Questions and answers about MSC Chain of Custody Certification

1) What is Chain of Custody Certification?

In the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Certification Programme a fishery is assessed to the MSC Standard for Sustainable Fishing. Use of the MSC logo on fishery products is only permitted where there has been independent verification that the product originated from an MSC certified fishery. A Chain of Custody (CofC) Certificate provides this verification.

2) Who should seek CofC Certification?

If there is no logo or claim made on or about a product then CofC Certification is not required. Therefore, anyone wanting to apply the MSC logo to a fish product must first obtain a CofC Certificate. Each member of the supply chain including processors, retailers and restaurants must be certified up to the point of applying the label to the product. Products with a certified supply chain will be eligible to carry the MSC logo; products with a non-certified supply chain will not be eligible to carry the logo.

3) Who certifies the Supply Chain?

Only an MSC accredited certifier – either the certifier that certifies the fishery or another MSC accredited certifier can undertake MSC CofC Certification. The list of accredited certifiers is on the MSC website (www.msc.org). Any certification organisation may apply for accreditation by the MSC if it meets specific requirements. The requirements are set out in the MSC’s Accreditation Manual (also available on the MSC website).

4) Where does CofC Certification take place?

A certifier must consider all parts of the supply chain (from fishing vessel to end consumer) when assessing the supply chain against the MSC CofC Standard. Often the supply chain will involve a number of different companies. It is up to the certifier to determine the intensity of the review of the CofC applicant. The certifier will pay particular attention to any steps in the supply chain where products from a fishery certified to the MSC Standard could be mixed with products from non-certified fisheries.

5) What does CofC Certification involve?

A company wanting to apply the MSC logo to a seafood product(s), contracts an MSC accredited certifier to assess the supply chain(s) for that product(s). The certifier will request documentation relating to that supply chain and will usually visit one or more points in the supply chain to verify the product to which the logo will be applied originated from a certified fishery.

In most circumstances, verification of a supply chain is straightforward since companies already operate product identification and tracking systems for other purposes such as ISO9000 Certification for HACCP. If the certifier verifies that the product identification and segregation systems are adequate to ensure that products from certified fisheries are not mixed with products from uncertified fisheries, the company will receive a CofC Certificate.

For more information, please visit www.msc.org
6) Do I need a CofC Certificate if I already operate a documentation system?

If a company already operates in compliance with the HACCP, FDA or USDC documentation programme, it may be easier for that company to demonstrate to the certifier that it meets the MSC CofC Standard, and their certifier could potentially combine the audits in one visit. However, compliance with other programmes does not currently replace the requirement for MSC CofC Certification.

7) Must all points of sale be separately certified?

In the case of a multiple branch or multi-divisional retailer or foodservice operator, a CofC Certificate may be sought by the retailer's head office or divisional office. The CofC Certificate would require the certification body to visit a sample of sites to verify relevant internal audit programmes covering individual outlets.

8) How long does a CofC Certification last?

The certification lasts for 3 years with an annual review by the certifier. The certifier may also undertake a random audit at any time between annual reviews to ensure the supply chain is operating in an appropriate manner.

9) How much does CofC Certification cost?

The costs of CofC Certification are agreed between the certifier and the client and will depend on the size and complexity of the supply chain. For instance, if the fish product remains mostly unchanged throughout the supply chain and there are few processing sites and few stages in the supply chain, certification is likely to be straightforward. However if the product changes form a number of times and many sites are involved, the process will be more complicated.

The certifier will provide a specific quote prior to undertaking the work. There will also be a cost associated with the certifier's annual review and renewal of the CofC Certificate.

10) Does the CofC Certificate entitle the company to use the MSC logo?

No. Once a company has received a CofC Certificate, it must enter into a licence agreement before it is permitted to use the MSC logo.

11) Why is it necessary to have a logo licence?

As with any trademark, careful control of the MSC logo is important to maintain its value to legitimate users. This control is exercised through a licence agreement between the company wanting to use the logo and the trading arm of the MSC – Marine Stewardship Council International (MSCI) – which licenses the use of the MSC logo. The licence specifies the product(s) on which the logo may be used. It also requires that logo use is consistent with the requirements set out in the document, ‘Using the MSC Logo: Regulations and Guidelines for Application’. These regulations require that proposed uses of the logo must be submitted to MSCI for written approval. MSCI will not approve use of the logo on certified products where other labelling on the product may cause confusion about the identity of the fishery from which the product originated.
12) What does it cost to use the MSC logo?

The cost of on-product use of the MSC logo is based on the value of the product at the first point of sale after application of the logo and is payable by the company responsible for applying the logo to the product. A minimum royalty is payable annually by the licensee to MSCI. A royalty rate is also payable annually for sales of MSC-labelled “consumer facing” product. Please contact Alex.Hickman@msc.org for more information.
Vessel from a fishery certified to the MSC Principles and Criteria delivers its fish to the dock. All certified fish must be segregated and identified from non-certified fish.

If MSC-certified fish is sold in a wholesale market, sellers must identify the fishery from where they originate. This can be done through tagging of larger species, appropriate labeling of unopened boxes or MSC specific areas within market, using MSC Fishery Management Certificate Registration Code.

All certified fish must be segregated and clearly identified during storage and transportation, with Chain of Custody Certificate Registration Codes.

MSC-certified fish is processed at a processor. Certified fish must be processed in a separate production run, or the certification body must approve some other precautions that are taken to ensure continued segregation and identification of certified from non-certified fish (for processors).

The MSC Logo is applied to product containing fish from a certified fishery. The logo can only be applied if all steps of the supply chain and subsequent Chain of Custody registration codes can be identified.

Note: if processor has CoC for one certified species, then providing the same system is used, the same code can be used for a newly certified species. The certification body must be advised on any such addition.

Note: if brand owner is sourcing from a number of suppliers, such as canned fish product, then the suppliers individual Chain of Custody code must be ink-jetted onto the can, before delivered to the point of labeling.

Applied on consumer ready packaging by processors
Applied to or nearby, fish on fish counter by retail staff.
Applied in restaurants and food service on menus, etc

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