

# Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs)

---

## Background

As market demand grows for sustainable seafood, an increasing number of fisheries around the world are becoming interested in making the necessary improvements to become recognised as sustainable and access these markets. This has led to considerable growth in organised multi-stakeholder efforts to improve fisheries towards sustainability, often called 'Fishery Improvement Projects' (FIPs).

## The MSC definition of a credible FIP

The MSC recognises the important contribution that credible FIPs can make to improving overall fisheries health and in promoting sustainable seafood. However, the MSC believes that it is important that they are operated in a manner that is credible: that their actions are transparent; that they clearly show improvement in fishery performance; and that these fisheries ultimately demonstrate their sustainability through a robust, independent assessment process.

In July 2015, following deliberations by a Board/Stakeholder Council working group, the MSC Board of Trustees approved an MSC definition of credible FIPs. The definition advocates that a credible FIP should be characterised by:

- An initial gap analysis against the MSC Standard (**MSC pre-assessment**)
- An **action plan** inclusive of activities, budgets, roles and responsibilities, that is linked to the MSC performance indicators and scoring guideposts and is ultimately capable of delivering an unconditional pass against the MSC Standard
- Regular **reporting of progress** against the action plan
- Presence of a mechanism to **verify and provide assurance** about the robustness of the **process and progress** being made in the FIP (i.e. pre-assessment and progress reports prepared or reviewed by an MSC assessor or an independent technical consultant)
- A **pre-determined limit** to the amount of time spent as a FIP, which should generally be no longer than five years
- An **upfront commitment to enter full MSC assessment** and achieve MSC certification through a transparent, third party process, to verify the success of the FIP

The above guidance is intended to be used as a roadmap to sustainability, and to provide clarity to FIP providers, fisheries, retailers and stakeholders on what constitutes a credible FIP. The MSC recommends that partners apply it to the

development of effective and time-bound fishery improvement projects, and encourages retailers to use these criteria to assess the credibility of a FIP, should they take the independent decision to include FIPs in their sourcing policies.

## Further information and support tools

The MSC has a range of tools available to support the development of credible FIPs and to help FIPs stakeholders address each of the elements outlined above.

These include:

- [Pre-assessment Template](#)
- [Action Plan Template](#)
- [Benchmarking and Tracking Tool](#)
- [List of technical consultants](#)
- [Capacity building program](#)
- [Partnering for Sustainable Fisheries](#)
- [Get certified! A guide to the MSC assessment process](#)