



Western Australian commercial fisheries third party certification program with the Marine Stewardship Council



Western Australia is a world leader in fisheries management.

In 2000 the West Coast Rock Lobster Fishery became the first in the world to attain Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification – the ‘gold’ standard of fisheries ecosystem performance. The Fishery is also the first to be re-certified by the MSC for a third time.

The Department of Fisheries (the Department), in partnership with the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council and with support from the State Government, is about to embark on a program which will provide the opportunity for all the State’s commercial fisheries to achieve MSC certification.

Independent third party certification through the MSC will build on the Department’s strong record in fisheries management and provide a range of benefits to Western Australia including:

- enhanced public confidence in the sustainability of WA’s fisheries;
- greater confidence among fish buyers that the seafood they are purchasing is sustainably fished;
- assurance to a wide range of stakeholders and other fisheries resource users that WA’s commercial fisheries are sustainably managed to international standards;
- opening up of new markets;
- securing access to markets;
- encouragement of business and market innovation, and regional investment;
- support for regional communities; and
- providing a basis to develop stronger partnerships with regional tourism.

What is third party certification?

Third party certification is a process to ensure compliance with a publicly available technical specification, such as the MSC standard. Importantly, assessments are undertaken by an independent third party that is qualified and accredited against the standard.

What is the Marine Stewardship Council?

The MSC is an independent non-profit organisation that sets a standard for sustainable fishing. MSC’s mission is to use its ecolabel and fishery certification program to contribute to the health of the world’s oceans by:

- recognising and rewarding sustainable fishing practices;
- influencing the choices people make when buying seafood; and
- working with partners to ensure the seafood market remains sustainable.

Globally, more than 288 fisheries are engaged in the MSC program.

In Australia, six fisheries are MSC-certified; Mackerel Icefish, HIMI Toothfish, Macquarie Island Toothfish, Spencer Gulf King Prawns, Lakes and Coorong Fisheries and the West Coast Rock Lobster Fishery. Worldwide, there are more than 15,000 seafood products which can be traced back to certified sustainable fisheries; 206 are available in Australia. They all carry the blue MSC ecolabel.

Each fishery must prove that it complies with the MSC's three overarching principles:

1. Sustainable fish stocks
The fishing activity must be at a level which sustains the fish population. Certified fisheries must operate in a way that avoids over-exploitation so that fishing can continue indefinitely.
2. Minimising environmental impact
Fishing operations should be managed so that the structure, productivity, function and diversity of the ecosystem on which the fishery depends is maintained.
3. Effective management
The fishery must meet all local, national and international laws and have a management system which can respond to changing circumstances while maintaining sustainability.

Thirty-one further criteria support these three main principles.

For more information on the MSC, visit www.msc.org

Why has WA selected the Marine Stewardship Council?

The MSC's fisheries environmental standard is widely recognised as the most complete and comprehensive.

The MSC runs the only certification and ecolabelling program for wild-capture fisheries that is consistent with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Guidelines for the Eco-labelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries. These guidelines are based on the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing, which require credible fishery certification and ecolabelling schemes to include:

- objective, third-party fishery assessment using scientific evidence;
- transparent processes with built-in stakeholder consultation and objection procedures;
- standards based on the sustainability of target species, ecosystems and management practices.

The MSC standard is already in use by a number of major retailers and fish processors (primarily Australian and international supermarket chains).

What is the certification process for WA's fisheries?

The certification of Western Australia's commercial fisheries will be achieved through a two-stage process: pre-assessment and full assessment.

Pre-assessment

During this stage approved external assessors use available information to provide an opinion on:

- the current status of the fishery against each of the MSC principles and criteria;
- likely gaps and any improvements that may be needed in the performance of the fishery before it could achieve full MSC certification standard; and
- the level of overlap of issues among fisheries within each bioregion, to inform how they should be structured for full assessment.

Once pre-assessments have been completed a timetable and process for full assessments will be developed.

Full assessment

During this stage MSC-approved certifying bodies use a team of international experts to undertake a highly detailed examination of each fishery, scoring it against the 31 MSC criteria across the three MSC principles. The process is transparent and provides opportunities for stakeholder input.

Fisheries achieving certification will have annual audits to ensure their level of performance is maintained and that arising issues are being adequately addressed. A full review of the management of a certified fishery against the MSC standard is required every five years.

Who will conduct pre-assessments?

A number of appropriately experienced and qualified assessors will be contracted to undertake pre-assessments.

How will pre-assessments be conducted?

It is anticipated that pre-assessments will be undertaken on a bioregional basis (South Coast, West Coast, Gascoyne and North Coast regions of WA). The Department will provide assessors with an analysis of each fishery or group of related fisheries/species in the bioregion, with further details provided as required. Assessors will also gather information from the fishing industry.

Who will conduct full assessments?

Full assessments will be undertaken by independent, accredited MSC-certification bodies. There are currently 10 bodies worldwide accredited to undertake full MSC fisheries assessments.

How will full assessments be conducted?

Full assessment will follow the framework set out by the MSC to benchmark a fishery's performance against MSC principles and criteria. These are highly precautionary. For example, if any of the standards assessed scores less than 60% the fishery fails certification. Each of the three principles established by the MSC must score an average of at least 80% for the fishery to be certified. For those criteria where a score is less than 80%, conditions are set to improve performance to the 80% level within an appropriate time period.

This process can take from several months to more than a year to complete.

How will Government contribute?

The WA Government has committed \$14.56 million over four years to the certification program. This funding will cover application fees for wild-capture fisheries to undergo pre-assessment and the initial full assessment. It will also cover the initial audit for each fishery achieving full assessment. A portion of the pre-assessment funds will be available to assist with fishery improvement programs to help fisheries to transition through to full certification. This allocation will be available to leverage funding from other sources.

Will aquaculture be included?

There is opportunity to pursue certification for WA's growing aquaculture sector through the Aquaculture Stewardship Council.