

Marine Stewardship Council

Open and transparent

The certification procedure of the MSC initiative seeks to involve the many and different stakeholders in fisheries

I refer to the article by Brian O’Riordan entitled ‘Who’s Being Seduced?’, which appeared in the July issue of SAMUDRA. I would like to clarify a number of points related to the MSC certification which is currently still being developed.

Firstly, I was happy to see that Brian’s article began on a positive note for the MSC. I fully agree with him when he underlines MSC’s potentially valuable contribution towards sustainable fisheries. I was also very pleased to learn that Brian approved of the consultation process which we are currently undertaking and I can confirm that the consultation process is both open and transparent. We are doing our utmost to get as many stakeholders around the world involved in designing the MSC certification programme.

In addition, we are currently field-testing the Marine Stewardship Council’s proposed certification system in various fisheries settings. These test cases include small-scale fisheries as well as fisheries in the developing world. We hope that these test cases will provide valuable information on the MSC’s Principles and Criteria and the certification methodology, and will help guide future development. These test cases should provide information on the costs of certification, the feasibility of the proposed standard and methodology in a real fisheries setting and also highlight how the certifiers work in this sector, which is new to most of them. Our resources are, of course, not unlimited, so we do our utmost to get the best value for the money that has been allocated for the development of the MSC.

There are various reasons why ecolabelling systems (by no means confined to the proposed MSC

certification) have taken off in recent years. One very important aspect of ecolabelling is that, when applied on a voluntary basis, they are market-neutral and non-discriminatory. In this respect, it should be noted that the success of a voluntary scheme, as is the case for the MSC, will, at the end of the day, be judged by the level of take-up from industry.

The voluntary nature of the MSC scheme ensures that it will not be ‘imposed’ on anyone. Rather, the consumers (final or intermediate) are being alerted to the environmental consequences of their consumption. This is an attempt to address the devastating effects that consumption from certain fisheries may have. In this way, the proposal that “the North should rather be questioning and regulating its own patterns of consumption” is definitely very much in line with MSC thinking, but by means of a voluntary scheme rather than one which is ‘regulated’.

Brian’s article notes that privatized fisheries (e.g. ITQs) will be easier to certify. At present, there is no evidence to substantiate this proposition nor is there any intention to discriminate against any particular fisheries management system. The test cases mentioned above may, however, shed some light on these issues.

Global applicability

The global applicability or equivalence of a scheme like the MSC’s is vital. For a better understanding of how this can be achieved with a general set of principles and criteria (or standards) against which certification takes place, it should be remembered that the relative importance of indicators (measures for each of the principles and criteria) will be fisheries-specific. That is why we have consistently stressed that the certification



procedure/methodology is at least as important as the set of principles and criteria which, unfortunately, seems to be what attracts most attention.

means of ensuring socially and economically acceptable outcomes for those who rely on fishing and by the same token, also the future of the resource. ¶

Contrary to 'normal' certifications where the measurements are fairly straight forward and can be addressed as a set of yes/no questions and answers, certification as proposed by the MSC will be less straightforward.

Under the MSC system, the certification companies will set up certification teams, which will consist of people with relevant knowledge about the local/regional fisheries situation and have the 'approval' of stake holder groups. This will ensure the credibility of the certification outcome and that the certification process will take into account the local/regional fisheries conditions and settings.

Let me finally mention that the latest OECD fisheries publication, 'Towards Sustainable Fisheries', which, *inter alia* analyses community-based fisheries management systems, comes to a very positive conclusion with respect to achieving sustainability objectives through such schemes.

In fact, in the many fisheries meetings and discussions I have attended in recent years, co-management and community-based systems are often highlighted as being among the best

This letter, written by Carl-Christian Schmidt, Project Manager of the Marine Stewardship Council, was addressed to Sebastian Mathew, Executive Secretary of ICSF, with a copy to Brian O'Riordan of ITDG