

MSC-certificates - status and challenges

Like in previous years, 2023 resulted in a wide range of tasks for SFG in relation to the maintenance of the Greenlandic MSC certifications. Not least the re-certification of the shrimp fishery in West Greenland. In January 2024, SFG will receive the new MSC certificate, and the fishery is certified for the next 5 years. A single condition remains, namely the lack of an agreement between Greenland and Canada regarding the management and sharing of the shrimp stock in the so-called SFA1 area, which lies in Canadian waters. The condition must be closed in connection with the MSC audit sometime in early 2025, and it's therefore crucial that the Ministry of Fisheries and Hunting and the Canadian fisheries authorities reach a more formal cooperation on this specific question during 2024. The remaining MSC certificates have all been through annual surveillance audits in 2023. The conditions connected with the MSC certificate for the lumpfish fishery and the offshore fishery for Greenland halibut in West Greenland are all "on target". When it comes to the lumpfish fishery, challenges are still related to the reporting of bycatch. In a collaboration with the Greenlandic Institute of Natural Resources, SFG has conducted a number of studies specifically in the area of by-catch in recent years, and this work will continue in 2024, just as SFG will initiate an information campaign, targeted specifically on bycatch, before the 2024 fishing season begins.



When it comes to the MSC certification of the fishery for cod, haddock and saithe in the Barents Sea, 2023 resulted in a so-called "expedited audit". The reason behind this was new scientific knowledge regarding the distribution area of the Norwegian coastal cod. Estimates showed that there is app. 10 % bycatch of the coastal cod in the total Greenlandic offshore cod catches. This amount exceeds the MSC's bycatch limits. It is not possible to separate the catch of the two cod stocks without moving the fishery further offshore geographically. This is not a desirable situation for the industry.

Therefore, the Norwegian coastal cod is now included in the MSC certification as a so-called IPI stock (inseparable or practically inseparable) for the remainder of the certification period. This means, that during the next MSC re-certification in 2025, it must either be included as a regular target stock, or the share of bycatch must be reduced. However, SFG's Norwegian counterpart succeeded in having the coastal cod MSC re-certified in 2023. So, during the next re-certification of fishing in the Barents Sea, SFG will add the coastal cod to the certification as a target species. It is important to mention, that the same challenge regarding the Norwegian coastal cod applies to all the MSC certifications for offshore cod fishery in the Barents Sea.

Management plans

SFG has for many years had a good and constructive cooperation with the fisheries authorities in Nuuk, and this has also been the case in 2023. This is not only in connection with MSC certifications and audits, but also in relation to the preparation of various management plans. In 2023, SFG contributed with input to the management plans for, respectively:

- The coastal halibut fishery in West Greenland
- The offshore fishery for Greenland halibut in East Greenland
- Fishery for cod
- The Greenland seabed

The management plans for the coastal Greenland halibut fishery and the seabed are not finished yet, and SFG will continue to be part of the process in 2024.



MSC standard

The new MSC standard version 3.0 entered into force on 1 May 2023. This means that all new fisheries starting MSC certification must now be assessed against this version. The new standard sets a higher bar on a number of areas. Not least in relation to principle 2, which deals with knowledge and documentation regarding the fishery's impact of on the ecosystem (bycatch and seabed). No fisheries have yet been assessed according to version 3.0, and SFG is following the situation closely in order to prepare for when our own MSC certificates have to be evaluated against new version.

The lumpfish fishery and the Greenland halibut fishery will transition to the new version in 2026, the shrimp fishery in 2028 and the fishery in the Barents Sea possibly as early as 2025.

Nordic Cooperation

In 2023, SFG has once again cooperated closely with the other Nordic MSC-clients in Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands. At the beginning of the year a meeting was held in Oslo, and here the dialogue from previous meetings regarding the parties' views on the new version of the MSC standard and experiences with the various certification agencies (CABs) continued.

During the meeting, it was agreed to initiate a process in which an unofficial assessment of some of the parties' MSC-certified fisheries against version 3.0 will be carried out, in order to uncover where the biggest challenges during transition will be. The collaboration with the other Nordic MSC clients will continue in 2024. Among other things, the collaboration provides the opportunity for a united, and thus stronger, North Atlantic voice in the work with the ongoing development of the MSC- standard.

In addition to the above-mentioned cooperation, 2023 also became the year where a collaboration between the mentioned MSC clients in the Nordics and researchers from the individual countries who deal with seabed habitats and seabed organisms was launched, thanks to economic funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers. As mentioned, the new version of the MSC standard includes higher demands regarding knowledge and documentation on sensitive seabed habitats. It is the intention that by bringing researchers from the different Nordic countries together, it will be possible to get an overview of the information and knowledge that's already available when it comes to the seabed. But also initiate projects and cross-functional collaboration between the scientists in order to generate new knowledge with relevance to MSC-certification. The first meeting was held in Svenstrup in October 2023, and two additional meetings are planned in 2024, and finally a seminar in 2025.

Finally, it's worth mentioning, that in 2023 SFG was appointed a seat on MSC's technical advisory board (TAB), which advises MSC's board of trustees on a number of issues.

