

## **Marine Stewardship Council adopts On the Hook campaign ask, bans compartmentalisation by fishing practice**

- Marine Stewardship Council will close loophole which allowed unsustainable compartmentalisation of fisheries on basis of fishing practice
- This is part of the MSC's updated Fisheries Certification Process
- Move comes after two and a half years of campaigning by On the Hook

**For immediate release London, 13th February:** The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Board of Trustees released a [statement](#) on Friday in which they approved a new version of their Fisheries Certification Process (FCP) to be rolled out in March. The statement confirms that the updated FCP removes the possibility for a vessel to catch both certified and non-certified catch using different practices, known as compartmentalisation. The [On the Hook campaign](#) has campaigned for this change for the past two and a half years.

**Professor Callum Roberts, Professor of Marine Conservation at the University of York and On the Hook member** said: "Compartmentalisation on the basis of fishing practice represents a gaping loophole in the MSC's standard. It rewards good fishing practices with certification while allowing vessels to continue unsustainable and damaging fishing methods alongside. Treating the two practices as separate fisheries undermines the credibility of MSC certification and its ability to drive improvement across the entire fishery."

**Charles Clover, Executive Director of the Blue Marine Foundation and On the Hook member** added: "Now that the MSC has accepted the view that the sustainability of a fishery can only be determined through holistic assessment, certification can hopefully be much more effective in driving genuine improvement across the entire fishery. However, there remains significant scope for improvement from the MSC. On the Hook will continue to push for urgent action to eliminate shark finning from certified fisheries and for the MSC to commission an overarching independent review into its Standard and its application."

'Compartmentalisation' refers to the fact that fish certified as sustainable and permitted to be sold carrying the MSC ecolabel are in fact caught alongside unsustainable practices which result in the hauling up of juvenile tuna, sharks and turtles on the same vessel on the same trip. The only difference between the sustainable and unsustainable fishing is that the latter involves nets being set on Fish Aggregating Devices, around which a variety of species may cluster, while the former is caught in the open ocean, therefore involving less bycatch. The MSC has thus far allowed the assessment and certification of the FAD-free (open ocean) sets as a separate fishery.

Last week's announcement of a ban on compartmentalisation by fishing practice, through an updated Fisheries Certification Process, follows two and a half years of campaigning by the On the Hook campaign. [The campaign was launched in August 2017, supported by scientists, NGOs, retailers, industry, MPs and other ocean advocates to call](#) for the MSC to enact this reform.

The MSC announced its first round of consultation on the topic of compartmentalisation by fishing practice in August 2017, in response to the launch of On the Hook. Therefore, while this element of last week's announcement, coming after three rounds of consultation over two and a half years, was welcomed by On the Hook, there are still some serious questions for the MSC to clarify around the updated FCP's definition of 'Unit of Assessment'.

With regards to next steps, **Dr Frédéric Le Manach, Scientific Director of BLOOM and On the Hook member** said: "It should not have taken the MSC so long to get to this stage, but we welcome this step change. However, the last round of consultation on the updated FCP suggested that, while 'fishing practices' would be removed from the definition of Unit of Assessment, 'the geographical area where fishing occurs' could be added. We have requested urgent clarification from the MSC as to whether this line is included in the finalised version of the FCP - if so, they must also clarify that this does not serve to introduce a new form of compartmentalisation. Similarly, when these changes will be implemented for certified fisheries, fisheries in assessment and fisheries entering assessment."

Additionally, On the Hook continues to call for vital reform from the MSC on other areas, which the updated FCP does not adequately deal with. The MSC's statement last week also included the decision to move forwards to the next phase of their Fisheries Standard Review – conducted every five years – and information on the topics up for consultation between now and 2022, including best practice regulations and management systems to stop shark finning, another serious issue which On the Hook has highlighted. The updated FCP proposes only to exclude vessels successfully convicted for shark finning from the fishery for two years; On the Hook has called the MSC to go much further on the basis that detection and prosecution rates for shark finning are notably low, rendering a measure based on convictions wholly inadequate.