

Minutes: Sustainable Seafood Coalition

Implementation Support Webinar: Certifications, Ratings & Risk Assessments

31st January 2022, 14:00-16:00

40 Participants

1. SECRETARIAT INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Secretariat introduced the purpose of the Implementation Support Webinars, explaining that this would be the first in a series of sessions. The series aims to provide SSC members with the knowledge and resources required to effectively, consistently and accurately implement their commitments to the Codes of Conduct. They explained that this series would be different to the standard all-members' meetings in that it would not aim to make collective decisions or set new work areas for the coalition. Instead, it would approach different themes within the Codes and engage in a knowledge-exchange with stakeholders that have expertise in those areas.

1.2 The Secretariat set out the purpose and format of this session. They explained that through a series of presentations and breakout rooms, the session would cover the separate but linked themes of Certification, Ratings and Risk Assessments.

2. PRESENTATION ON CERTIFICATION SCHEMES

2.1 A representative from an aquaculture certification scheme set out the history, coverage and scope of their programme. Their programme considers both environmental impacts and social aspects to be within scope. They illustrated examples of their species-specific standards, which address metrics such as greenhouse gas emissions, antibiotic use, escapes, sea lice, feed ingredients, water quality, zonal management, mitigation of negative impacts on seabed and biodiversity and protection of wildlife and wild fish populations. They introduced the series of standard reviews and consultations which their programme was opening in the near future, including one on Fish Welfare. They outlined their audit process.

2.2 A representative from a wild-caught certification scheme presented an overview of their programme. They explained the components which are evaluated as part of the certification process, which include the target species, the geographic area & stock, the gear type used and the client/certification holder. They also outlined the sequence of events involved in an assessment process, from pre-assessment to full certification. They described how the scheme is improving its transparency, including an updated webpage for tracking individual fisheries and their progress through the certification process and a 'find a supplier' database. They explained the cycle of reviews undertaken for their standard, including an ongoing consultation opening in February 2022.

2.3 The Secretariat highlighted the reasons for selecting these presenters to represent the role of certification schemes in fulfilling commitments to the Codes of Conduct. They explained the existing overlap between their areas of work, and ability to account for both aquaculture and wild-caught sources, made them the most appropriate

3. PRESENTATION ON RATINGS PROGRAMMES

3.1 Attendees responded to a live poll which asked "Does your business use Good Fish Guide ratings to help inform how it buys seafood?". 79% of respondents said 'Yes'.

3.2 A representative from a ratings programme introduced the scope, methodology and impact of their work, with a focus on the ways in which their work intersects with the SSC Codes of Conduct. They noted that their risk assessment outcomes align well with the Code of Conduct definitions of 'High', 'Medium' and 'Low' risks. They explained their unit of assessment, which is Species + Stock Area + Management Unit + Fishing or Farming Unit + GSSI-recognised Certification. They outlined the rating criteria for both wild capture and farmed sources, which highlighted further areas of alignment with the SSC Codes, including the avoidance of species which are endangered or critically endangered. The presenter set out a timeline of upcoming consultations and research periods, stressing

an opportunity for members with scientific or technical knowledge to improve the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the ratings commencing in February 2022. They explained their efforts to collaborate with certifiers to provide clear and consistent advice to the supply chain where possible.

3.3 Another representative of the ratings programme explained their work with businesses in the supply chain. They described their efforts to provide simple, easy-to-follow advice on what to source. They outlined the role of FIPs in their ratings methodology, and the criteria required for FIP credibility. They advise business to check their sources, remove or improve where necessary, to make public commitments in a sourcing policy and to work directly with the ratings programme for support and in providing input to consultations. They introduced a new tool for businesses which enables easier organisation and management of seafood sources, with guidance and resources for understanding overall sustainability performance. They also invited businesses to engage with a new features in development: one enables consumers to check the sustainability of specific products within individual retailers; another is a training portal to familiarise CSR, front of house, buyers etc. with the basics of seafood sustainability, sourcing and marketing.

4. PRESENTATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL RISK ASSESSMENT (ERA)

4.1 A fisheries management scientist presented an overview of Environmental Risk Assessments (ERAs), focussing on what they are, what they can tell us about the environmental status of a fishery, and how they can help businesses to make sourcing decisions. This was supplemented with real examples of ERAs which have been carried out in the past. They explained that ERAs have been used globally in fisheries, as part of FIPs, in the MSC Risk-Based Framework (RBF) and is regularly used in Australian and New Zealand fisheries. They outlined 3 different forms of ERA, namely Qualitative (level 1, relying on expert knowledge and using available data), Semi-quantitative (level 2, using expert knowledge and analytical approaches), and Quantitative (level 3, a model based analytical approach). They stated that an ERA will provide a description of the ecological risk for the target stock, bycatch species, incidental catch, benthic habitats and overall ecosystem impacts.

4.2 The presenter explained the scenarios in which an ERA can be helpful. They find that in data poor fisheries, ERAs can help to understand the relative scale of fisheries impacts, enabling managers to direct their efforts towards the most important areas. They suggested that many UK fisheries lack adequate data and have a critical need for coherent action plans, which ERAs could enable. They set out best practice criteria for conducting an ERA, including full documentation and transparency by publishing methodologies, data, assumptions, analyses, participants and outcomes.

4.3 The presenter outlined multiple ways in which ERAs provide value to supply chain stakeholders. They suggest that an ERA can help with planning & decision-making for buyers. They celebrate the ability of ERAs to enable businesses to encourage positive incremental change in fisheries, including on high risk issues. They also highlight that such engagement can be transparent, open and inclusive by keeping all stakeholders informed.

4.2 The presenter stated their initial intention to share the outcome of a pilot ERA conducted in the England's South-West mixed fishery in collaboration with Seafish. However, they explained that the results from this ERA are not yet ready for publication. Instead they explored ERA examples from New Zealand.

5. BREAKOUT ROOMS: CERTIFICATION, RATINGS & RISK ASSESSMENTS

5.1 The Secretariat opened three breakout rooms for smaller groups to ask questions and workshop specific challenges. All members were then invited to the main room for a summary of each themed breakout room.

5.2 Summary from Certification breakout room: one presenter received several questions on greenhouse gases and how they are assessed within their certification scheme, and offered to share updates with the group as their dedicated tool is finalised. They also noted interest in transparency, and recognised that the publication of huge amounts of data is not always easy to navigate by interested stakeholders. They received positive feedback on their work in feed ingredient assessment. When asked about 'pre-certification' fisheries, another facilitator referenced the work of Project UK and the 8 FIPs that initiative coordinates around the UK.

5.3 Summary from Ratings breakout room: the facilitator saw a high level of interest in direct business engagement through new tools and platforms. Many members raised queries on how to get new species and sources added to the ratings programme, and the presenter explained that all proposals are welcomed by their team. This breakout room also explored ERAs and their impacts on ratings.

5.4 Summary from Risk Assessments breakout room: the facilitator noted a knowledge gap regarding what can be achieved by an environmental risk assessment. They suggested that once the results from the Southwest mixed fishery have been published, their potential will be clearer to members and this could inspire the wider adoption of ERAs. Another participant emphasised the importance of businesses driving improvements on the water, and the ability of ERAs to enable these improvements. A third participant raised their interest in using ERAs as part of sourcing policies and their willingness to engage with SSC members in pursuing this.

6. AOB

6.1 The Secretariat updated members on upcoming SSC activity. They explained that the next SSC all-members' meeting would focus on environmental claims and the recent 'Green Claims Codes' guidance published by the Competition & Markets Authority. They also informed members that they had successfully proposed a panel discussion on pre-competitive collaboration at the Barcelona Seafood Expo Global in April 2022, and invited them to put themselves forward to take part in that panel.

6.2 The Secretariat shared a feedback form with meeting participants, asking for their responses to help inform future sessions in the series of Implementation Support Webinars.