

CONSERVATION ALLIANCE  
FOR SEAFOOD SOLUTIONS

# Guidelines for Supporting Fishery Improvement Projects

Working together, conservation groups and the seafood industry can be a powerful force for improving the sustainability of seafood and the health of ocean ecosystems.

*[solutionsforseafood.org](http://solutionsforseafood.org)*



## GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTING FISHERY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

The goal of this document is to define the kind of fishery improvement projects members of the Conservation Alliance will support (e.g., recognize on the Alliance FIP tracking website and/or recommend business partners participate in or source from).

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# Guidelines for Supporting Fishery Improvement Projects

**Members of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions support the efforts fisheries are making to improve the sustainability of their seafood products.**

There are many different ways to address management and environmental problems in fisheries, including policy change, targeted strategies such as bycatch reduction, and multistakeholder efforts called fishery improvement projects (FIPs). While the latter are the focus of these guidelines, we believe all of these methods are valuable and play an important role in helping fisheries become more sustainable over time.



**In 2012, the Conservation Alliance released its first set of guidelines for fishery improvement projects with the expectation that these guidelines would need to evolve over time.** Since then, the number of fishery improvement projects around the world has increased substantially. Based on feedback from the Alliance community and industry and fishery stakeholders, the Alliance has updated the guidelines to be as clear as possible and recognize advances in the fishery improvement project landscape during the past two years.

**We believe fishery improvement projects must strive to achieve a high level of sustainability that allows fisheries — and the communities and businesses that depend on them — to thrive.** Ultimately, we encourage all fishery improvement projects to work to achieve a level of performance consistent with an unconditional pass of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Fisheries Standard. We recognize that, for some fisheries, performance at this level is a long-term goal.

**We use the MSC Fisheries Standard as a tool for measuring the performance of fisheries and the progress fishery improvement projects make over time.** The standard is accessible to all fisheries regardless of whether they decide to pursue certification. Using the same credible standard for measuring the progress of all fishery improvement projects allows members of the Conservation Alliance and businesses with sustainable seafood commitments to make better-informed decisions about participating in or sourcing from these projects.

**The Conservation Alliance is developing a fishery improvement project tracking website.** The Alliance intends the website to be a comprehensive, public, online database that makes information about fishery improvement projects accessible to conservation groups, suppliers, and retailers, among other audiences. Currently this information is housed in a number of different places online, and we aim to consolidate that information into a one-stop shop.

## THE ROLE OF SEAFOOD BUYERS IN IMPROVING FISHERIES

In 2008, the Conservation Alliance released the [Common Vision for Environmentally Sustainable Seafood](#), a guide that outlines six steps businesses can take to develop and implement a sustainable seafood policy. One of these steps is for retailers, suppliers, and processors to buy environmentally responsible seafood. To fulfill this step, buyers that purchase seafood from sources with environmental problems can pursue a variety of strategies to help those sources move toward sustainability.

One strategy is to temporarily stop purchasing seafood from those sources until they meet the criteria required by the company's sustainable seafood purchasing policy. We recommend that companies that take this approach also communicate the problem areas in the fishery that need to be addressed for sourcing to resume.

Another strategy is to engage suppliers, producers, and other industry partners in a fishery improvement project. Fishery improvement projects need to be accountable for meeting specific milestones and deadlines for improvement. If a fishery does not make measurable improvements in its environmental performance over time, we recommend buyers and suppliers engaged in the improvement project stop buying seafood from that source and communicate the reason for doing so.

The decision about whether to engage one's supply chain in an improvement project or stop buying until improvements are made rests with the buyer and will depend on the specific requirements of the company's sustainable seafood policy. Both approaches are legitimate when structured to create incentives for measurable, positive change in our oceans and seafood supply — which is the ultimate goal.



## **DEFINITION OF A FISHERY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

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A fishery improvement project is a multistakeholder effort to address environmental challenges in a fishery. These projects utilize the power of the private sector to incentivize positive changes toward sustainability in the fishery and seek to make these changes endure through policy change.





## DEFINITION OF A FISHERY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

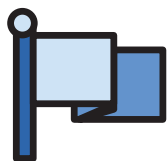
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The following are key qualities that a fishery improvement project must have to be considered for support by members of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions.



### Participation

A fishery improvement project must draw upon market forces, which might include suppliers, retailers, food service, fishing industry, etc., to motivate fishery improvements. Specifically, a fishery improvement project must include active participation by companies in the supply chain. Other important participants include government, fishery managers, and nongovernmental organizations. Participation means contributing financial or in-kind support to the project and/or working on activities in the workplan.



### Public Commitment

Participants must commit to financially invest in (directly or in-kind) and make improvements to the fishery (e.g., a signed memorandum of understanding, email correspondence stating a commitment, etc.).



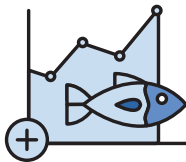
### **Objectives**

A fishery improvement project must define the near-term scope of the project with a set of timebound objectives. Alliance members will determine their support for a fishery improvement project based in part on these objectives (see additional details on basic and comprehensive fishery improvement project criteria below).



### **Workplan**

A fishery improvement project must develop and implement a workplan, with an associated budget and deadlines, designed to address the deficiencies in the fishery necessary to achieve the project's objectives. The workplan and deadlines must be made publicly available. The budget need not be made publicly available.



### **Progress Tracking and Reporting**

A fishery improvement project must regularly track work toward the activities and outcomes in the workplan and report progress or lack thereof and planned course corrections publicly. All fishery improvement projects are expected to make progress over time. Annually, the Conservation Alliance will conduct a review of progress reporting for all fishery improvement projects listed on the Alliance FIP tracking website.



## BASIC AND COMPREHENSIVE FISHERY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

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Conservation Alliance members engage with fishery improvement projects at two levels:

BASIC	COMPREHENSIVE
Good entry point for fisheries to begin addressing specific environmental challenges.	Aim to address the full range of environmental challenges necessary for a fishery to achieve a high level of sustainability.

The primary differences between basic and comprehensive fishery improvement projects are the level of scoping to inform development of the workplan, the objectives, and the verification required.

**The Alliance encourages fisheries developing new improvement projects to pursue the comprehensive model.** The Alliance also encourages basic fishery improvement projects to transition to comprehensive projects over time. Fisheries engaged in projects that meet the Alliance comprehensive criteria and demonstrate progress are the most likely to be recommended by Alliance members for procurement.

# Key Differences Between Basic and Comprehensive Fishery Improvement Projects

BASIC	COMPREHENSIVE
<b>SCOPING</b>	
<p>FIP completes a needs assessment and scoping document based on the MSC standard to identify environmental challenges. The needs assessment must cover the indicators in the three principle areas of the MSC standard. The needs assessment or scoping document must be made publicly available.</p>	<p>FIP engages a party experienced with applying the MSC standard to complete a pre-assessment and scoping document. The pre-assessment or scoping document must be made publicly available.</p>
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	
<p>FIP defines timebound objectives for addressing a specific set of the fishery's environmental challenges to improve its performance against the MSC standard.</p>	<p>FIP defines timebound objectives for addressing all of the fishery's environmental challenges necessary to achieve a level of performance consistent with an unconditional pass of the MSC standard.</p>
<b>VERIFICATION OF PROGRESS</b>	
<p>Both basic and comprehensive FIPs must publicly report progress on activities and their results with supporting documentation every six months. Annually, the Conservation Alliance will conduct a review of progress reported for all fishery improvement projects listed on the Alliance FIP tracking website.</p>	
<p>Independent, in-person audits of activity results and performance against the MSC standard are encouraged but not required for <b>basic</b> FIPs.</p>	<p>Every three years, <b>comprehensive</b> FIPs must arrange for an independent, in-person audit of activity results and performance against the MSC standard by someone that is both experienced with the MSC standard and independent from the organization implementing the FIP.</p>



## **PROCESS FOR FISHERY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS**

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To be eligible for support by Alliance members, fishery improvement projects generally follow the process described below. We recognize the path is not always linear, but these are the elements we will look for when evaluating fishery improvement projects to make recommendations about engagement or sourcing.



## PROCESS FOR FISHERY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

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### FIP Identification

During the identification stage, a target fishery that may benefit from a fishery improvement project is identified and a supply chain analysis is conducted to understand who else is involved in the fishery and what market leverage exists.

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### FIP Development

During the development stage, the fishery's performance is evaluated against the MSC standard and stakeholders are recruited to participate in the project. The development stage includes:

#### **An assessment of the fishery's environmental performance.**

- Basic fishery improvement projects conduct a needs assessment that covers the three principle areas of the MSC standard to determine environmental challenges and improvements needed in the fishery. We recommend basic projects conduct an MSC pre-assessment as their needs assessment if they anticipate transitioning to a comprehensive project in the future.
- Comprehensive fishery improvement projects conduct an MSC pre-assessment to determine where the fishery falls short of the MSC standard.

#### **A scoping document completed by a consultant.**

- For basic fishery improvement projects, a scoping document summarizes the results of the needs assessment and recommends strategies for addressing the fishery's challenges. Either the needs assessment or the scoping document must be made public.

- For comprehensive fishery improvement projects, a scoping document summarizes the results of the pre-assessment and recommends strategies for addressing the fishery’s challenges. Either the pre-assessment or the scoping document must be made public. The scoping document must be completed or audited by an entity experienced with applying the MSC standard.

*Note: If the needs assessment or MSC pre-assessment includes a summary of results and recommended strategies for addressing the fishery’s challenges, the fishery improvement project need not complete the additional scoping document.*

### **A stakeholder mapping and engagement process.**

Identify which parties are the most relevant to the fishery improvement project. Consider the full range of stakeholders who will be impacted by the project or have a role in making changes to address environmental challenges in the fishery. Determine who needs to become a participant in the fishery improvement project, including government representatives, industry (fishermen, processors, exporters, etc.), environmental NGOs, and the scientific community.

We encourage fishery improvement projects to make the process for adding participants transparent. Additionally, we encourage projects at the development stage to determine whether other improvement projects exist within the same fishery and to collaborate where possible rather than duplicate existing efforts.

## FIP Launch

During the launch stage, the project participants and workplan are finalized and made public. The launch stage includes:

• **Confirmation of project participants.** A memorandum of understanding or list of fishery improvement project participants is posted publicly.

• **Participant meeting.** The fishery improvement project participants meet in person to discuss the assessment and determine a course of action.

• **Development of the workplan.** Based on the assessment, scoping document, and participant input, the fishery improvement project develops a workplan with activities that will help it correct the deficiencies necessary to achieve its objectives. For a comprehensive fishery improvement project, the workplan must be developed with someone experienced with applying the MSC standard.

A workplan must include:

- **Objectives.** We recommend objectives focus on a time frame of five years (or less). For basic fishery improvement projects, objectives will address a specific set of the environmental challenges identified in the needs assessment to improve the fishery's performance against the MSC standard. For comprehensive fishery improvement projects, objectives will address all the fishery's environmental challenges necessary to achieve a level of sustainability consistent with an unconditional pass of the MSC standard. We recommend all fishery improvement projects work toward including traceability as part of their objectives.



- **A list of activities.**
- **Responsible parties.** Organizations/people responsible for completing each activity.
- **Timeframes.** An estimate of the timeframe needed to complete each activity and milestone (e.g., January 2015 – June 2015).
- **Metrics and key performance indicators.** Milestones to enable the project participants to track progress, or lack thereof, over time and to communicate about the changes in the fishery.
- **An associated budget.** Costs and funding opportunities for each activity as appropriate. There are generally two sets of costs: (1) process costs (e.g., costs associated with developing the scoping document, holding stakeholder meetings, developing the workplan), and (2) implementation costs (e.g., costs for the fishery to actually make changes). One or more parties in the supply chain will be responsible for the costs.

During this stage, the workplan must be made public and the budget must be adopted by participants (although the budget details need not be made public). When developing the workplan, we recommend assessing risks that may impact the ability of the fishery to make progress as planned.


## STAGE 3

### FIP Implementation

During the implementation stage, the fishery starts taking action toward addressing its shortcomings and begins tracking its progress.

This stage includes:

- **Implementing activities in the workplan** and consistent engagement with regulators on these activities.



**Tracking and reporting on progress.** Basic and comprehensive fishery improvement projects self-report their progress on implementing their workplans publicly every six months (or more frequently if appropriate). Progress reporting must include public evidence of activities completed. Once the Alliance FIP tracking website is operational, it will be the vehicle for public reporting.

Annually, the Conservation Alliance will conduct a review of progress reporting for all fishery improvement projects listed on the Alliance FIP tracking website.

Every three years, comprehensive fishery improvement projects must arrange for an independent, in-person audit of activity results and performance against the MSC standard (e.g., changes in fisheries policy, management, or fishing practices and ultimately the health of the fishery) by someone who has demonstrated experience applying the MSC standard (e.g., is a [registered MSC technical consultant](#) or [accredited conformity assessment body](#)) and is independent from the organization implementing the fishery improvement project.

**Course correcting if needed.** If a fishery improvement project does not achieve the milestones in its workplan within the specified timeline, the project should report the reasons milestones were missed and update the workplan to reflect adjusted milestones and deadlines.

STAGE 4

### **Improvements in Fishing Practices or Fishery Management**

In this stage, fishery improvement projects document any demonstrated improvements based on implementation of the workplan. Improvements in this stage include:

- **Improvements in policy or management or modifications in fishing practices.**

- **Increases in scores for MSC performance indicators focused on management or information.**

STAGE 5

### **Improvements on the Water**

In this stage, fishery improvement projects document any demonstrated improvements on the water. Improvements in this stage include:

- **Increases in scores for MSC performance indicators focused on outcomes.**

- **Verifiable change on the water**, such as a reduction in fishing mortality, an increase in biomass of the target stock, a reduction in habitat impact, etc.

*Note: Stages Four and Five are not necessarily sequential. These stages evaluate the fishery improvement project on two different sets of outcomes. Both stages may not be required with every fishery improvement project.*



A blue-tinted photograph of a fishing boat on the water. The boat is in the foreground, moving towards the right, with a wake visible. A person is standing on the deck. A large white rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text. The background shows a calm body of water and a distant shoreline under a clear sky.

## **SUPPORTING FISHERY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS**

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Supporting fishery improvement projects can help to engage additional seafood businesses in existing projects as well as spur demand from buyers and suppliers for new projects to improve other fisheries with environmental problems.



## SUPPORTING FISHERY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

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**There are different ways to support fishery improvement projects.** The Conservation Alliance will recognize fishery improvement projects on its new tracking website, but will not make recommendations about participating in or sourcing from projects. Individual Alliance members will evaluate information on the website and consider making recommendations to their business partners. However, companies make the final decision about whether to engage in or source from a fishery improvement project.

The following provides additional information about Alliance recognition and member recommendations.

## **Alliance Recognition**

The Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions applauds all fishery improvement projects working to address environmental challenges. To recognize these important efforts, the Alliance encourages fishery improvement projects that meet at minimum the criteria for basic projects outlined in these guidelines to submit information to the Alliance FIP tracking website (currently in development). The Alliance intends the website to be a comprehensive, public, online database that makes information about fishery improvement projects accessible to conservation groups, suppliers, and retailers, among other audiences.

To be recognized on the Alliance FIP tracking website, a fishery improvement project must meet at minimum the criteria for a basic project and reach Stage Two (FIP Launch). Fishery improvement projects at Stage Zero or Stage One that aim to meet the basic or comprehensive criteria will be included in a “Prospective Fishery Improvement Projects” section of the website for up to 18 months. After that time, they must progress to Stage Two to remain on the website. The Alliance will review information submitted by fishery improvement projects to determine whether they meet basic or comprehensive criteria and verify the project stage. In addition, as noted in the progress tracking requirements previously outlined in this document, the Alliance will conduct an annual review of progress tracking information submitted by fishery improvement projects on the website.

## **Member Recommendations**

The Conservation Alliance does not make recommendations to engage in or source from fishery improvement projects. Instead, individual Alliance members will evaluate fishery improvement projects based on the information included in the Alliance FIP tracking website and consider making recommendations to their business partners as follows:



- Recommend a company engage in a FIP. Alliance members will consider recommending that companies engage in fishery improvement projects included on the Alliance FIP tracking website. Company engagement in a fishery improvement project can take several forms. Companies participate in fishery improvement projects (e.g., contribute financially/in-kind or get involved in activities) or engage with a FIP in other ways (e.g., send a letter of support, ask their supply chain to participate).
- Recommend a company source from a fishery engaged in a FIP. Alliance members will consider recommending that companies source from fisheries engaged in fishery improvement projects included on the Alliance FIP tracking website. Alliance members have varying criteria for recommending that companies source from a fishery. Fisheries engaged in fishery improvement projects that meet the Alliance comprehensive criteria, include traceability, and are demonstrating progress, are the most likely to be recommended for procurement. But some members may recommend companies source from fisheries engaged in basic projects as well.

### **Business Role in Decision**

The decision about whether to source from a fishery or engage in a fishery improvement project ultimately rests with our company partners based on the parameters of their sustainable seafood commitments. Alliance members make recommendations, but are not the final decision-makers.

## **Progress is Critical**

In addition, this decision is contingent on the fishery making progress over time against the activities and outcomes in its workplan. Clear communication and reporting from the fishery improvement project is key. If a project misses deadlines for activities in the workplan, we request that it report on the reasons deadlines were missed and provide a new plan for meeting them. We recognize that a fishery improvement project can make progress even if it misses deadlines for some activities. However, consistently missing deadlines and/or failing to make measurable improvements in environmental performance over time may result in the withdrawal of support for a fishery improvement project.

*Note: For more information, including a glossary of terms used in this document, please visit [solutionsforseafood.org/projects/fishery-improvement](https://solutionsforseafood.org/projects/fishery-improvement).*