

Marine Stewardship Council

## Don't be harsh on the MSC

**Both fishing communities and consumers have much to gain from the recent MSC initiative, says a former fisher**

**A**s a former fisher, I disagree with the conclusion drawn by Barbara Neis in her article "Cut Adrift" (SAMUDRA, November 1996), which analyzes the potential impacts of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) initiative. Although Neis points out many of the possible benefits of the MSC, she concludes that this initiative, designed to harness market forces to promote sustainable fishing, disenfranchises women and is "the equivalent of a death sentence for (sic) fisheries and communities that depend upon them."


The basic fallacy in Neis's prediction of the MSC's impacts is the assumption that fisheries are static and that any programme designed to have an impact on fisheries must address all current inequities associated with fisheries. The state of fisheries worldwide is not static. Global fish catches have increased 500 per cent in the last 40 years. Fishing communities, such as those on the Atlantic coast of Canada and America, are already in jeopardy or have collapsed, as have some fish stocks. The social costs of mismanagement are severe; overfishing ruins communities and wrecks the lives of women, men and children.

Fisheries are complex and multi-dimensional, encompassing biological, environmental, social and economic factors, and scientific uncertainty. The MSC, in developing criteria to evaluate the sustainability of fisheries, is taking these factors into account. The mission of the MSC is to work for sustainable marine fisheries by promoting responsible, environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable fishing practices. However, the MSC is not a panacea for our worldwide fisheries crisis. It is designed

to provide consumers with a more direct way of promoting sustainability in fisheries through market forces, so that women, men and children may rely on healthy supplies of fish in the future. It is not designed to replace existing democratic institutions, which should be encouraged to promote sustainability, and, for that matter, social equality.

As an individual who has fished for a living, I am intimately aware of the shortcomings of modern fisheries management and applaud a programme designed to promote sustainable fishing practices for the benefit of the resource and those who depend upon it.

### Consumer point of view

As a consumer, I support a mechanism allowing consumers to have a more direct impact on fisheries management through the market place. I encourage all of those in fishing communities, women and men alike, who have so much to lose from overfishing and mismanagement, and so much to gain from conservation and sustainability, to support the Marine Stewardship Council. 

This response to the debate on the MSC Initiative carried by SAMUDRA comes from Laura Cooper, an ex-fisher from Alaska, us, who is now the International Programme Officer of WWF's Endangered Seas Campaign.