

Frequently Asked Questions - MSC Chain of Custody Certification

MSC Chain of Custody certification is a traceability program to ensure that products using the MSC ecolabel have come from an MSC-certified fishery. This is a summary of questions and answers to help companies wishing to become Chain of Custody-certified.



1. What is Chain of Custody certification?

Fisheries that choose to enter the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification program are evaluated by an independent third party accredited to assess fisheries to the MSC environmental standard for sustainable fishing. Throughout the supply chain, use of the MSC ecolabel on fish products is only permitted where there has been independent verification that the product originated from an MSC-certified fishery. A Chain of Custody certificate for each company in the supply chain provides this verification. To use the MSC ecolabel, companies must also hold an MSC logo license (see question No. 11).

2. Who should seek Chain of Custody certification?

If your company wishes to sell fish or fish products as MSC-certified then you should apply for Chain of Custody certification. Often the supply chain involves a number of different companies – each company that takes ownership and/or processes the product is required to obtain their own Chain of Custody certificate in order to apply the MSC ecolabel. If there is any break in certification in the supply chain, products will not be eligible to carry the ecolabel.

3. Are there any cases in which companies don't need Chain of Custody certification to sell seafood as MSC-certified?

All companies that take ownership and/or processes product in the supply chain must have Chain of Custody certification for the product to bear the MSC ecolabel. However, companies such as retailers that receive only consumer ready tamper proof products bearing an MSC ecolabel and product code from a certified supplier does not need to obtain Chain of Custody certification in order to sell that product to consumers. If you are unsure if your product is consumer ready tamper proof, consult your certifier.

4. Why should my company apply for Chain of Custody certification?

- a) It is required if you, companies you sell to, or anyone down the supply chain wants to display the MSC ecolabel.
- b) Chain of Custody certification is a unique selling point for your business; it provides clear answers to customers who want more information about product sourcing.
- c) Chain of Custody certification recognizes improved corporate social responsibility.
- d) The MSC ecolabel provides access to an increasing number of environmentally-minded customers.
- e) The traceability element of Chain of Custody assures you and your customers that certified fish comes from legal and sustainable sources and therefore reduces risk to your company.

5. What do I have to do to get Chain of Custody certification?

- a) Ask for a quote from a certifier accredited to undertake audits and certifications in line with the MSC Chain of Custody standard. We strongly recommend asking more than one certifier to submit quotes for the work. A list of accredited certifiers is available at <http://www.msc.org/get-certified/find-a-certifier/chain-of-custody-assessments>
- b) Prepare for an audit of your traceability processes by the certifier. In the audit, you must be able to show that MSC-certified fish does not get mixed with non-certified fish at any stage of the production and handling process. The MSC has developed the 'myMSC' guidance document to help you prepare for your Chain of Custody certification. You can download this document at <http://www.msc.org/get-certified/supply-chain/mymsc>

6. What does Chain of Custody certification involve?

The accredited certifier contracted to carry out your Chain of Custody audit will request documentation relating to your company's traceability system. They will also visit your company to verify if your systems work effectively to ensure separation and tracking of MSC fish. In most circumstances, verification of a company's traceability system is straightforward since most companies already operate product identification and tracking systems for other purposes such as inventory, ISO9000 or HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points). If the certifier verifies that your company meets the Chain of Custody standard - that is the product identification and segregation systems are adequate to ensure that products from certified fisheries are not mixed with products from non-certified fisheries and you can track products through your systems - your company will receive a Chain of Custody certificate.

7. What can I expect during the audit?

You will have to:

- a) Describe the systems you use to ensure internal traceability.
- b) Verify how much MSC-certified fish has been delivered to you, which species, when, by whom and where it is being stored.
- c) Verify how much MSC-certified fish has left your company and to whom it was sold.
- d) Show that MSC-certified fish does not get mixed or confused with non-MSC-certified fish in receiving, processing, packing, storage and shipping. This is normally done by clear labeling.
- e) Retain complete records about which fish species have been used when, in which quantities and what you have done with them.

8. How long does the certification process take?

Before contracting a certifier, it is worth spending some time reviewing your tracking systems yourself. How long it will take to check, and put systems in place where necessary, is dependent on the size of your business and which systems you already employ. The time your certifier spends at your location depends on the size of your business, the number of MSC products you wish to handle, the level of processing involved, the systems in place, and most importantly, how prepared you are.

The better prepared you are, the quicker and cheaper certification will be. This is why MSC has developed the 'myMSC' guidance document to help you prepare. You can download it at <http://www.msc.org/get-certified/supply-chain/mymsc>

9. What if I am unhappy with a decision by my certifier or another aspect of their performance?

All certifiers are required to have their own complaints procedure. You should be able to find this on their website – listed with their contact details. If you need to raise a complaint with your certifier, please use their complaints procedure as a first step.

If you are not satisfied with your certifier's response, it is possible to raise a complaint with MSC's independent accreditation body – Accreditation Services International (ASI). ASI's website, www.accreditation-services.com, includes full details of the [ASI complaints procedure](#).

10. Do all sites in a multi-site company need to be audited to obtain certification?

If you manage a group, you can apply for certification of the whole group in one assessment. The MSC defines a group as a number of individual sites which collectively apply for certification. This might be one organization with several sites, or a group of individual businesses, such as independent restaurants or fish mongers, that form an association to become certified together. MSC has developed specific requirements for groups, and a guidance document to help you achieve certification. The benefit to clients is that being certified as a group can lead to substantial savings in the cost of chain of custody certification compared to individual certification because not every site is audited.

11. How much does Chain of Custody certification cost?

The cost of Chain of Custody certification are agreed upon between you and your certifier and is mainly composed of the time the auditor spends (ask for their day rate and whether they will always charge for a full day) and their travel and accommodation expenses. In addition to cost, you may also want to consider their responsiveness, availability and other factors important to you. The time your auditor spends on-site will depend on the size of your company, the number of sites involved in handling fish, the level of processing involved and the complexity of your business. If the product changes form a number of times and many sites are involved, the process may take more of the certifier's time.

12. How long is the Chain of Custody certification valid?

The certificate is valid for 3 years and usually involves an annual, on-site surveillance review by your certifier. The certifier may also undertake a random audit at any time between annual reviews to ensure traceability systems are in operation and effective.

13. Does the Chain of Custody certificate entitle the company to use the MSC ecolabel?

Once you are certified for Chain of Custody, you need a logo licence from the MSC's trading company, Marine Stewardship Council International (MSCI), to use the ecolabel on products. Find out more about using the MSC ecolabel: <http://www.msc.org/get-certified/use-the-msc-label>



The new MSC ecolabel
– two versions

14. Why is it necessary to have a logo license?

As with any registered trademark, careful control of the MSC ecolabel is important to maintain its value to legitimate users. This control is exercised through a license agreement between your company and the MSCI – which licenses the use of the MSC ecolabel. The license specifies the product(s) on which the ecolabel may be used and requires that proposed uses of the ecolabel must be submitted to MSCI for written approval.

15. Which MSC ecolabel can I use?

On 16 July 2009 the MSC announced the introduction of an evolved and improved MSC ecolabel. The new ecolabel offers greater flexibility for design and translation. It is available in two formats: a landscape and a portrait version and approved translations are also available from the MSC. There are also two versions of the MSC claim that may accompany the ecolabel on packaging.

16. What does it cost to use the MSC ecolabel?

The cost of displaying the MSC ecolabel on MSC-certified seafood products depends on how much MSC-certified fish your company sells. There is a flat fee that ranges from \$250 to \$2,000 per year, depending on the amount of your gross sales. Suppliers who sell directly to retail or restaurants also pay a fee equal to 0.5% of the wholesale value of the labeled product(s).