

A powerful arrow in the quiver

The MSC initiative is going ahead with its plans to harness market forces and consumer power to tackle the global crisis in fisheries

The several articles and the editorial on the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) initiative that appeared in the last issue of *Samudra* marked the beginning of a thoughtful and important dialogue with a significant group of stakeholders in marine fisheries. The timing of this discussion could not have been better, as the MSC initiative is in the early stages of its evolution. Much of the useful feedback provided by the *Samudra* writers has proven extremely valuable to the sponsors of the initiative.

A great deal of progress has been made on the development of the MSC since the publication of the last issue of *Samudra*. A brief update might help address some of the substantive and procedural issues that were raised by the *Samudra* commentators.

In September, the MSC sponsored the first in a initiative series of international workshops and consultations to discuss the development of principles and criteria for sustainable fishing that will eventually underpin the MSC. This workshop, held in Bagshot, UK, was attended by an international panel of fisheries experts. The panel suggested that a sustainable fishery should be based upon:

- the maintenance of the integrity of ecosystems;
- the maintenance, and re-establishment of healthy, populations of targeted species;
- the development and maintenance of effective fisheries management systems, taking into account all relevant biological, technological, economic, social, environmental and commercial aspects; and

compliance with relevant international, national and local laws and standards.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Unilever have been carrying out an international programme of preliminary consultations with interested groups of stakeholders. Staffs have attended seafood shows and fishing expos worldwide.

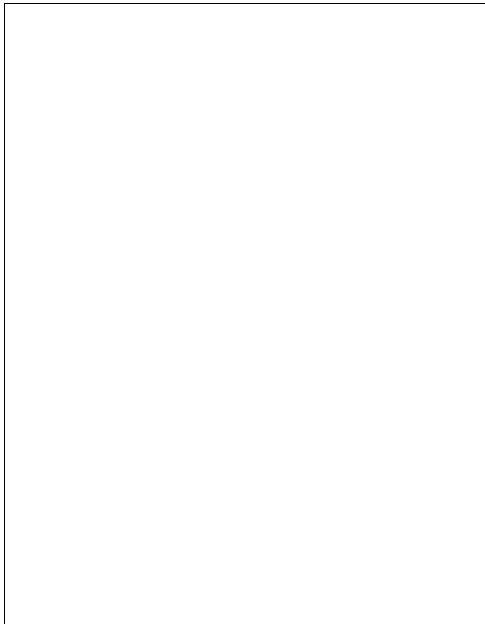
Recently, WWF and Unilever were invited to present the MSC initiative at annual meetings of the National Fisheries Institute (the largest association of seafood processors in North America) in Seattle, the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (representing fishing industry associations from 12 countries) in Seoul, the Groundfish Forum (the major groundfish quota holders) in London, and the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Montreal.

In addition, staff briefed the Seafish Industry Authority in the UK, at a meeting in Copenhagen of industry and government officials from all Scandinavian countries, and the World Bank's Environment Division in Washington, DC. The latter is considering launching a Market Transformation Initiative based on the MSC initiative.

Other interested parties who will soon be briefed include the United Nations Development Programme and the EU Fisheries Commissioner, Emma Bonino.

Series of workshops

The sponsors of the MSC initiative are also planning a worldwide series of workshops and consultations during the remainder of 1996 and 1997. The purpose of these workshops will be to introduce the MSC initiative to diverse stakeholders around the world, seek inputs and



feedback on the emerging draft principles and criteria for sustainable fishing, and solicit the involvement of all stakeholders in marine fisheries.

Interested parties are encouraged to contact one of the sponsoring organizations in order to register their interest in this process. WWF and Unilever retained Coopers and Lybrand, the international consulting firm, to develop an organizational blueprint and implementation plan for the MSC.

Coopers and Lybrand is a world leader in organizational design, and the sponsors of the initiative sought the firm's professional advice from the outset. Its staff interviewed a wide range of stakeholders, over the past several months, from all parts of the world. They also conducted detailed comparative studies of certification organizations, such as the Forest Stewardship Council, in order to learn from their mistakes and successes. At the time of writing this, Coopers and Lybrand's report is still forthcoming.

WWF and Unilever also retained an executive recruiting firm to conduct a worldwide search for a senior project manager to lead the development of the MSC. The response was overwhelming: more than 400 applications were received from fisheries professionals around the world. That by itself was a sign that many involved in fisheries today are seeking a new approach, and looking hopefully to


the MSC initiative to provide leadership. The search is in its final stages, and an announcement of the person who will be appointed to take the MSC from idea to reality is expected before the end of the current year.

Present plans call for the MSC to be formally created as an independent entity in early 1997, when the project manager begins work. This appointment will be followed by a search for a board chair and they will begin shaping the organization, guided by the advice received from Coopers and Lybrand and the regional workshops.

The initiative will be looking for individuals of the highest calibre to serve as board members, who can bring vision and new thinking to help shape the way market forces can be harnessed to promote sustainable fishing.

Funding for the MSC initiative and the organization itself will be from independent sources such as private foundations. The World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme have indicated their preliminary interest in the initiative, and a fundraising drive is under way to capitalize on the initiative.

An important characteristic of the MSC will be its independence from both the environmental community and the industry. Finding a way to harness market forces and consumer power in appropriate ways to help resolve the crisis in marine fisheries may not be the only arrow in the quiver of marine conservation, but it could well be a powerful one.

Our challenge is to ensure that this particular arrow flies straight and true, and we hope to enlist the active participation of all SAMUDRA readers in this exciting effort. 

This article has been written by Michael Sutton, Director, Endangered Seas Campaign, WWF International and Caroline Whitfield, International Manager, Fish Innovation Centre, Unilever