

Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch®

Fisheries and Aquaculture Standards Review

Public Summary

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Introduction

The mission of the Monterey Bay Aquarium is to inspire conservation of the oceans. Seafood Watch® is a program of the Aquarium and works to engage and empower consumers and businesses to purchase seafood that is fished or farmed in ways that minimize their impact on the environment. The program was launched in 1999 and continues to research and evaluate the sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture operations worldwide. We share the resulting seafood recommendations with the public, businesses and other interested parties in several forms including pocket guides, smartphone apps and online at seafoodwatch.org.

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the Seafood Watch program and the process for review of the Seafood Watch Standard for Fisheries ([current version](#)) and the Seafood Watch Standard for Aquaculture ([current version](#)) ('Standards'). These Standards were last revised in 2014-2015 and published on October 30 2015, ready for implementation from January 1 2016. Minor revisions were made in 2016 and published in December 2016, ready for implementation from January 1 2017.

The next review cycle will begin in 2019. Please see the [2019-2020 Workplan](#) for additional information and timeline for that cycle.

Seafood Watch Standards

The Seafood Watch standards consist of:

1. Defined guiding principles or objectives
2. Science-based performance criteria that are regularly revised based on the input from fishery and aquaculture experts
3. A robust and objective scoring methodology that that results in a transparent assessment of a fishery or aquaculture operation against the respective criteria

Seafood Watch revisits the performance criteria every four years to reflect the most current thinking in sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. Standards review may also be triggered by other factors (see Process Protocols).

Scope

Seafood Watch assesses the ecological impacts on marine and freshwater ecosystems of fisheries and aquaculture operations up to the dock or farm gate. Seafood Watch assessments do not consider all ecological impacts (e.g. land use, air pollution), post-harvest impacts such as processing or transportation, or non-ecological impacts such as social issues, human health or animal welfare.

Justification of Need

The Seafood Watch standards and fishery and aquaculture assessments currently fill a critical role in the North American marketplace. The assessments identify the environmental performance of the fishery or aquaculture operation in question providing producers with areas for improvement. The resulting fishery and aquaculture ratings inform the seafood purchasing decisions of concerned consumers and businesses. Elements of the Seafood Watch standards and program that are unique to existing eco-certification schemes and ratings programs include the following:

1. We assess the majority of the seafood on the North American market. Initial estimates are that our current recommendations cover some 70-80% of the total seafood on the US market, by volume;
2. We use a three tiered system approach with the intention of recognizing better and best performers;
3. We publish all assessment results regardless of score and rating outcome at www.seafoodwatch.org;
4. Our fisheries and aquaculture Standards press for improvement beyond current best practice;
5. Our assessments are non-voluntary;
6. Our performance criteria are structured to assess the impacts from farms and fisheries not only in isolation, but also in the context of the cumulative effects of multiple fisheries and aquaculture farms in the region.

Objectives

Seafood Watch defines sustainable seafood as seafood from sources, whether fished or farmed, that can maintain or increase production without jeopardizing the structure and function of affected ecosystems. In keeping with this definition, Seafood Watch refers to the following objectives to illustrate the qualities that fisheries and aquaculture operations must possess to be considered sustainable. These objectives inform the performance criteria and scoring methodology used to assess fisheries and aquaculture operations.

Fisheries Objectives

Sustainable wild capture fisheries:

1. Follow the principles of ecosystem-based fisheries management;
2. Ensure all affected stocks¹ are healthy and abundant;
3. Fish all affected stocks at sustainable levels;
4. Minimize bycatch²;
5. Have no more than a negligible impact on any threatened, endangered or protected species;
6. Are managed to sustain long-term productivity of all affected species;
7. Avoid negative impacts on the structure, function or associated biological communities of marine habitats where fishing occurs;
8. Maintain the trophic role of all marine life;
9. Do not result in harmful ecological changes such as reduction of dependent predator populations, trophic cascades, or phase shifts;
10. Ensure that any enhancement activities and fishing activities on enhanced stocks do not negatively affect the diversity, abundance or genetic integrity of wild stocks;

¹ "Affected" stocks include all stocks affected by the fishery, no matter whether target or bycatch, or whether they are ultimately retained or discarded.

² Seafood Watch defines bycatch as all fisheries-related mortality or injury other than the retained catch. Examples include discards, endangered or threatened species catch, pre-catch mortality and ghost fishing. All discards, including those released alive, are considered bycatch unless there is valid scientific evidence of high post-release survival and there is no documented evidence of negative impacts at the population level.

Aquaculture Objectives

Sustainable aquaculture farms and collective industries:

1. Have robust and up-to-date information on production practices and their impacts (or lack of impacts) publically available;
2. Prevent effluent discharges from exceeding, or contributing to exceeding, the carrying capacity of receiving waters at the local or regional level;
3. Are located at sites, scales and intensities that maintain the functionality of ecologically valuable habitats;
4. Limit the type, frequency of use, total use, or discharge of chemicals to levels representing a low risk of impact to non-target organisms;
5. Source sustainable feed ingredients and converting them efficiently with net edible nutrition gains;
6. Prevent population-level impacts to wild species or other ecosystem-level impacts from farm escapes;
7. Prevent population-level impacts to wild species through the amplification and retransmission, or increased virulence of pathogens or parasites;
8. Use eggs, larvae, or juvenile fish produced from farm-raised broodstocks thereby avoiding the need for wild capture;
9. Prevent population-level impacts to predators or other species of wildlife attracted to farm sites;
10. Avoid the potential for the accidental introduction of non-native species or pathogens during the shipment of live animals;

Contributing to Public Consultation

We greatly value input into how we can better meet our objectives in assessing wild-capture fisheries and aquaculture operations. Our Standards review process is structured to allow as much public input as possible. To this end, we have created a Standards review webpage that provides information on the process and houses the draft proposal and other documents (including this one). This webpage is:

www.seafoodwatch.org/seafood-recommendations/standards-review. We have included public consultations and will provide draft proposal documents. While all substantive comments received will be published on the Standards review webpage, commenters who wish to remain anonymous can do so (see draft proposal documents for more details). Further, we commit to addressing all substantive comments (at least in aggregate) and clearly explain how they were incorporated, or if they weren't incorporated, why not. This document(s) will be uploaded to the Standards review webpage when complete.

Interested parties may contribute to the consultation by submitting comments online on the Standards review webpage, or by email to SFWStandardReview@mbayaq.org. All comments submitted by the deadlines will be considered in the next review of the draft Standards. Any comments received after the deadline for the public consultation(s) will be considered in the next Standards review cycle (see [Process Procedures](#) for triggers for a new review cycle). All parties may send an email to SFWStandardReview@mbayaq.org to receive updates on the process. Other ways we may use to gather public comment include in-person meetings, web-based surveys, webinars, and workshops. A timeline of the process is included below.

Decision-Making and Advisory Bodies and Procedures

The main decision-making and advisory entities in the Standard review process are the Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) and the Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG). The MSG and TACs were established in 2015, and will remain in effect indefinitely to provide advice and input into future Standard review cycles and other matters related to Seafood Watch research and assessments. Members serve two year terms. If you are interested in being on the TACs or MSG, please let us know at SFWStandardReview@mbayaq.org.

Technical Advisory Committees: The TACs are advisory bodies comprised of fisheries and aquaculture experts qualified to tackle substantive technical issues that may or may not be brought up in the public consultation process. Their advice will be shared with the Multi-Stakeholder Group to help ensure that our performance criteria are robust and reflect the latest developments in fisheries and aquaculture science and management.

Multi-Stakeholder Group: The MSG approves the final Standards before they are published. It is comprised of members from each of the key stakeholder groups identified in our stakeholder map (see below). Our intent is to ensure that the MSG is both balanced and committed to advising the program in a manner consistent with our objectives for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.

MSG approval process

1. The MSG is to strive for consensus. Efforts to achieve this include identifying and trying to address the specific areas of disagreement and gathering further data/information to inform the decision.
2. Voting cannot be conducted without a quorum. A quorum is two-thirds of the members and at least one member from each stakeholder group. Voting can be conducted in person or remotely depending on the need.
3. Where consensus is not possible, a two-thirds majority and at least one vote from each stakeholder group are required.
4. The results of decision-making shall be made public on the Standards review website, including any dissenting opinions.

Seafood Watch stakeholder map

The diagram below shows the key stakeholder groups identified for outreach during the Seafood Watch Standards review process. All stakeholders are welcome to submit comments during the public consultation periods. Comments received outside of consultation periods will be considered during the next review and review process.



- Organizations focused on improving fisheries/aquaculture management include those working on fisheries and aquaculture improvement programs
- International Ratings System Organizations include those that use recommendations programs as part of their work on sustainable seafood
- Policy NGOs include those working on fisheries and aquaculture policy
- Academics include academic faculty
- Seafood Business includes retailers, suppliers and distributors that buy and sell seafood
- Seafood includes seafood producers and associations

Contact Details

Project management of the Seafood Watch Standards Review is being conducted by Santi Roberts, SFWstandardreview@mbayaq.org. The Seafood Watch Standards review website can be found at: www.seafoodwatch.org/seafood-recommendations/standards-review

Document update history

- February 2015. Timeline update.
- May 2015. Timeline update.
- June 2015. Clarification of stakeholder map. Note that the original group Fisheries/Aquaculture Managers, which includes government decision-makers and advisory bodies, was removed from the map. This was for two reasons:
 - The perception that representatives could have a conflict of interest
 - The difficulty in finding people with broad enough experience of fisheries and aquaculture management across the many different management systems in use across the globe.
- December 2015. Timeline update to reflect that assessments begun after January 1 2016 will be against the new standard, and the new standard will be implemented in SWAT by April 2016. This allows for reports currently underway as of Dec 31 2015 to be completed in SWAT before switching over to the new version of SWAT based on the new standard.
- April 2016. Document updated to reflect new workplan for 2016.
- June 2016 (this document). Document updated to reflect updated timeline and [workplan for 2016](#). The previous version of this document noted the continued development of a greenhouse gas emissions criterion. This project is still in development, but will not likely be incorporated into the Standards (scored or otherwise) before the next full review cycle (2019-2020). Instead, the project will result in a tool that will allow interested parties to calculate estimated GHG emissions, and that can better inform decisions on if and how to incorporate GHG emissions into the Standards at a later date.
- Feb 2017. Updated to reflect 2017 workplan. No substantive changes to document.
- Feb 2018. Updated to reflect 2017-2018 workplan. No substantive changes to document.
- December 2018. Updated to reflect 2019-2020 review workplan. Reference to voting in the TACs has been removed, as TAC members did not see voting necessary in an advisory role.