

Sustainable Seafood Coalition (SSC) Members' meeting minutes

Date/location: 14 June 2016, The Counting House, London, EC3V 3PD

Number of attendees: 17 members (including 4 ClientEarth staff acting as facilitator, secretariat, and minute taker) and 6 external participants in the afternoon session.

Summary of agreed points

Item 1

- Social responsibility criteria will be included in the SSC sourcing code.
- Members agreed the codes did not require amending to clarify the use of sustainability claims for aquaculture, but that the secretariat would clarify this in messaging with new and potential members.
- We will form a working group to define what 'data deficiency' means and possible actions for sourcing from these fisheries. The SSC Guidance will be clarified to refer to existing tools to assess risk in data-limited fisheries, and new developments in FIP performance measurement.

Item 2

- We will create a dedicated SSC Twitter account.
- Members will support the secretariat reaching more businesses for expansion, including into the foodservice sector.
- Members support continued secretariat participation in future Fishing4Data workshops, for information-sharing purposes.

Item 3

- Members agreed that concerted advocacy towards decision-makers should be discussed soon, to drive action on the landing obligation and 'choke' issue, which may have a reputational risk on the supply chain.
- Alignment with the RASS tool will be very useful and having more precautionary results in the initial testing is not necessarily a bad thing. It highlights that a lot of risk is around a lack of data, which validates the work we are collectively starting on fishery improvements. Each business may also individually be involved in improvements that lower the risk for specific fisheries.

Purpose of the members' meeting

The meeting was to review the codes of conduct, in particular on whether to include social responsibility criteria; to discuss progress on SSC fishery improvements work and other actions since the last meeting on 11 February 2016; and to update members on alignment with other initiatives. These included the Seafish Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood (RASS) online tool, the Celtic Seas Partnership (Fishing4Data), and the upcoming report on the implementation of the SSC codes. Four speakers presented in the afternoon session.

Item 1: Review of the sourcing and labelling codes

Incorporation of social responsibility criteria

Several members had requested that social responsibility criteria are included in the SSC codes, in the context of increased attention to social responsibility in the seafood supply chain. During the development of the codes, members had initially agreed social criteria would be included at a later stage once the environmental criteria had been agreed. The group explored two questions: Do members want to include social responsibility commitments? If so, what would these look like?

- All members present agreed that social criteria should be incorporated. One member said that while it is a complex issue still being defined by industry, it cannot be ignored; another agreed and felt the SSC is now in the right place to include these considerations. Retailers already look at social issues in their supply chains for other commodities. The Modern Slavery Act requires relevant companies to create a public statement in relation to slavery and human trafficking for each financial year. These could contribute to this process.
- Some tools already exist to reduce risk around social criteria (e.g. third party certification schemes, like the Seafish Responsible Fishing Scheme and several aquaculture certification schemes). Seafish, Seafood Watch and Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) are currently developing a risk assessment that covers social criteria. This is due to be sent for industry review by July 2016. Seafish has also risk assessed 15 countries and the outcomes are publicly available. Much of the risk perceived by consumers related to farmed fish is in relation to the sources of wild feed. There is growing appetite to cover social criteria in wild capture certification schemes. The highest risk in fisheries is on the vessel: looking at risk at the fishery level is not enough.
- Members suggested several angles of approach starting with transparency and traceability. Also, looking at applicable laws using the "legality" criterion in the SSC sourcing code (particularly in relation to recruitment and working conditions, as well as illegal fishing and trafficking); port state measures; and determining what data sources are needed or need to be updated. Supply chain complexity and the wide scope of social considerations should inform future discussions on this topic. One member mentioned that the scope of social issues is much more extensive than the vessel or farm site (e.g. canning sites). The group agreed four steps to explore: scope, data, risk assessment process and relevant actions.

Sustainability claims for aquaculture

During the development of the SSC codes, it was agreed that only responsibility claims can be made for aquaculture products, not sustainability claims. However, this has resulted in some confusion, particularly for new members, because the labelling code refers to sustainability claims for both fishery and aquaculture sources (section 4.1). This was designed for flexibility in the event that certification schemes change in the future but, as explained in section 6.1 of the SSC guidance, the SSC is currently unaware of certification standards that make claims of sustainability.

- Members discussed whether the codes should be amended to clarify this point. There was general agreement that using the word “sustainable” for aquaculture is still not appropriate, and to make exceptions would be confusing and undermine the strong connotation that comes with “responsibility”.
- As a solution to this, and other frequently asked questions from potential members, the secretariat suggested producing a FAQ document to clarify that the labelling code does not include sustainability claims for farmed products.

Improvements in data-deficient fisheries

Many medium or high risk assessment outcomes result from a lack of data. This can be particularly true for artisanal and small scale fisheries/farms. The group discussed whether more action should be taken to address data deficiency, and if the codes should be clearer in terms of expected member engagement before a decision is made to source or not.

- Regarding artisanal fisheries, one member mentioned two existing tools (Productivity-Susceptibility Analysis - PSA and Marine Stewardship Council-MSC Risk-Based Framework) that can be used to carry out risk assessment in data-limited fisheries. Whilst they each have limitations, they can help define the risk associated with that fishery. One member suggested amending the guidance to provide this information and possible actions to address data deficiency in a fishery. Another member suggested contacting Seafish to see if their existing work on data deficiency can contribute to the guidance.
- Members agreed that data deficiency should be seen as opportunity for improvements rather than a barrier to sourcing, so long as members engage in some form of improvement. This does not need to be a formal Fishery Improvement Project (FIP), or full funding of an initiative – particularly for medium risk fisheries. The secretariat asked if we could clarify the guidance. The group confirmed a basic FIP (as [defined](#) by the US-based Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions) is an acceptable benchmark, and existing tracking tools could be referenced.

Agreed:

- Social responsibility criteria will be included in the SSC sourcing code. The secretariat will organise a working group to look into the four necessary steps: the scope, data availability and gaps, how it fits into the sourcing code risk assessment process, and what would be the required actions for medium and high risk outcomes. Initially, this will focus on the ‘legality’ considerations, in relation to working conditions and rights. Once the Seafish/SFP/Seafood Watch risk assessment has been defined and agreed, we could refer to this in the SSC code.

- Members agreed the codes did not require amending to clarify the use of sustainability claims for aquaculture, but that the secretariat would clarify this in messaging with new and potential members.
- We will form a working group to define what 'data deficiency' means and possible actions for sourcing from these fisheries. The SSC Guidance will be clarified to refer to existing tools to assess risk in data-limited fisheries, and new developments in FIP performance measurement.

Actions:

- Members can contact Seafish to test risk assessment tool with SFP/Seafood Watch.
- Members to let the secretariat know if they would like to participate in either the social responsibility and/or data deficiency working groups.
- Secretariat to produce a FAQ document for new members.

Item 2: Progress on SSC priorities

Membership expansion

- The secretariat updated members on membership expansion, including meetings with suppliers at the Brussels Seafood Expo. Introductions have been very useful.

Website and social media

- The secretariat shared plans to make the SSC website content more business-focused and streamlined. While it was originally set up as a transparency tool, it can be better used for profile-raising as interest in the SSC grows. Members were invited to participate in a video for the website and to provide regular (fortnightly) news stories to ensure the news section is up to date and more member-focused.
- One member asked if there could be a dedicated SSC Twitter account. Previously this was discounted because media stories need to be agreed by all members in advance, making reactive social media tools difficult to use. Currently, some SSC tweets are made via the secretariat account. Members felt a separate account would help support the SSC's group identity, and would be an accessible tool to increase profile and engage members. It would need regular updating to be useful. The content scope could be agreed in the Terms of Reference.

Project UK

- The secretariat updated the members on progress in supporting Project UK.

Fishing4Data

- Fishing4Data is a new initiative aiming to make fisher-collected data more widely accepted. The secretariat asked members if they support continued secretariat participation in Fishing4Data workshops, and would also like to receive invitations to attend. Members can also sign the Fishing4Data Letter of Intent individually.

Agreed:

- We will create a dedicated SSC Twitter account.
- Several members agreed to support with reaching more businesses for expansion. Two members offered to help with greater expansion into the foodservice sector.
- Members support continued secretariat participation in future Fishing4Data workshops for information-sharing purposes.

Actions:

- Secretariat to draft and share ToR wording on the use of an SSC Twitter account.
- Secretariat to share Fishing4Data materials and meeting invitations with members.

Item 3: Progress and alignment with other initiatives

Supporting compliance with the Common Fisheries Policy

- Mike Mitchell of Fair Seas Ltd made a call for action on the reputational risk to the supply chain in the context of compliance with the EU Common Fisheries Policy. He highlighted the issue of 'choke species' under the Landing Obligation. Illegal discarding creates a growing reputational risk, and calls for practical solutions to reach fully documented fisheries. Seafood buyers can use their influence to pressure regulators, and should take the lead in acting on this issue, whether independently, as a group, or in collaboration with other stakeholders. Interested members were invited to contact Mike Mitchell to discuss further.
- Liane Veitch, ClientEarth's Fisheries Project Lead, gave an overview of ClientEarth's work on the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy. The presentation covered ClientEarth's perspective on progress to date, focusing on the landing obligation, fishing opportunities, multiannual plans, and technical measures. It also briefly referred to progress on data collection, monitoring, and transparency.
- One external participant, from a funding body, offered to support the continued conversation between the SSC and Fair Seas Ltd. There is also possible seed funding to support other initiatives. They are commissioning a study on the impact of the landing obligation on MSC-certified fisheries, to be published in August 2016.

Seafish's Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood (RASS)

- Dr Alex Caveen of Seafish presented our joint work to align the SSC outcomes with the RASS tool. The exercise is ongoing, and feedback from members is requested. Once the conversion process is agreed and finalised, Seafish will be able to include a dedicated 'SSC button' on the RASS website that would show the SSC risk outcome for each fishery profile. Members asked if the SSC conversion would be available to the public or if an "SSC member-only access" button was possible.
- Currently, the low/medium/high risk SSC outcomes generally align with the criteria for the RASS tool. Many fisheries come out as high risk, mostly due to data deficiency. One member suggested a comparison of some of the proposed RASS/SSC outcomes with members' own risk assessments, to test the

interpretation. If the outcomes vary, a discussion will be needed to clarify the discrepancy. This will take place at the next RASS Steering Group in September.

Planned report on implementation of SSC codes

- The secretariat is commissioning a consultant to deliver a report evaluating the implementation of the SSC codes of conduct. The consultant will provide a non disclosure agreement with each business so that any non-public information remains confidential. The results will be published in Autumn 2016 with the businesses' names anonymised.

Agreed:

- Members agreed that concerted advocacy towards decision-makers should be discussed soon, to drive action on the landing obligation and 'choke' issue, which may have a reputational risk on the supply chain.
- Alignment with the RASS tool will be very useful and having more precautionary results in the initial testing is not necessarily a bad thing. It highlights that a lot of risk is around a lack of data, which validates the work we are collectively starting on fishery improvements. Each business may also individually be involved in improvements that lower the risk for specific fisheries.

Actions:

- CFP/LANDING OBLIGATION: Members interested in advocacy towards decision-makers to inform secretariat who will set up call to discuss further.
- RASS: Seafish to send secretariat a set of key RASS profiles that went through the SSC alignment process for members to compare with their internal risk outcomes.
- IMPLEMENTATION REPORT: All members to send details of the relevant expert, and a list of products (for retailers), to the consultant by 1 July.

Item 4: Any Other Business

- The secretariat will produce short video for the SSC website to raise the SSC's profile. Members are encouraged to participate.
- The secretariat gave an update on the scoping work in the Spanish seafood supply chain. We are organising a meeting with Spanish retailers and brands and seek participation from 2 or 3 members.
- The secretariat attended US Innovation Forum on sustainable seafood in May. Both industry and NGOs expressed frustration at lack of consistency in communication about sustainability across US supply chain. Secretariat will share experience with US NGOs at Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions strategy meeting in July.

Actions:

- Members interested in participating in video about SSC to inform secretariat.
- Members interested in joining Spanish retailer meeting to inform secretariat.