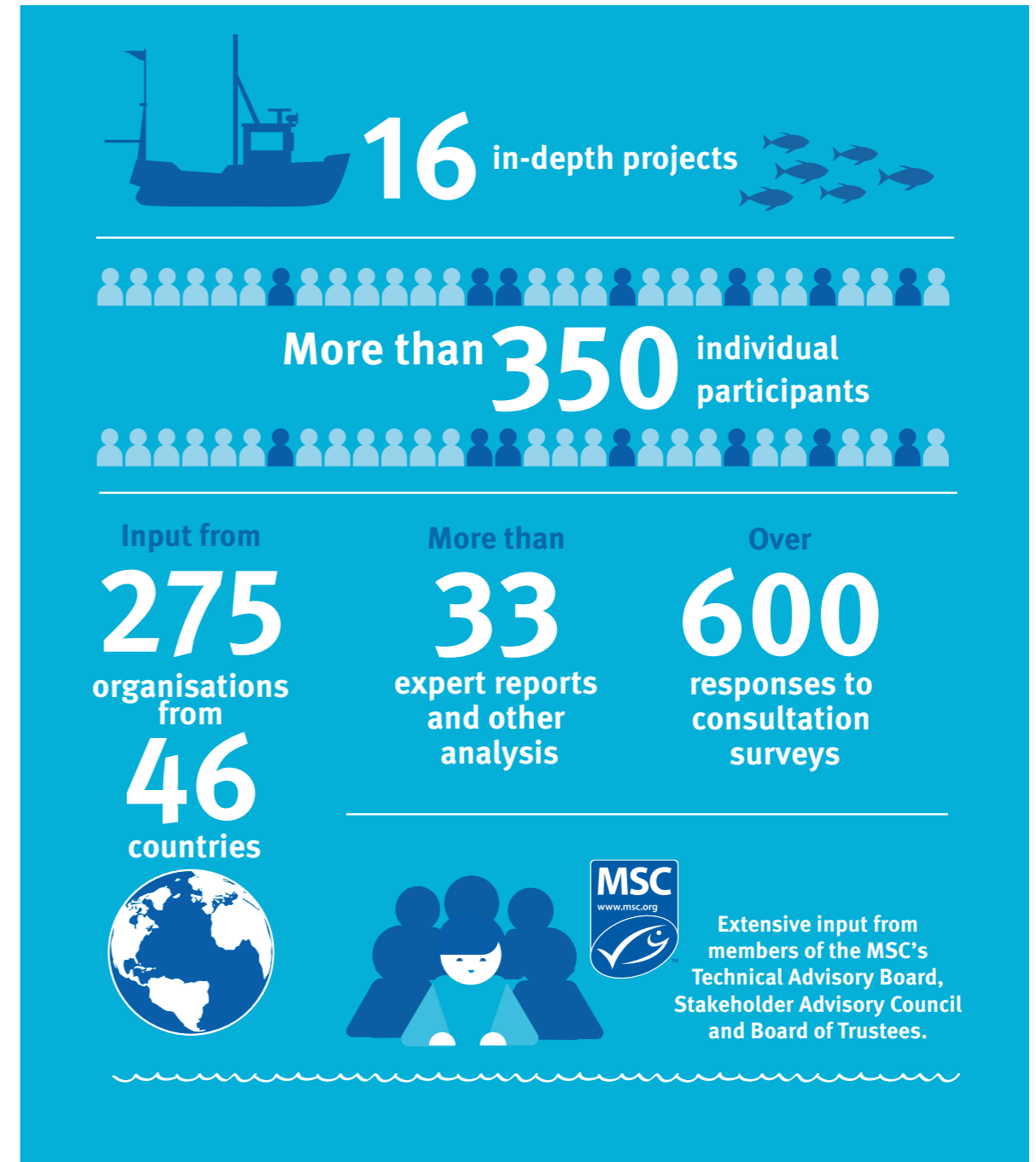
The new Standard will be published in full at the end of October 2022 with requirements applying to all new fisheries certifications from May 2023. Already certified fisheries will have a maximum of six years to adopt the new requirements unless they

opt to undertake early application of a new approach to harvest strategies which will trigger the early adoption of the full Standard.

The new Standard includes significant improvements, including better protections for marine life, as well as requirements for stronger management and compliance. The changes will ensure that MSC certified fisheries continue to be recognised as world leaders in sustainability. Where possible, the complexity of the Standard has also been reduced.

**The updates include several important changes with implications for tuna fisheries which are outlined in this briefing.**

## DEVELOPING VERSION 3.0 OF THE MSC FISHERIES STANDARD INVOLVED...



Yellowfin tuna fishing boat © Anthony J Rayburn



## ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE TUNA FISHING

Due to their international ecological and economic significance, tuna fisheries are some of the most publicly scrutinised in the MSC programme.

As a result, the Fisheries Standard Review focused on several important challenges faced by tuna fisheries. These included the impacts of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), shark finning, effective monitoring and surveillance of high seas fishing and impacts on ETP species (page 9).

It also reviewed how best to address the challenge faced by tuna fisheries managed by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) in adopting effective harvest strategies.

These management measures are essential to ensuring the long-term sustainability of shared tuna stocks by providing a pre-agreed harvest objective and a ‘safety-net’ if stocks begin to decline. Agreement on harvest strategies has been notoriously difficult to achieve, requiring alignment between multiple states representing their own national interests.

The lack of agreement of harvest strategies is most pressing in the Western Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO), responsible for over half the global tuna catch and 81% of all MSC certified tuna (page 8).

## DEVELOPING NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR RFMO-MANAGED FISHERIES

As part of the Fisheries Standard Review, the MSC conducted extensive research and consultation on requirements for harvest strategies, with the objective of understanding how the MSC could best support international efforts to drive change within tuna RFMOs.

The Review showed increasing support for harvest strategies across fisheries, governments, NGOs, retailers and tuna brands. It also suggested that maintaining the assurance and market advantage afforded by MSC certification is contributing to international efforts to influence RFMO decisions. MSC certification incentivises tuna fisheries to deliver improvements which safeguard the environment and provides credible, independent verification of the sustainability of some of the world’s most important tuna fisheries.

The Review also surfaced considerable progress, both within the MSC and amongst external stakeholders, in the understanding of harvest strategies. It showed that the previous requirements in the MSC Fisheries Standard did not take full account of the complexities of reaching agreements and curtailing overfishing within the complex international framework of RFMOs. Of particular concern was the inability of current requirements for harvest control rules to prevent the catch of skipjack in the Indian Ocean from exceeding levels recommended by scientists.

Experience has shown that within RFMO-managed fisheries, state-of-the-art harvest strategies, including effective catch and effort constraints and derived through Management Strategies Evaluation, are needed to ensure long term sustainability.

In this context, the MSC took a proposal to reform requirements for harvest strategies for fisheries managed by RFMOs to its Board of Trustees in June 2022. The proposal, developed with members of the MSC’s Stakeholder Advisory Council and Technical Advisory Board, incorporating stakeholder feedback from public and targeted consultations, and tested in pilot assessments, set out a new roadmap for RFMO-managed fisheries to deliver state-of-the-art harvest strategies. The objective was that, at the end of a set timeframe, fisheries certified to the new Fisheries Standard would have more robust and highly sophisticated harvest strategies, developed through a collaborative process involving all relevant actors including NGOs, governments, industry and the scientific community. The proposal represented a significant increase in expectations of RFMO-managed fisheries, including tuna, across multiple performance indicators.

### What is Management Strategy Evaluation?

Management Strategy Evaluation is a collaborative process between scientists, decision-makers, industry and NGOs that involves using computer simulation to compare the relative ability of different fisheries management strategies to achieve a set of objectives, such as preventing a stock from declining. Management strategies are combinations of data collection schemes, methods of analysis, harvest control rules and subsequent processes leading to actions such as catch or effort constraints. They allow the sustainable exploitation of a stock or for a stock to recover should it decline.

Management Strategy Evaluation aims to identify a management strategy that is robust to uncertainties and appropriately reflects the trade-offs among the objectives of different stakeholders.

## A NEW HIGHER BAR FOR HARVEST STRATEGIES

The MSC’s Board agreed requirements, detailed in Section SE of the new Standard, that will require fisheries managed by RFMOs to achieve world-leading harvest strategies within a set timeframe.

### These requirements will:

- Require fisheries to meet specific milestones for delivering state-of-the-art harvest strategies including Management Strategy Evaluation and agreeing effective catch and/or effort constraints.
- Result in fisheries working together towards shared deadlines, combining their influence and expertise to influence international government representatives in securing an agreement.
- Have the potential to move already certified fisheries to a higher bar of sustainability on issues including shark finning, ghost gear, ETP impacts and observer coverage, earlier than would otherwise be required.

# NEW TIMELINES FOR DELIVERING STATE-OF-THE-ART HARVEST STRATEGIES

## For newly certified stocks

To achieve MSC certification, like all other fisheries, RFMO-managed fisheries will need to meet requirements for harvest control rules and harvest strategies. However, ongoing certification of these fisheries will now be conditional on delivering prescribed milestones which put all certified fisheries on an RFMO-managed stock on the same track to agreeing and implementing state-of-the-art harvest strategies.

**For a newly certified stock, the specific milestones must be delivered within 10 years, over two phases (figure 1):**

- **Phase 1** requires Management Strategy Evaluation in consultation with stakeholders to identify a preferred harvest strategy. Phase 1 milestones must be delivered within the first certification cycle (5 years) in order for fisheries to be recertified and progress to phase 2.
- **Phase 2**, implementing effective harvest strategies, must be delivered within the second certification cycle (another 5 years), resulting in the adoption of a harvest strategy that includes catch or effort constraints.

Irrespective of the timings, the first fishery certified using Section SE sets the timeline for Section SE to be applied to all subsequent certified fisheries that include the same target stock. This means all fisheries that include the same target stock will have harmonised milestones for the development and adoption of harvest strategies which reflect the highest possible level of sustainability performance in the MSC programme (SG100).

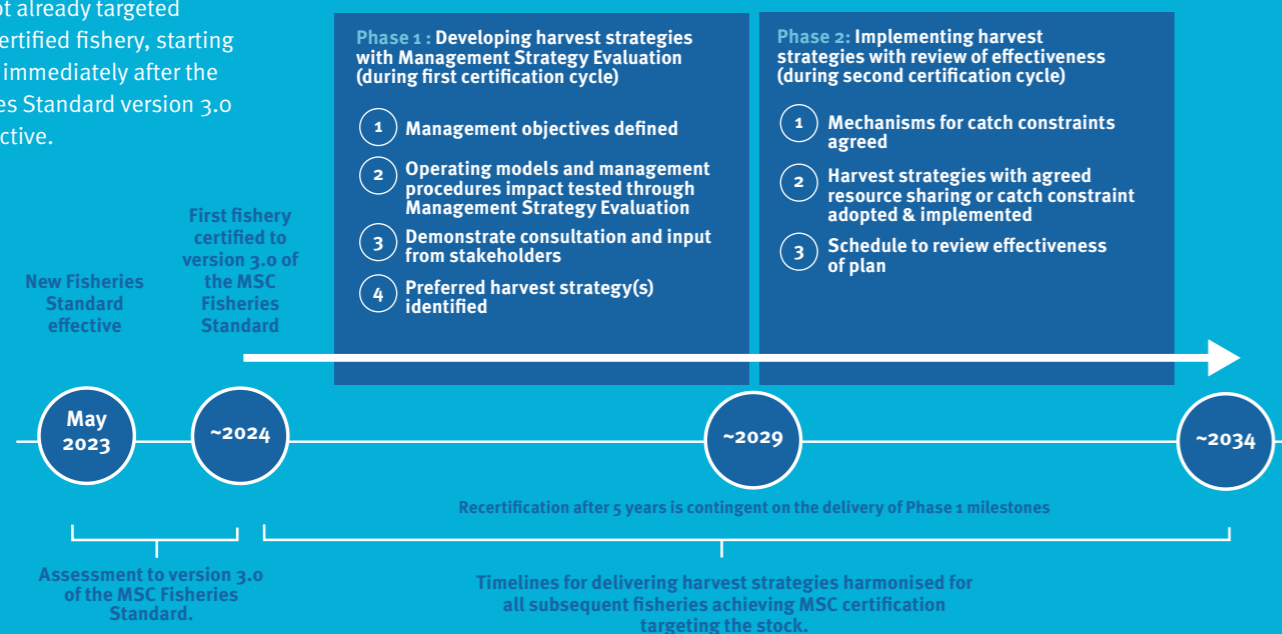
## For already certified stocks

To accelerate the potential for adoption of state-of-the-art harvest strategies, RFMO-managed fisheries targeting stocks that are already part of an existing MSC certificate will be able to undertake early application of Section SE before their next reassessment. However, early application is contingent upon the majority of certified fisheries targeting the stock agreeing to apply Section SE, triggering the harmonisation of timelines for all fisheries on that stock.

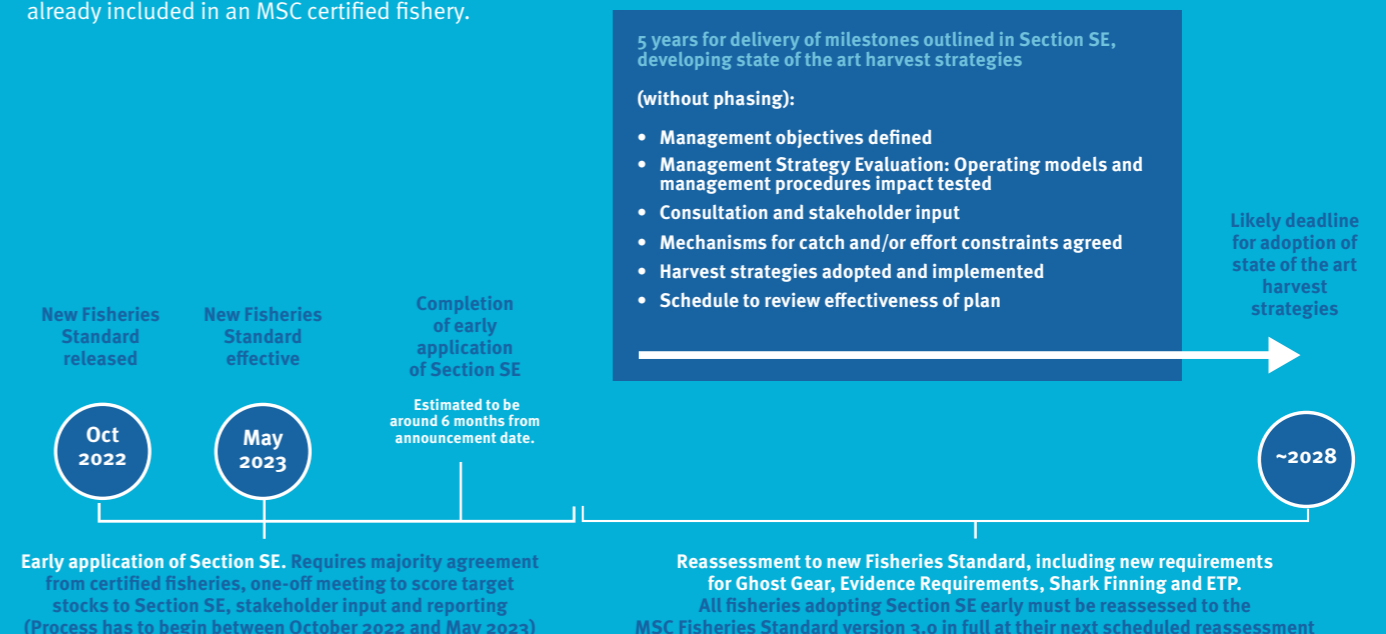
Fisheries that undertake the early application of Section SE must be reassessed to version 3.0 of the MSC Fisheries Standard in full at their next reassessment, fast-tracking the application of all new requirements including those for ETP species, evidence requirements, ghost gear and shark finning (page 9). These fisheries need to announce the early application of Section SE between October 2022 and May 2023 (the date that the new standard becomes effective).

In recognition of the significant increase in expectations these fisheries will be given an additional five years to deliver state-of-the-art harvest strategies. Within this timeframe they will need to deliver the same milestones as for previously uncertified stocks, but without the need for phased delivery (figure 2).

**Figure 1:** Estimated timeline for the application of Section SE by fisheries on stocks not already targeted by an MSC certified fishery, starting assessment immediately after the MSC Fisheries Standard version 3.0 is made effective.



**Figure 2:** Timeline for the early application of Section SE by fisheries targeting stocks already included in an MSC certified fishery.



## ONGOING CALL FOR PROGRESS IN THE WCPO

So far, the 26 member states of the Western Central Pacific Tuna Commission (WCPFC) have been unable to reach an agreement on harvest strategies, putting the MSC certification of 33 globally important tuna fisheries in the WCPO at risk of suspension.

The best way to ensure ongoing certification of these fisheries remains for harvest strategies to be adopted before June 2023, allowing current conditions of certification to be closed.

Following positive progress at the 2022 Science Committee and Science Management Dialogue for the WCPFC, the adoption of harvest strategies for skipjack at the December 2022 annual meeting of the WCPFC would be a significant step forward in ensuring the long-term future of tuna fisheries in the region.

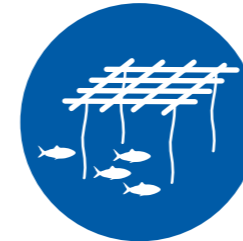
Unfortunately, decisions for other tuna species managed by the WCPFC have been delayed beyond June 2023, making the suspension of certification of these fisheries to the current version of the MSC Standard increasingly likely.

The MSC's Board, including representatives from leading tuna conservation and management groups, agreed that, with the prerequisites outlined in Section SE, allowing the opportunity for tuna fisheries in the WCPO to remain certified past June 2023 provided a significant incentive to influence a breakthrough on state-of-the-art harvest strategies and increase protections on marine ecosystems. With MSC certified fisheries representing 18 fishing nations and 75% of tuna catch in the WCPO, the shared milestones for delivering harvest strategies for tuna stocks would create a unified and powerful push in the WCPFC that could aid in the development and adoption of robust harvest strategies.



Marshall Islands © Anthony J Rayburn

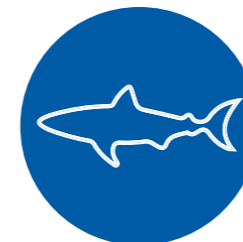
## OTHER IMPORTANT CHANGES FOR MSC CERTIFIED TUNA FISHERIES



### Ghost Gear and Fish Aggregating Devices

Fisheries will be required to implement effective management strategies to minimise gear loss and its impact. This includes monitoring lost gear and entanglements, implementing marking and retrieval programmes and modifying gear to reduce its impacts.

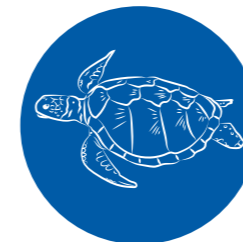
Fisheries will be required to demonstrate how they are avoiding and managing the loss of FADs. This includes tracking and retrieving lost FADs or demonstrating that the impact of lost FADs is low e.g. by being biodegradable or non-entangling.



### Shark finning

MSC certified fisheries that retain sharks must have a Fins Naturally Attached (FNA) policy in place that is demonstrably enforced, giving a high degree of confidence that shark finning is not taking place.

This new policy follows an extensive review of the best practices to prevent shark finning already in place across global management jurisdictions, including within tuna RFMOs.



### Reducing impacts on endangered species

A new classification system will ensure that species are consistently and objectively classified as ETP.

More species, including all marine mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles, will be automatically subject to the new requirements and afforded greater protections.

Impacts of fisheries on ETP populations will be assessed more explicitly, and fisheries required to demonstrate how they are reducing these impacts through the application of best practice management measures.

The requirements include clearer and greater protection for all species of shark.



### Higher levels of monitoring and surveillance

Under the new evidence requirements, certified fisheries will have to have independent observation of their catches, with the level of observation determined by their local circumstances. For RFMO-managed fisheries operating on the high seas, such as tuna long-liners and purse seiners, higher levels of monitoring will be required, to account for the fact these fisheries operate in a less regulated area and are likely to interact with ETP or species out of the scope of the MSC programme.

The new requirements include a framework to evaluate the quality of information being used to certify a fishery as sustainable and well managed.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the new MSC Fisheries Standard includes important improvements which will continue to ensure that MSC certified tuna fisheries remain world leaders in sustainable fishing.

It addresses important challenges, including reducing the impacts of FADs, affording greater protection to ETP species and giving greater confidence that shark finning is not taking place. It also holds fisheries managed by RFMOs to a set of well-defined milestones for delivering state-of-the-art harvest strategies. Tuna fisheries catching the same stock will be required to work together towards shared deadlines, unifying efforts to influence international negotiations. And early adoption will be conditional on the application of all requirements of the new Standard at the fishery's next reassessment.

The diverse interests represented in the MSC's stakeholder and governance bodies agreed that these requirements afford the highest level of influence and potential for certified fisheries to adopt much needed state-of-the-art harvest strategies over the next five years. The MSC stands ready to support tuna fisheries in this collective effort.

## FURTHER READING

Find out more about MSC certified tuna and to subscribe to our tuna newsletter:  
[msc.org/tuna](https://www.msc.org/tuna)

Full details of the MSC's Fisheries Standard Review:  
[msc.org/fsr](https://www.msc.org/fsr)

Once published, read the new MSC Fisheries Standard:  
[msc.org/fisheries-standard](https://www.msc.org/fisheries-standard)



A fresh catch of yellowfin tuna © Getty Images

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