

SSC members' strategy meeting

Date: 4 April 2017

Location: The Counting House, London, EC3V 3PD

Number of attendees: 16 total (including 12 members, 3 ClientEarth staff as secretariat, member and minute taker, and 1 external facilitator)

Summary of agreed points

Item 1: Vision and aims

- The environmental scope of the codes is clear and a review would detract from other urgent priorities. Both the vision, and the definition of sustainability, will remain the same for now. The aims should be reviewed in the near future.

Item 2: Strategic priorities

Short-term priorities (12 months)

- Membership expansion, with a focus on foodservice.
- Providing support to current members.
- Maintaining the codes as necessary. We need a statement around social responsibility that shows SSC members are individually working on these issues, but collectively the scope is on environmental issues.

Long-term priorities (three years)

- The SSC will continue to assess alignment and hold members accountable to their commitments under the codes. This will be independently conducted but details were not agreed as to how often or by whom.

General

- Using the SSC as a platform to influence policy and/or work with other NGOs was not ruled out, but is not a priority.
- The working groups on social criteria and fishery improvements will be put on hold until agreed otherwise.
- The role and responsibilities of the new SSC coordinator will be defined in line with the above agreed priorities. The necessary skill set will include: communication and public relations experience, networking and administrative skills.

Item 3: Value and expectations of membership

- Members will help drive expansion by referring to the value of the codes and introducing the potential new member to the secretariat.

Item 4: Governance

- There is no need for a steering group at the time, but this should be revisited as membership grows.
- Major strategic decisions will be made by two thirds majority vote, based on input from all members, with silence implying abstention.
- Minor operational decisions will be made by two thirds majority vote, based on members present at an annual general meeting.
- The secretariat function should continue to be filled by an independent, non-profit organisation. ClientEarth will continue to fulfil this role for now.

Purpose of the meeting:

To agree short and long-term strategic priorities for the SSC as agreed at the last meeting, on 1 March. To help identify priorities, the secretariat sent a survey asking how members feel about the current vision and aims, the decision making process, the governance structure and future priorities.

Presentation of survey findings:

The secretariat presented key findings of the SSC strategy survey, which had received 14 responses.

- Committing to the SSC codes most reflected respondents' reasons for membership (65% for Labelling Code, 70% for Sourcing Code). 100% felt the codes add credibility to sourcing and labelling commitments. 50% felt the SSC shows the UK seafood supply chain as a leader in environmental sustainability and acts as a forum to create change.
- The main challenges faced by the SSC were: risk of duplication (79%); loss of direction/added value (71%); difficulties in driving change (43%). 43% of respondents said they may leave the SSC if these challenges are not addressed.
- When asked how important the SSC is to them, 50% believed it should not stop existing, or should be replaced by an alternative. 36% felt they could demonstrate commitments in other ways, or would be satisfied with having the codes in the public domain.
- 79% were satisfied with the SSC vision that all fish and seafood sold in the UK is from sustainable sources. 50% felt that the aims need reviewing.
- Immediate priorities were listed as: expanding membership (92%, with a focus on foodservice); supporting current members (77%); and governance review (77%).

- 77% of respondents believed the secretariat should remain an independent, non-profit organisation. 30% feel the secretariat role must be fulfilled by ClientEarth.
- Regarding decision making, there was a slight preference towards majority vote with input sought from all members (silence implying abstention).
- 77% felt a reporting mechanism should be instigated, with emphasis on a simple report against strategic aims, with KPIs, and basic financial accountability.

Item 1: Vision and aims

The group discussed the relevance of the [SSC vision and aims](#), the latter having been reviewed last in [July 2015](#).

Discussion and comments:

- The group discussed whether the SSC vision ought to be more practical and achievable, or if being 'visionary' - capturing the best case scenario, as it does - is appropriate. The definition of sustainability was briefly discussed, including whether it ought to include social considerations. Several members stated the term could become problematic if their business was challenged and it didn't include social responsibility. Others felt responsible behaviour is a brand commitment, and that businesses can have their own policies in place in relation to social standards; consensus would be difficult at this stage as there is a lack of developed tools.
- The group then discussed if the aims should be reviewed. There are two types of aim - the beliefs of individual members, which the SSC contributes to (such as promoting responsible fish consumption), and what the SSC seeks to achieve as a collective entity (such as influencing relevant changes in policy).

Agreed points

- The environmental scope of the codes is clear and a review would detract from other urgent priorities. Both the vision, and the definition of sustainability, will remain the same for now. The aims should be reviewed in the near future.

Item 2: Strategic priorities

The group discussed strategic priorities for the SSC, beyond commitment to the sourcing and labelling codes, both in the long term (three years) and in the short term (12 months). The outcomes will help the secretariat to carry out its tasks more effectively.

Discussion and comments

- Evaluating what can be achieved with the current SSC budget (which will be limited to income from membership fees after summer 2017) will help define realistic priorities. Overall, the SSC's core value lies in its codes of conduct, and encouraging others to adopt this best practice should be a priority. These are unique, and the seafood market is in a better place with them.
- In response to a question around seeking external funding, the secretariat stated that membership expansion and compliance with the codes would not be sufficient

objectives to attract external funding. A project with a clear aim of creating something new, rather than maintain what already exists, would be needed.

- The incoming SSC coordinator will need to have skill set that relates to the outcomes of this meeting.
- Over the past year, the SSC (via a working group) started working on including social criteria into the codes. Progress has been on hold until key external tools (such as the Human Rights Risk Tool for seafood being developed by Seafish, the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership and Seafood Watch) are finalised. There are currently no globally applicable solutions, and so there is little value in amending the SSC codes until these exist. Budget constraints and time commitment were also cited as limiting factors to participation in the working group. However, social responsibility remains a critical issue that needs to be addressed.
- More clearly defining the line between the SSC and ClientEarth as its secretariat is needed. This will create more distance between SSC members and ClientEarth's advocacy work.
- One member felt that the [first two \(of seven\) aims](#) represent the core of the SSC strategy. The group reiterated the need to clarify the distinction between SSC work priorities (the SSC 'institution') versus individual member commitments.
- The group considered under which circumstances they might turn to the SSC secretariat. These primarily relate to queries and clarity around labelling and responsible sourcing. Having an audit or check in place to ensure there is alignment with the codes - such as the independent report carried out over the last 6 months - adds real credibility and value to members.
- One member asked if the SSC had a history of successfully using its collective voice to influence policy. The secretariat referenced the [joint letter](#) to the European Commission in 2015, which had some positive results. A member felt that Brexit offers an opportunity for the SSC to use its collective voice towards decision-makers. Another agreed that the foodservice sector, which has no platform for joint advocacy, could benefit from a unified voice. Others felt that there are better resourced entities (e.g. British Retail Consortium, Seafood Industry Alliance, Provision Trade Federation) that already fulfil this role.
- Some members felt there is an opportunity for additional collaboration between the SSC and other UK NGOs, which could benefit both sides. However there was a concern that no agreement would ever be reached and it could just be talking shop.

Agreed:

Short-term priorities (12 months)

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- Maintaining the codes as necessary. We need a statement around social responsibility that shows SSC members are individually working on these issues, but collectively the scope is on environmental issues.

Long-term priorities (three years)

- The SSC will continue to assess alignment and hold members accountable to their commitments under the codes. This will be independently conducted but details were not agreed as to how often or by whom.

General

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- The working groups on social criteria and fishery improvements will be put on hold until agreed otherwise.
- The role and responsibilities of the new SSC coordinator will be defined in line with the above agreed priorities. The necessary skill set will include: communication and public relations experience, networking and administrative skills.

Actions:

- The secretariat to include time to agree a statement on social responsibility at the next members' meeting.

Item 3: Value and expectations of membership

The group discussed the value of SSC membership, particularly in relation to other initiatives, and what it has achieved so far.

Discussion and comments

- The main value is the usefulness of the codes of conduct in identifying best practice and adding credibility to sourcing and labelling commitments. The SSC acts as a forum to create change, and the group felt the labelling code completely changed UK market rules on voluntary responsibility and sustainability claims. One member said that the codes are an effective means to address media challenges.
- The SSC allows businesses to be part of the wider momentum around pre-competitive collaboration and has driven a better international reputation.
- The group felt there should be greater public recognition of member compliance with the codes. This will strengthen the value proposition of SSC membership and create a natural drive for businesses to join the SSC.
- One member suggested that the businesses that have implemented the codes successfully could act as advocates of the SSC to expand membership. This would also help the secretariat in its objective of membership expansion.

Agreed:

- Members will help drive expansion by referring to the value of the codes and introducing the potential new member to the secretariat.

Item 4: Governance

The group reviewed the key components of SSC governance: decision making, meeting frequency, secretariat position and reporting.

Discussion and comments

- A single annual general meeting was suggested. Opinions were mixed: some felt that one compulsory annual meeting would be enough, while others would like more to keep up to date with a fast-moving industry. In terms of a reduction of meeting attendance from the original SSC members, one pointed out that attendance was initially driven by a common need to agree the codes. Now, new incentives are needed to bring attendance up.
- One incentive could be if decisions were made at that meeting so that you need to attend to have a voice. The secretariat currently spends a lot of resource seeking responses and not being able to make a decision if some businesses do not respond. The group discussed what percentage would count as a majority vote, and if those not present would be considered as in agreement or abstinence.
- Creating a steering group to help with decision making and agenda setting was raised. It has already come up in the past, but membership size had not yet justified such a set-up. Some felt a steering group could better separate the role of ClientEarth and the SSC. It would also reduce secretariat workload, saving capacity for the main SSC priorities.
- The group briefly discussed setting up a simple but transparent reporting mechanism, with a few Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be agreed.

Agreed:

- There is no need for a steering group at the time, but this should be revisited as membership grows.
- Major strategic decisions will be made by two thirds majority vote, based on input from all members, with silence implying abstention.
- Minor operational decisions will be made by two thirds majority vote, based on members present at an annual general meeting.
- The secretariat function should continue to be filled by an independent, non-profit organisation. ClientEarth will continue to fulfil this role for now.

Actions:

- Members to send suggestions of KPIs to the secretariat. The secretariat will then design a simple reporting mechanism with a set of KPIs to evaluate progress against agreed priorities.