

 <p>Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels</p>	<p>Ninth Meeting of the Seabird Bycatch Working Group <i>Florianópolis, Brazil, 6 - 8 May 2019</i></p> <p>Bycatch and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC): <i>A review of the efficacy of the MSC certification scheme in tackling the bycatch of non-target species</i></p> <p><i>Jose Peiro Crespo and Rory Crawford, BirdLife International</i></p>
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This paper has an attachment:

Crespo, J.P. and R. Crawford. *Bycatch and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC): A review of the efficacy of the MSC certification scheme in tackling the bycatch of non-target species.* BirdLife International.

SUMMARY

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is a seafood certification scheme and ecolabel that sets and maintains a standard for sustainable fishing based on three principles: 1) sustainable target fish stocks; 2) the environmental impact of fishing; and 3) effective management. Twelve percent of global marine wild catch is currently certified under the MSC Fisheries Standard (MSC 2017).

Following the codes of best practice established under the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation and International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling, MSC's Fisheries Standard has been reviewed and revised several times since it was first developed.

However, the standard does not yet fully ensure that certified fisheries are operating to one of the general principles set out in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries: the minimisation of non-target catch or 'bycatch'. This issue has been identified by MSC itself, which is now in the process of reviewing requirements on Endangered, Threatened and Protected species as part of the next Fisheries Standard Review.

BirdLife International undertook a review of non-target bycatch (including elasmobranchs, marine mammals, seabirds and sea turtles) in 23 fisheries (or groups of fisheries) which have been certified by the MSC (with the exception of one fishery, which withdrew before

completing the process) to assess the effectiveness of the MSC criteria and standard in ensuring that the impacts of certified fisheries on non-target species are minimised, or at least reduced.

To facilitate comparisons, the 23 fisheries were grouped into six case studies: North Atlantic gillnets, North Atlantic longline, tuna purse seine, Southern Hemisphere trawl, North Sea mixed fisheries and Northwest Atlantic trap fisheries.

This review used a 'red/amber/green' rating approach to rank the performance of certified fisheries with regard to non-target bycatch species data quality; proposed actions to resolve bycatch issues (under MSC's system of conditions of certification); effective implementation of these actions; and documentation of the trend in bycatch rates/levels in the fishery. The primary sources of data for this review were public certification reports (PCRs) and annual surveillance reports produced by Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs). When alternative data on bycatch were available (e.g. published scientific papers and government reports), these were used to provide an independent source of verification.

This review found that the existing standard is not yet delivering consistent reductions in endangered, threatened and protected species bycatch, with only three of the fisheries reviewed achieving an overall green score, alongside 12 amber and eight red. There is inadequate observer coverage in 14 of the 23 the fisheries assessed, which in turn leads to poor bycatch monitoring and reporting, hindering assessment of the impact on bycatch species in the majority of reviewed fisheries. Among the fisheries reviewed, 'proposed actions' (or conditions) is the criterion which scored lowest – just under half (ten) had serious deficiencies – i.e. insufficient conditions were put in place to address bycatch issues. Underlying reasons for this were varied, including failure to consider relevant bycatch species, changes in scores during the assessment process (i.e. between public comment draft report and final report stages) without clear rationale, and conditions rolling forward from a certification to re-certification.

In addition, the technical and management measures implemented by certified fisheries (via conditions) to address bycatch often fall short of their objectives: we found that the measures implemented to address bycatch were only clearly effective in three of the fisheries reviewed (~13% of the case studies). In terms of bycatch trends – the ultimate arbiter of successful mitigation strategies – reported bycatch *increased* (or did not decrease from high levels) during the certification period in seven of the fisheries reviewed, with only one fishery clearly demonstrating a sustained reduction in bycatch levels, achieving a green score. However, it should be noted that in some cases, increased bycatch levels may be the result of better data collection (which may have been driven by certification of the fishery) or because populations of non-target species are increasing in abundance.

Our study concludes that MSC must strengthen the bycatch elements of the MSC standard at the next full Fisheries Standard Review, to prevent fisheries with unacceptably high impacts from being certified and to ensure that mortality of non-target species in certified fisheries is minimised. To that end, this review makes a series of recommendations for improvements.