

# CASE

## Marine Stewardship Council

### Challenge:

Fisheries around the world are being depleted faster than they can replenish themselves. This issue was a concern to both the World Wildlife Fund and to Unilever, the parent company of the world's largest purveyor of frozen fish. Unilever and World Wildlife Fund formed a partnership with the goal of creating economic incentives for sustainable fishing by certifying and labeling products from sustainable fisheries. The partners recognized the potential for controversy about the scientific basis for defining sustainable fisheries, and for implementing a certification program.

### Result:

Through a consultative process facilitated by RESOLVE, the project partners developed draft principles and criteria guidelines defining sustainable marine fisheries, tested them with a wide range of stakeholders around the world, and finalized a consensus document. The consensus principles and criteria now form the basis for certification decisions. One hundred products have been certified by the Marine Stewardship Council, created to implement the market-based approach.

## Participants

### STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN CONSULTATION

Individual fishers  
Commercial fishing industries  
Seafood buyers, processors and retailers  
Government regulatory authorities  
Government and academic scientists  
Economists  
Independent certifiers  
Conservation groups

Indigenous peoples  
Other interested parties

### FOUNDING PARTNERS

World Wildlife Fund  
Unilever

### FACILITATOR

Lee Langstaff, RESOLVE (now an independent provider of neutral services)

## Issues

Fish connect people to the sea by providing food, sport and enjoyment. Yet humans have not always been good stewards of this valuable renewable resource. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that of the world's commercially important marine fish stocks, 47% are fully fished, 15% are over-exploited and 10% are depleted or slowly recovering. If fish stocks were better managed, ecosystems would be healthier and more fish could be caught without compromising future fishing.

Recognizing that over fishing threatens ocean environments and fishing industry livelihoods, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Unilever, the world's single largest buyer of fish, formed a partnership with the joint goal of creating economic incentives for sustainable fishing through the establishment of an independent, non-profit Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). The MSC would house and oversee a program whereby fisheries conforming to a set of criteria for sustainable fishing would be eligible for certification and labeling. This would provide consumers with the opportunity to choose seafood products from sustainably managed sources.

## Process

From the earliest stages of the MSC initiative, Unilever and WWF recognized that a key to the success of the MSC certification program would be a technically sound and widely accepted set of criteria on which to base certification decisions. In September of 1996, they initiated a process of broad consultation, facilitated by RESOLVE, aimed at ensuring that the development of the Marine Stewardship Council and its proposed certification program would be as well informed as possible by the full range of individuals and organizations with expertise and interest in fisheries sustainability.

The MSC sponsors recognized that the potentially controversial nature of the MSC initiative and the fact that some stakeholders viewed one or both of the sponsoring partners as advocates for a particular point of view could make it difficult, if not impossible, for the consultative process to be perceived as unbiased. The use of a neutral helped to ensure that participants felt the

workshops were conducted in a manner that provided for the free and open exchange of perspectives, and that concerns and recommendations were accurately reflected.

The consultative process proceeded in three phases:

- A small group of internationally renowned experts in marine fisheries met for three days to develop a preliminary set of Draft Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing that provided a starting point for engaging in broader consultation.
- The MSC sponsors conducted eight two-day workshops around the world to introduce local and regional stakeholders to the Marine Stewardship Council initiative, to gain an understanding of their different perspectives, and to gather feedback. Workshop participants represented individual fishers, commercial fishing industries, seafood buyers, processors and retailers, government regulatory authorities, government and academic scientists, economists, independent certifiers, conservation groups, indigenous peoples and other interested parties.
- The original drafters of the principles and criteria and stakeholders from several of the regional workshops reconvened and reached agreement on revisions to the Draft Principles and Criteria, reflecting input from the workshops and from results of pilot projects.

## Results

The consultation process resulted in wide agreement on a set of principles and criteria for sustainable fishing, which is currently being utilized as the basis for certification and labeling by the MSC and the certification bodies they have accredited.

Currently, the MSC is an established independent non-profit organization supported by a broad coalition of more than 100 organizations from more than 20 countries.

Based in London, MSC employs 23 people and administers the certification process. One hundred fish products now bear the MSC label, guiding consumers to sustainable choices. MSC continues to operate through a multi-stakeholder partnership approach, taking into account the multiple perspectives of those seeking to secure a sustainable future.

Scientific/Technical Obstacles and Actions	
O B S T A C L E	A C T I O N
Criteria that would actually achieve sustainability were not known.	WWF and Unilever began with a small group to create a starting point for others to discuss, build on, test and revise
Difficulty of establishing scientifically and technically meaningful criteria while accommodating the wide range of scope, scale and scientific and technical capacities of fisheries around the world	Identification of the most basic principles and criteria and agreement that they must be adapted to each specific circumstance, taking into consideration the scope, scale and context of the fishery in question
Defining effective criteria for sustainable fisheries required scientists from multiple disciplines	The initial group involved scientists with broad credibility across interest groups and individuals experience in working in a multidisciplinary setting
Ecological, social, and political conditions vary widely among fisheries around the world	The process explicitly involved meetings in different regions of the world. The draft criteria were revised iteratively to reflect lessons learned. Many of the original expert group of scientists went to more than one regional meeting, and all made extraordinary effort to discern the fundamental principles of sustainability that underlie the specific regional differences
Potential for lack of trust	Use of facilitator; transparent process; continuing collaboration