

MSC process and current status of certification in Fiji.

Our initial certification in 2012 was for Albacore and only for that caught exclusively within the EEZ.

MSC Certification is renewed every five years and in 2018 the opportunity was taken to include Yellowfin. The area of operation was increased to include the adjoining High Seas. There are three High Seas "pockets" that abut our EEZ. The EEZ is taken to include the territorial and archipelagic waters of Fiji.

Details of the terms and conditions that apply to our certification are shown on the MSC website and can be found under;

<https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/fiji-albacore-and-yellowfin-tuna-longline/@@view>

Vessels that are allowed to land their catch as "MSC" are listed on this website and must be Fiji flagged. The Fiji flag ensures that compliance is maintained strictly under the authority of the Ministry of Fisheries (MoF). This applies both when fishing within the EEZ and on the High Seas. Any voyages that include fishing in a national jurisdiction other than Fiji are excluded from MSC certification for that particular voyage.

The current certificate will expire on the 22nd January 2023 and the process of certificate renewal will commence prior to that. Subject to the status of the stock the FFIA will probably seek to add Big Eye into the species mix at that time. The organisations that undertake the assessments are known as a "Conformity Assessment Bodies" (CAB). In our case we use the Scottish based "Acoura". Acoura, in turn, is a division of Lloyds of London. Acoura produces a "Public Certification Report" (PCR) upon which the recommendation to renew the certification is made (or not). The current (PCR) is a 239 page document in which all stakeholder comment is included.

We do not sit on our laurels for FIVE years and wait for the next assessment as our certification comes with SEVEN conditions. These conditions are subject to an "Annual Surveillance Audit" conducted by the CAB. The first of these, for the current certificate, was reported on in March this year. Within the five year period of certification there are certain milestones which we have to meet. The Surveillance Audit also checks the annual performance against these. I will refer to the actual "conditions" later.

The Fiji fishing industry has to comply with the **National** management requirements as set down by the Ministry of Fisheries (MoF). Those, at a Regional Level, are determined by the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Fiji, being a member of the WCPFC, align National management requirements accordingly. Our "bible" for compliance is the Offshore Fisheries Management Decree (now Act) and the Offshore Fisheries Management Regulations (OFMR).

Essentially the MSC certification provides an independent sign off that we are complying with regulations and compliance issues which we should be following in any case. The assessment of our Fishery by MSC however goes beyond regulatory matters and there are THREE core principles which we must meet;

Principle One: **Are the fish stocks that we are catching sustainable** - can “the fish population remain productive and healthy”

Principle Two; **Minimising environmental impact** – fishing activity to be “managed carefully so that other species within the eco system remain healthy”

Principle Three; **Effective fisheries management** – operations to be well managed and compliant with relevant laws.

There is infinite detail in the management of a well- run and managed fishery. MSC requirements are under constant review requiring us to adapt and adjust. More recently Labour practices including forced and child labour policies are being included in the assessments. This issue being addressed both by our Association and the FFA in Honiara.

It cannot be over emphasised the value of being "Internationally Accredited" in an International market. Whilst we may maintain ,in Fiji, sustainability , phytosanitary and other pertinent standards to the highest level unless these are accredited by an reputable organisation - the market will not believe that we are "men (or women) of our word". MSC certification means more to us than ,say, countries such as Iceland or Norway who can stand on their own two feet - based on their known National and historical reputations.

The conditions that apply to our certification provide an interesting aspect to Industry's involvement in the workings of the WCPFC. Six of the conditions directly relate to Harvest Strategies responsive to the state of the Albacore and Yellowfin stock. We are required to work with MoF to ensure that WCPFC ,within the term of the accreditation, have appropriate harvest strategies in place as stated in the conservation measures of the Commission (CMM 2014-6). A tall order indeed for a Trade Association from a distant island state!. The fact that we have MSC accreditation behind us is helpful in this regard. That Fiji has recently included the Executive Officer of the Association in the National Delegation to WCPFC assists in our compliance with the MSC conditions. Furthermore it was Fiji that lead the adoption of a Interim Target Reference Point (iTRP) for Albacore at the last Commission meeting. A final condition requiring records for the importation of bait, noting its source and sustainability, has already be adhered to . The issue being to ensure that the Fiji Long Line industry does not impact adversely on Fisheries in other countries.

The right to on sell our MSC certified catch, as MSC, is secured by individual companies having their own, or access to a " Chain of Custody" .What is often misunderstood is that “MSC Tuna “ retains its identity only to the landing point which in our case is Suva. To maintain the MSC label beyond the wharf at Suva it has to be sold to a Company that is accredited under the Chain of Custody system. It is essential to maintaining the integrity of MSC that this chain is not broken or infiltrated by non-MSC product. Fiji's process in managing this is, I believe, unique and involves MoF collating all MSC exports on a monthly basis with relative catch records. The matching of Fiji's regulatory process with MSC sets our accreditation apart from others.

MSC certified product currently carries a price premium over non-certified Albacore and Tuna. This is particularly so for exports to the EU. This margin is likely to reduce as other sources of supply gain MSC certification. The value will then become more a right of access to these sophisticated markets where the consumer is increasingly conscious of where fish comes from and its sustainability.

The FFIA does not have the financial resources of the larger overseas groups under MSC certification. Fortunately there is a strong link in Fiji between WWF-Pacific , MoF and FMA by assisting in the maintenance of our approvals. Whilst the FFIA is now a self- funded

organisation financial support given by overseas donors is acknowledged and in the case of the EU access to the sophisticated market it has provided.

Charles Hufflett

Suva

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