

Sustainable Seafood Coalition (SSC) Meeting Minutes

Chair: ClientEarth

Attendees: 26 in total, comprised of 5 Non-members (attended morning only); 17 Members (attended all day); 4 from the Secretariat (attended all day):

Location: Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Kings Place, London N1 9AG.

Date: London, 12 May 2011

Morning Sessions (members and non-members)

1. Secretariat welcomes all and gives a brief introduction. Session begins with four presentations.

Agenda Item 1: Secretariat Presentation

2. Covered the expected aims of the SSC including: clear labelling, promotion of underutilised species, sourcing standards and data collection.
3. Coordinated approach is required. All of industry to be involved, including promotion from celebrity chefs, suppliers to ensure processes down to the fishmeal sectors.
4. Seafood labelling – there is no harmonisation, it is not properly regulated and no definitions.
5. Hypothetical examples were given for defined environmental claims, and the promotion of underutilised species.

Agenda Item 1: Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's (HFW) Presentation

6. Highlighted that a 'serious chunk' of the fish business sector was present at the meeting. 2-3 notable absentees. Encouraged those non-members present to sign up. Very optimistic that the group could deliver real change.
7. Agreed that the elements to bring together everything outlined from ClientEarth were correct. Emphasised his commitment following on from FishFight. Jamie Oliver will continue to cook sustainable fish.
8. Wants commitment and communication from the group. He would be happy to provide recipes to the group (but not exclusively to any one member).
9. Noted that the group must not feel that being present is enough; the original commitment must be the focus in order to bring about change.
10. The stakes are high and delivery of the stakes, even higher. He wanted the group to 'crash through' agreeing terms.
11. He won't be attending the afternoon sessions in order to attend the House of Commons motion on discards and the Common Fisheries Policy. The public can make real change. The fisheries business will only survive in the long-term if fish is sustainable.

12. Secretariat emphasised the need to crash through agreeing terms, and that every time the group met, they should aim to change the world.

Agenda Item 1: Icelandic UK presentation

13. The headlines continue in the press. 'we are at the tipping point.' There is a £20bn cost in terms of EU subsidies. £9bn in costs attributed to illegal fishing. £50bn in overall costs. ('Sunken Billions' report – World Bank, February 2010).
14. The role of the supplier in trade, processing etc is to feed the people. Suppliers do not want to sell unsustainable fish. Suppliers' role is not to educate the consumer; it is to deliver sustainability.
15. There are many labels, scorecards and so on. They are no substitute for good fisheries management – for example, the fish on red lists should be helped.
16. In respect of cod, voluntary traceability codes were established (Audits), to make sure cod was legally landed. Now 60% of the world's cod is either MSC certified or independently verified.
17. The journey continues. Chance to form a strategy. Other associations as far as Europe could be included.
18. The coalition could use the AIPCE Principles for Responsible Sourcing as a framework to work on.
19. Mentioned the WWF alliance on CFP reform. Benyon and Damanaki are with us – they wanted industry momentum and now they have this. Highlighted Sri Lanka fishery Improvement project – publicised in Intrafish.
20. Ended by saying that it is critical to assess species new and old. The message is that it is ok so long as the fish is sustainable.

Agenda Item 1: Sainsbury's Presentation

21. We must work together. Re the labelling element, the role of the consumer must be understood. It is hard to get sustained traction; i.e., consumer interest. Now we have this.
22. This is fine so long as there is a level playing field to drive things forward. Education is ok. Everyone will struggle without traction.
23. The media's message is sometimes confusing (NGOs too).
24. The coalition could agree on clear labelling terms. This will be a real challenge, but the commitment is here.
25. In respect of process and what we want to achieve - More information on the label (catch method etc)? Not to create a new standard – use what is already there. Agree on participation: engaging consumer NGOs is very important. The code or standard must be very robust – not the lowest common denominator.
26. Assuming everyone is in, must communicate with the media and consumer and the message must be consistent – this is key. All about doing, not talking.

Agenda Item 2: expectations for the SSC

27. From the processing sector's point of view – it is like food safety. No competition here. Do compete though to win business (the precondition is safe food). Sustainability should be treated in the same way as food safety in this respect.
28. In terms of managing expectations, it was noted that the group was not complete in terms of industry. In some EU markets, sustainable seafood is not an issue. Key wins should be to show best practice to the rest of the EU. Labelling perhaps not as big an issue.
29. One party expressed their willingness to help by writing an open letter to chefs/colleagues. This coalition could be used as a meeting point for change. All the supermarkets are improving in respect of using adverts to promote sustainability. It was also suggested that weekend food writers/opinion formers/consumer influencers should be invited to part of future SSC meetings
30. Some highlighted the global dimension. Many other fisheries outside the UK are 10 years behind. Policy makers and the global dimension binds us.
31. It was suggested that the coalition could agree a broad commitment along the lines of 'stop taking any fish from fisheries that engage in discarding practices.' If all agreed, nobody would lose in terms of competition. The coalition should not be frightened to suggest big ideas like this.
32. Grey areas should be tackled: the abandonment of improving fisheries; mackerel overfishing in Faroe Islands; anchovies and fishmeal – how should we approach these issues?
33. The group reemphasised that duplication should not occur. Should there be tighter objectives for the coalition?
34. It was stated that reliance should not be placed solely on the celebs to promote. Celebrities would need clear guidance on what the coalition needs from them.
35. Some suggested that competition is not necessarily a bad thing. It gets buyers interested. So long as there is a level playing field. Others suggest that you cannot compete to obtain sustainability.
36. To emphasise the clout of working as a coalition, an example was used in respect of illegal fishing in the Baltic. A group got together and said they would not buy from the Baltic unless something was done about illegal fishing. This could be replicated for the discards issue in order to speed up the agenda. Discards is now a political issue and it could be useful to make this sort of threat.
37. Some suggested that the word 'intention', 'demand' or 'expect' could be used instead of 'threat'. It was suggested that moderate language would suffice – 'expect'.
38. The group suggested the coalition should begin with easy things before moving on to other issues.

Agenda Item 3: Where does SSC fit into existing landscape?

39. Traceability issues were discussed. Secretariat could send a memo around later on this issue. It was suggested that an expert from FERA, York University, or Fishpoptrace, Bangor University could be contacted as an advisor/interested party to the group in future.
40. Some highlighted the fact that nobody has seen the full report from Greenpeace and the Sunday Times therefore they cannot assess the appropriateness of the test. Some stated that DNA sampling was not a part of the food quality control techniques. It was also suggested that those using DNA testing for campaign purposes should be invited to relevant future meetings as interested parties.
41. Some suggested a clearer purpose of the coalition needed to be established. Others responded by saying the purpose was a common approach and collaboration. It was noted that an SFP representative was needed.
42. A template or approach to seafood sourcing was discussed. Broad coordination was required. The UK is already progressive. The group expressed the need for a level playing field.
43. Some suggested that standard setting was MSC's job. It would be difficult to have agreement on what is 'sustainable'. In terms of labelling, it would be possible to agree which label for which fish etc. The International Association of Fishing Inspectors had agreed to scope out if they should take an overview of the scheme, scope etc. There is a sustainable seafood report from a Dutch consultant due to be released.
44. The main difference between the SSC and the Common Language Group (CLG) is that the SSC is action orientated and membership mandates results.
45. The SSC works for maximum impact. DAG involvement would be important. Leveraging for change. No replication.
46. It was suggested that a website could be used to gather everyone's input/ used for consultation purposes (i.e. to gather feedback on suggested labelling terms & criteria). It was agreed that this was a good idea.

Discussed Agenda Item 2 again: expectations for the SSC

47. How to use the term sustainable? There is no data on discards, which is why data collection is an important parallel aim of the group Diversification was key.
48. DAG already works on data collection? Overlap? The Need to dovetail with this group was repeated.
49. Need to agree on global issues and a one liner for an SSC vision.
50. Suggestion that the coalition members could use their influence to encourage fishers to collect data.
51. The example of the collection of carrier bag data from retailers was used, which was a success – the same could be done in relation to discards data.
52. It was suggested something along the lines of 'customers should have confidence' should be in the expectations.

53. It was clarified that 'unloved' did not mean just underutilised commercial species; it also included species that are currently discarded because of lack of market.
54. It was suggested that aspiration (consumer facing) and best practice aims could be separated.
55. An EU standard could be in our stated ambitions.

Agenda Item 5: non-business advisers

56. Consumer organisations important: e.g. Which? (vocal on labelling) and the Woman's Institute (they opposed bottom trawling). Also accreditation bodies (all of them) and the International Fishmeal and Fish Oil Organisation (IFFO). These will not be members of the coalition but should be invited as advisors.
57. The group asked about EU organisations. It was clarified that the group could extend to the EU later, but we should establish the coalition in the UK first.
58. It was suggested caution should be taken with single issue lobbying NGOs and any others who were not genuine in their support – a strategy in how to deal with these would be needed – it would be fine for organisations to comment but not become members.

Agenda Item 4: functioning of the SSC

59. With regards to competition laws, members asked Secretariat to check that it would not be seen as a labelling cartel? Voluntary code is fine.
60. It was agreed that working groups should table proposals for the quarterly coalition meetings.
61. It was noted that ClientEarth was the only NGO and therefore in the minority. An additional expert committee including NGOs was mooted.
62. The following was discussed in relation to decision-making:
- Consensus very time consuming.
 - Majority voting – but what happens to those that do not agree? There might be good reasons for not agreeing (e.g. current systems need to be adapted and testing needs to be conducted before implementing)
 - It should remain voluntary – cannot guarantee compliance. Otherwise it would create a further barrier to joining SSC for the people who are not currently members.
 - Alternative is to make two commitments: first to develop a code; and second to adopt the code. It was stated that a commitment on adopting a code was needed.
 - Target dates/deadlines would result in healthy competition.

Afternoon Sessions (members only)

Agenda Item 6: Recap on morning discussion

63. Secretariat recapped on the outcomes / discussion from the morning session.

64. Welcomed new member Thistle Seafoods

Agenda Item 7: agreement on the Draft Terms of Reference (ToR)

Aims and vision:

65. Discussed the unique aspects of the SSC: the SSC are a cross-industry group that develop their own codes of best practice and implement them.

66. The members reemphasised the need for consumers to be near the top of the aims.

67. The following Aims were agreed:

- To promote sustainable fish and seafood consumption.
- To encourage UK consumers to eat a wider variety of sustainable seafood, and to introduce species to our stores and restaurants that are currently underutilised or discarded.
- To support the sustainable use of unwanted discarded species' trimmings and offal in the manufacture of fishmeal.
- To use harmonised seafood labelling based on agreed standards in order to provide consumers with accurate information on sustainability.
- To require fishers, where possible, to collect catch and discard information for the fish and shellfish sourced by Coalition members and pass this information to government authorities for use in scientific assessments.
- To adhere to a new voluntary industry code of conduct agreed by the Coalition until sufficient management measures and labelling rules are in place.
- To influence changes in policy at UK, EU and international level.
- To build national and global alliances.
- To inform the public debate on seafood.

68. In addition, following discussion, a new vision was agreed: 'All fish and seafood sold in the UK is from sustainable sources.'

69. The aims and vision may be amended subject to member's agreement; 'not set in stone'.

70. The term 'sustainable' is not defined. Work can be done on this. It was suggested to begin with Secretariat's definition and work towards agreement.

71. In terms of consumer-awareness, there was discussion regarding communications budget. Celebrities could be used as leverage. SSC needs to make sure that celebrities do not give out the wrong information. The celebrity promotion route should be taken, rather than the SSC having a communications budget. Members could also promote the message using their own media outlets.

Non-Industry Advisers:

72. As many as possible should be involved. Suggested WWF and SFP should be part of a steering group if there is one.
73. With regards to Fairtrade, some suggested it was a different dimension.
74. It was discussed that this should not necessarily be limited to non-industry as some industry groups/businesses may be useful to the group as advisors but not as members
75. Secretariat to do a gap analysis and send around the members with a deadline for members to respond. Secretariat to rank non-industry bodies in order of priority for SSC.

Function of the SSC:

76. Discussed whether there needs to be a steering group and whether there was a need for working groups.
77. It was discussed that a steering group could comprise up to 12 representatives from NGOs (ClientEarth and possibly WWF and SFP), retailers and processors of differing sizes. Decisions could be made if quorum of 6 (representing each sector) were present.
78. It was agreed that initially all members of the coalition make up the steering group and they have the decision-making capacity. Agreed that the governance structure is fine for the moment (with SSC members as decision-makers and steering group) but may need to be developed later as membership grows (particularly into the foodservice/fishmeal sectors).
79. It was agreed that for the moment two working groups should be set up by the Secretariat, one for species diversification (includes data collection sustainable seafood sourcing generally) and the other for seafood labelling. These working groups have no decision-making capacity, just proposal-making. Open invite to all members to attend, and to the relevant non-members.
80. It was agreed that the Secretariat will chair all groups for now – can be changed subject to agreement. Secretariat to do background 'work' (organising, facilitating, giving background information to promote discussion). In future, it is hoped that funding will be secured for 2x Secretariat staff devoted to SSC matters.
81. Future agendas: Secretariat compile a suggested agenda and send to members with deadline for response.
82. Decision-making:
 - Consensus by agreement;
 - If sustained opposition, member must propose an alternative;
 - If a compromise cannot be reached, then there should be a backup system of supermajority voting (2/3) of members of the Coalition (proxy voting ok for those members not present).

83. Confidentiality: everything transparent unless it is agreed something is confidential (*Chatham House Rules* applies to all public discussion of SSC work, i.e. nothing is attributed to a specific person or company).

84. On non-compliance matters – Secretariat will send on information to discuss by correspondence and at next meeting.

Any Other Business

85. Next meetings:

- Early June for working group on underused fish.
- Mid-June for labelling working group.
- Coalition meeting set for 1 September 2011.

86. Video conferencing is an option where facilities available.

87. Dates for targets? Working groups to propose target dates for developing and implementing codes; this will then be discussed at next coalition meeting in September 2011.

88. Immediate press matters: agreed that it is ok to disclose aims and vision as agreed in the meeting, and that we will be setting up working groups in June. Next meeting 1st September 2011 to finalise target dates.

Action Items

- Secretariat will send revised Terms of Reference to members for finalisation.
- Secretariat will send members suggested dates for diversification working group and labelling working group meetings.
- Secretariat will do a gap analysis and ranking non-industry advisers and send around to members with a deadline for members to respond.
- Secretariat will send their Communications Team details to members for any press queries.
- Secretariat will send a memo to members re. Traceability & fishpoptrace event.
- Future Agendas: Secretariat will compile suggested agendas for meetings and send to members with deadline for response.
- Secretariat will send on information on non-compliance matters to discuss by correspondence and at next meeting.