

Sustainable Seafood Coalition (SSC) Members' meeting minutes

Date: 24 March, 2015

Location: The Counting House, 50 Cornhill, London EC3V 3PD

Number of attendees: 12 total (including 3 ClientEarth staff acting as secretariat, facilitator and minute taker).

Summary of agreed points

Item 2 and 3: Guidance Amendments

- A number of amendments will be made to improve the guidance. See Items 2 and 3 for full details.
- It was reconfirmed that sustainability claims cannot be used if a member does not hold chain of custody. It was agreed that this should be set out very clearly in the guidance document.

Item 4: Potential Funding Structures

- The secretariat will seek public funding with a view to securing approximately half of the required amount, with the other half to potentially be covered with membership fees.
- The group will discuss and agree future goals and next steps from September 2015 at a members meeting in July. The group will also discuss and agree potential membership fees based around the figures listed in the discussion.

Item 5: AOB

- The secretariat would look more into the Conscious Hospitality Show and forward details to the relevant foodservice supplier members.
- The group collectively agreed that attending Blue Week in order to promote the work of the SSC and raise awareness outside of the UK is a good opportunity.
- Members felt that the implications of partnering with government authorities could detract from the valuable work members do by continually having to respond to requests for information.

Purpose of the members' meeting

This meeting was to update the guidance based on the amendments circulated amongst the members a week before the meeting; to discuss and agree any changes; to review potential funding structures; and for the secretariat to update the group on actions since the last meeting.

Item 1: Updates since the last meeting

The last meeting was held on 14 August 2014.

Discussion and comments

- The SSC codes were launched on 18 September 2014 at the Humber Seafood Summit. Members have moved into the one year implementation phase.
- The secretariat was invited to attend three events in the US. These were the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions' annual general meeting; and to speak about the SSC on two panels at SeaWeb's Seafood Summit in New Orleans and the Boston Seafood Expo. The outcomes were that the US showed a considerable amount of interest in the SSC from both the industry and NGOs. There was a certain level of astonishment that the UK supply chain has agreed on which claims will be used on fish and seafood, and especially that there is agreement on what environmental sustainability means.
- The secretariat worked with some foodservice members to develop a template for the risk assessment process of both wild capture and farmed species. This risk assessment tool is available for any members to use and is continually being improved throughout the implementation phase.
- The secretariat has formally invited another major retailer to join the coalition and is waiting on a response.
- The secretariat indicated that the next members meeting will be held in July 2015.

Actions:

- The secretariat will organise the next SSC members meeting for July 2015.

Item 2: Guidance amendments (Sourcing Code)

The guidance document was developed to provide further detail and best practice on how to implement the SSC sourcing code. The SSC members wanted to have opportunities to amend and improve the guidance in relation to any gaps and challenges they encounter during the implementation phase, to ensure it is fully fit for purpose. Item 2 covers the

sourcing code and improvement project sections; Item 3 covers the guidance for the labelling code.

Discussion and comments

- One member asked whether the scope of the codes covered foods that are not for human consumption (e.g. pet food that contains fish). The meaning of 'own brand' fish and seafood was discussed in the context of what a member of the public would expect, and the responsibility of the SSC member in this regard.
- Members discussed amendments needed to clarify certain sections of the document, and how best to achieve these. This included adding a new appendix for useful website links; inserting an additional question regarding Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) to the checklist for sourcing wild capture fish; ensuring both wild and farmed sections were consistent with one another; and clarifying the language used in Table 4 under 'sourcing wild capture fish'.
- The group discussed methods of keeping a record of evidence in relation to their sourcing decision. There was a suggestion that this be included as 'best practice advice', but others felt it was overly administrative and that taking screenshots of websites and saving them as evidence detracted from making real improvements. This view varied depending on how many species the member sourced.
- One member questioned what the term "regular" meant with reference to 'conducting regular spot checks of documents to ensure the source is traceable and legal' (under Section b. 'biological status of the fish stock'). They felt that best practice advice should state what 'regular' looks like. Others felt it would depend on the risk level associated with that species and that spot checks would be more regular for higher risk outcomes.
- The group discussed the importance of ghost fishing gear and whether joining the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) would be considered best practice.
- One member felt that in the "Improvement projects" section, clarification was needed that improvement could be either informal projects or formal FIPs.

Agreed:

- The following text will be inserted into the final paragraph of the overview section: "At the moment this is in relation to food for human consumption and will apply to all products containing fish within 2 years (by September 2017)."
- A number of amendments will be made for clarification or simplicity.
- A new appendix will be added to include any useful website links.
- The following question will be inserted into the wild capture sourcing checklist: "Can I help start a new FIP or other forum to explore potential improvement actions?"
- The best practice advice regarding NGOs will be removed and the following sentence will be added to the text: "If using NGO advice to support sourcing decisions a record should be kept of the evidence that supports that decision."

- The word "regularly" will be removed from "regularly conduct spot checks".
- Regarding ghost fishing gear the following text will be added to 'wider environmental impacts of the fishing activity': "If ghost gear is known to be an issue in the fishery, then mitigation measures are in place." The group believed references to joining the GGGI was too premature and that the guidance could be amended in the future, once it has officially launched, if appropriate.
- Table 4 is unclear and will be removed ('examples of direct appropriate responses to risk assessment outcomes').

Actions:

- Each respective member shall take necessary steps to achieve having all own brand products in alignment with the SSC codes by September 2017.
- The secretariat will make changes to the guidance as described in the actions.

Item 3: Guidance Amendments (Labelling Code)

Discussion and comments

- One member requested clarity on 'sufficient assurance' regarding sustainability claims; and how and when a weblink to further information should be provided.
- Regarding sustainability claims, members can only use these if they can back up the claim and provide sufficient assurance. If the assurance is a third party sustainability certification, the member may only make a statement to that effect if they hold chain of custody. Members will adhere to the terms and conditions of third party certification schemes.
- Regarding the weblink, the code states that "where possible, sufficient explanation of the claim will either be provided at the point of sale, or via a link to where an explanation can be found". The secretariat clarified a link does not need to be provided on individual packets and the guidance will be clarified.
- One member suggested that the guidance needs to clarify what the term 'equivalent' means when talking about an 'equivalent independent audit' for sustainability claims.
- A member asked whether the guidance needs to be cross checked with the Common Organisation of Markets (CMO) labelling requirements for naming gear.

Agreed:

- It was reconfirmed that sustainability claims cannot be used if a member does not hold chain of custody. It was agreed that this should be set out very clearly in the guidance document.
- The guidance should be cross checked with the CMO regarding naming gear types.

- The term 'equivalent' will be clarified by referencing Table 3 on third party standard requirements, which lists best practice standards for third party certifications.
- A weblink does not need to be provided on individual packets and the guidance will be clarified.

Actions:

- The secretariat shall make the changes described in the actions above.

Item 4: Potential funding structures

Discussion and comments

- The current funding, kindly provided by the Walton Family Foundation, is due to finish in September 2015.
- The secretariat highlighted the challenges in obtaining funding for a programme like the SSC, as with the codes being finalised it is no longer deemed to be in its developing stages.
- Membership fees would be a beneficial and sustainable way of providing co-funding, as well as a means of alleviating pressure to find public funding elsewhere. Membership was deemed as an appropriate way of providing around 50% of the basic costs to run the SSC from October 2015. The figures suggested for membership fees were as follows: small businesses (£150); medium businesses (£1,500); and large businesses (£3,000). The consensus amongst the group was that these figures were in line with what a membership fee could look like, but that before agreeing to a membership fee structure, the group would need to decide future goals. Moreover, members would need to propose any fees to their boards and articulate the value of SSC membership to them.
- One member questioned whether there would be value in having funders meet and talk with the members, and the group discussed any potential opportunities to do so (such as the Brussels Seafood Expo).

Agreed:

- The secretariat will seek public funding with a view to securing approximately half of the required amount, with the other half to potentially be covered with membership fees.
- The group will discuss and agree future goals and next steps from September 2015 at a members meeting in July. The group will also discuss and agree potential membership fees based around the figures listed in the discussion above.

Actions:

- The secretariat will apply for relevant public funding.

- The group will discuss and agree potential membership fees based around the figures listed in the discussion above at a meeting in July.

Item 5: AOB

The secretariat has been approached with potential partnership schemes and wanted to share these with the group to find out whether to pursue them further.

Discussion and comments

- The Conscious Hospitality Show is a trade show aimed primarily at foodservice suppliers and restaurants. It will take place at Olympia from 5-7 October. They invited the SSC to run a stand to promote the SSC with any foodservice members also participating.
- The secretariat has the opportunity to promote the SSC at the next Blue Week in Lisbon on the 5 June. The group discussed the benefits of doing so, considering that this is an event outside of the UK and hence an opportunity to share the goals of the coalition on a wider European platform.
- The secretariat has been approached by the Better Regulation Delivery Office (BRDO) to participate in their primary authority partnership scheme. This scheme allows an eligible business to form a legally recognised partnership with a single local authority of its choice, who can then issue authoritative advice which must be respected by other regulators. This would mean that local authorities could use the codes to provide clear and consistent advice.

Agreed:

- The secretariat would look more into the Conscious Hospitality Show and forward details to the relevant foodservice supplier members.
- The group collectively agreed that attending Blue Week in order to promote the work of the SSC and raise awareness outside of the UK is a good opportunity.
- Members felt that the implications of partnering with government authorities could detract from the valuable work members do by continually having to respond to requests for information.

Actions:

- Secretariat to find out more information about the Conscious Hospitality Show and discuss with SSC foodservice supplier members.
- Secretariat to aim to attend and represent the SSC at Blue Week in Lisbon.
- Secretariat to decline the invitation to participate in BRDO's primary authority partnership scheme.