

MARINE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL – TECHNICAL ADVISORY BOARD

TAB DIRECTIVE SERIES

TAB Directive Number	Title	Date of Issue
TAB D-004 v1.1	Status of Stocks – Depletion and Recovery	1 May 2010
Decision Date: November 2003 Effective Date: 1 April 2004		

Documents Supplemented or Modified by this Directive

MSC Scheme Document	Status Change
TAB Directive 004 v1	Superseded

Background

This issue arose when guidance was sought by a certification body about the MSC's interpretation of the Principle 1, Criterion 2 relating to the minimum acceptable level (i.e. 60 level guidepost) for stock size and the scope that the Principle 1 provides for considering the rebuilding of depleted stocks.

Principle 1 states:

"A fishery must be conducted in a manner that does not lead to over-fishing or depletion of the exploited populations and, for those populations that are depleted, the fishery must be conducted in a manner that demonstrably leads to their recovery."

Criterion 2 states:

"Where the exploited populations are depleted, the fishery will be executed such that recovery and rebuilding is allowed to occur to a specified level consistent with the precautionary approach and the ability of the populations to produce long-term potential yields within a specified time frame."

Consideration

The specific interpretation of the MSC Principles and Criteria for a fishery under assessment is the responsibility of the certification body and assessment team, having sought input from the MSC and relevant stakeholders in the fishery under assessment. However, the intent of Principle 1 is quite clear in the existing guidelines:

"To ensure that the productive capacities of resources are maintained at high levels and are not sacrificed in favour of short term interests. Thus, exploited populations would be maintained at high levels of abundance designed to retain their productivity, provide margins of safety for error and uncertainty, and restore and retain their capacities for yields over the long term."

The performance indicator and 60 level guidepost should be chosen by the certification body so as to meet the intent of maintaining productive capacity at a high stock level. In choosing the performance indicator and 60 level guidepost, assessment teams should consider the broad question of sustainability under the MSC Principles and Criteria, including the reliance of predator populations on the target stock and the role of environmental variability in driving natural fluctuations in fish numbers.

It is entirely appropriate that a range of circumstances such as this be considered in setting the guideposts in relation to the MSC Principles and Criteria. As a result, the 60 level guidepost judged appropriate for one target stock could be expected to be different from that judged appropriate for others where considerations relating to predator dependence, environmental variability, etc are different. As long as the guideposts are appropriate to achieve the sustainability standard, and can be justified as such, differences in the absolute level of the 60 level guidepost in different circumstances are acceptable and understandable. It is because of such fishery specific considerations that MSC at this stage does not provide generic and absolute operational interpretations of the standard in relation to stock size.

MSC guideposts versus government set reference points

There is no necessary connection between an MSC guidepost and a government set reference point. If the government set reference point meets the needs and standards of the MSC assessment, then a certification body's assessment team may well chose to use it. But it is not necessary to use the government reference point and it should not be used if the assessment team does not consider that it meets the needs and standards of an MSC assessment.

Recovery of depleted stocks

Principle 1 also allows for consideration of a recovery plan for stocks that are depleted. But Issue 3 of the Fisheries Certification Methodology provides two constraints on this. These are:

- (1) All criteria and sub-criteria must score over 60 to allow a fishery to pass certification, so the depletion of the stock must not be sufficient to cause a score of less than 60 on any criteria or sub-criteria; and
- (2) If stock depletion has caused a score of between 60 and 80 then a stock recovery plan could be required by the certification body as a condition of certification, and the Fisheries Certification Methodology requires that conditions of certification would be reasonably expected to achieve the 80 level of performance within the period of certification (i.e. 5 years).

The intent of Principle 1 determines the 60 level guidepost for stock size. Because the fishery can pass certification only if all scores at criterion and sub-criterion level are 60 or more, this effectively defines how depleted the stock may be and still pass. So a stock depleted below the 60 guidepost for stock size cannot pass certification no matter how convincing the recovery plan is. If a stock recovery plan is included as a condition of certification then the requirements of such conditions of certification (ie that give a reasonable chance of achieving the 80 level guidepost over the time frame of the certification) determine the target and timeframe of the required stock rebuilding plan. On this basis, it may well be impossible for some stocks to achieve recovery targets in a five year timeframe because of the life history parameters of the species under assessment: growth rate; size or age at maturity or recruitment to the fishery; stock size or age composition; longevity; and, natural mortality, among other things.

ENDs