

CALLING ON MSC TO STAND UP FOR ITS VISION OF “THE WORLD’S OCEANS TO BE TEEMING WITH LIFE, AND SEAFOOD SUPPLIES SAFEGUARDED FOR THIS AND FUTURE GENERATIONS”¹ AND ITS PROMISE TO RETAILERS AND CUSTOMERS TO BE THE “GOLD STANDARD FOR SUSTAINABILITY”² SO STAKEHOLDERS CAN BE ASSURED OF SUPPORTING TRULY SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES WHEN SELLING OR BUYING SEAFOOD PRODUCTS WITH THE MSC LABEL

JANUARY 2018

Dear Dr. Kiene, Chair of MSC Board of Trustees, and Mr Howes, MSC Chief Executive,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and individuals, we are writing to express our significant and increasing concerns with both the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)’s Certification Standard and existing certification process as well as the lack of urgency to respond to concerted calls for improvement. This follows a January 2017 letter signed by 53 international organizations. This first letter brought concerns to the MSC leadership regarding key flaws in Principle 2 (‘Environmental and Ecological Impacts’) that are increasingly allowing fisheries with widely unacceptable impacts to be certified as sustainable. Now, at the start of 2018 additional organisations, groups and individuals are joining our call for more immediate dialogue and action, and have signed on to support the urgent implementation of critical improvements.

Attached as an “Annex” to this letter are our detailed requirements for imperative improvements to the MSC Standard and process of certification. These requested improvements are the result of research and analysis undertaken by NGOs and academics with marine conservation and seafood certification expertise in addition to years of stakeholder participation in the MSC program.

Given that the MSC recently celebrated 20 years of work and announced ambitious goals to expand the number of certified fisheries and products in the program to include 20% of global fisheries catch by 2020, it is imperative that the MSC maintains credibility with key stakeholders – the international conservation community of organizations, researchers, and scientists - as well as with retailers and consumers worldwide.

Concern is growing given the anticipated expansion due to the fact that in recent years an increasing number of controversial fisheries have received MSC certification or have been recertified, despite the fact that these fisheries:

- catch thousands of vulnerable and endangered animals,
- routinely discard and waste excessive amounts of sea life as unwanted bycatch,
- irreversibly destroy vulnerable sea bottom habitats,
- continue to catch overfished species, and
- continue to use unsustainable, non-certified methods for much of their catch.

Many of the same key flaws in the MSC Standard and process have been consistently identified by experts and stakeholders in the international community over the last decade. These weaknesses allow Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) to pass such fisheries for certification. Despite a large number of scientific studies published in peer-reviewed journals, countless stakeholder meetings, and a long history of letters from individual NGOs or alliances of NGOs, the MSC has to date failed to implement the changes to Principle 2, that are needed to properly protect habitats and marine species not considered as “target species”.

¹ MSC Annual Report 2015-16

² MSC Annual Report 2015-16

While we acknowledge that the MSC has made some improvements to its Certification Standard and process over the years, specific fishery certifications are evidence that critical weaknesses remain in the MSC system. The next scheduled update of the Standard is slated for 2020; accounting for phase-in times this means that critical changes would not be in effect until 2022-2028, and potentially even longer for some fisheries. For many of the species and ecosystems dealt with under Principle 2, the situation is untenable and changes to the MSC process need to be much swifter if the program is to act as an agent of change.

While the list of key changes requested in the “Annex” focus on Principle 2 issues of the MSC Certification Standard and Certification Requirements – bycatch and retained species, habitat, and ecological impacts - we recognize that these concerns are not comprehensive and look forward to a dialogue that is inclusive and transparent.

In addition to the points attached, of particular note we call for swift action to include ethical concerns, such as those related to social and labour issues in the fishery sector in the MSC assessments, ensuring that all people throughout the chain of custody are treated fairly and decently and that companies respect human rights and adhere to the International Labour Organization’s Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Signed,

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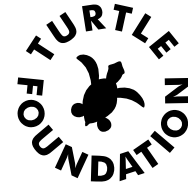
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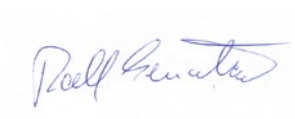
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