

## Funding support

### A new fund has been set up to support independent certification of fisheries and labeling of seafood products

A new fund, called the Sustainable Fisheries Fund (SFF), is being launched to help provide support for fisheries that wish to be assessed for possible certification under the auspices of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC, [www.msc.org](http://www.msc.org).) and its fisheries ecolabelling programme. To create the SFF, the MSC is working with the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) of Sacramento, California. The Packard Foundation has provided a substantial grant to RLF to launch the new fund, which will make smaller, more targeted, grants and loans to help defray the costs associated with fishery assessments.

The MSC is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to creating sustainable fisheries around the world by using market-based incentives. It has developed an environmental standard for sustainable and well-managed fisheries, and any fishery may voluntarily choose to be assessed against the MSC standard by an independent third-party certifier. Fisheries that meet the MSC standard may use the MSC ecolabel on their products, and this tells consumers that they are choosing products that are the best environmental choice in seafoods.

Danielle Wilson of RLF, who has extensive experience working with the Packard Foundation's Conserving California Landscapes Initiative, will provide the organizational leadership for the new SFF. Jim Humphreys, MSC's US Director, will serve as a consultant to RLF and will manage the new programme.

Specific guidelines are being developed to guide the operations of the new fund through a transparent application and review process. To assist in that process, a guideline development workshop was

held in London on 19 June 2002. Invited to that workshop were representatives from developing world fisheries, fishworker's organizations, environmental NGOs, and international foundations. Many of those attending the workshop are also members of the MSC Stakeholder Council, which met in London on 17-18 June 2002.

The workshop sought advice on four major areas: (i) guidelines for supporting fishery pre-assessments; (ii) guidelines for supporting full assessments of fisheries; (iii) guidelines for small grants to support stakeholder participation in assessments; and (iv) guidelines for support of projects that assist fisheries to move towards MSC certification.

The MSC has made significant progress in developing its global fisheries ecolabeling programme. Six fisheries have been successfully certified, another six are currently undergoing full assessment, while approximately 20 to 30 additional fisheries have completed confidential pre-assessments. Currently, more than 100 companies are selling labeled seafood products from fisheries certified under the MSC programme.

As the MSC programme has moved through this early stage of its growth and development, the cost of certification has emerged as an obstacle to participation. This is especially true in the developing world and in economically depressed fisheries.

#### Two stages

There are two major stages in the assessment process leading to certification: pre-assessment and full assessment. Pre-assessment is the initial scoping study of a fishery to identify the major issues and potential barriers to certification. Full assessment is a

comprehensive peer-reviewed scientific assessment of the fishery against the MSC Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fisheries. For each of these assessments, the MSC has set specific requirements regarding how the assessment is conducted and the qualifications of the assessment team members. This helps ensure that the assessments and resulting certifications conform to the high standards of the MSC and accepted international standards for certification.

**M**any fisheries have realized significant value in conducting either a pre-assessment or a full assessment under the MSC's programme even if a specific fishery is not immediately successful in earning certification. For example, *SAMUDRA Report* reported in August 2001 that a pre-assessment of the Brazilian Prainha do Canto Verde lobster fishery helped identify gaps in data and management and created opportunities for both media coverage and co-operation among the varied stakeholders.

A confidential pre-assessment is the first step in the MSC process. For fisheries that are well managed, it can provide the necessary information to move ahead for a full assessment and perhaps MSC certification. For fisheries with management and/or ecosystem problems, a pre-assessment can identify those major issues and provide the

fishers, fishery managers and stakeholders with an agenda for improvement. Problems being identified through a pre-assessment with a long-term goal of achieving MSC certification can be a valuable tool in helping fisheries make necessary improvements.

Full assessment may lead to MSC certification, which is recognition that a particular fishery meets currently accepted international standards for sustainability and management. Fisheries found to conform to the MSC's Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing reflect best management practices for scientifically based fisheries management with an ecosystem management component. Certification helps distinguish these fisheries as examples for others to follow.

Stakeholder participation is an important element at all stages in the assessment and certification process. Stakeholders vary widely and the MSC is developing guidance to help accredited certifiers ensure that all interested parties are consulted during the fishery assessment.

#### **Limited resources**

However, full participation in the assessment process sometimes requires a significant investment of time and energy by organizations that may have very limited resources. The SFF will make small

grants available to help ensure broadbased stakeholder input into fishery assessments.

**W**hen a fishery moves through the assessment process, opportunities may emerge or deficiencies may become apparent that can not be immediately resolved. For example, a fishery may lack information on the size, status and health of the target population. The SFF may provide some limited and targeted support to help fill such gaps, fund limited data collection and leverage larger projects. The new fund will not be in a position to support large-scale research projects or other programmes that might typically receive funding from development agencies.

The input from the London workshop was extremely valuable, and is now being used to help draft guidelines for the SFF. These guidelines will then be presented to the board of the RLF at its September meeting, and if approved, applications for support may be accepted shortly thereafter. 🐟

This piece is by Jim Humphreys (jim.humphreys@msc.org), us Director, Marine Stewardship Council, Seattle, us