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# Get Certified! Chain of Custody

A practical guide to the Marine Stewardship  
Council's Chain of Custody certification process



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## **Cover photography:**

The fresh fish counters of retailer EDEKA Minden-Hannover hold the MSC Chain of Custody certification for seafood traceability, assuring customers that their fish only comes from a MSC certified sustainable fishery.

# Introduction



© Pescafría-Pesquera Rodríguez

The MSC program makes it easy for buyers to source from certified sustainable fisheries.

## What is the MSC ecolabel?

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) ecolabel is the globally recognised mark for seafood that can be traced back through every step of the supply chain to the well managed and sustainable fishery that caught it. The ecolabel enables the world's fisheries to demonstrate their environmental credentials – proving that they are fishing sustainably, implementing good management practices and minimising their environmental impact.

With the MSC ecolabel, seafood buyers, processors, retailers and foodservice companies can assure their customers that the seafood they are buying comes from world-class, sustainable fisheries. These businesses play a leading role in making certified sustainable seafood available to buyers and consumers, and creating demand for seafood from well managed fisheries.

The MSC is an independent, global, non-profit organisation. Our mission is to use our ecolabel and fishery certification program to contribute to the health of the world's oceans by recognising and rewarding sustainable fishing, influencing the choices people make when buying seafood, and working with our partners to transform the seafood market to a sustainable basis.

## The global trend towards sustainability

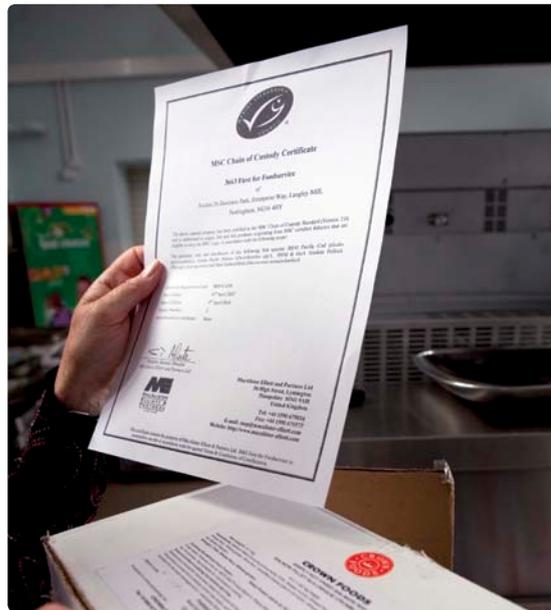
Consumers are increasingly concerned about overfishing and its environmental consequences. With the MSC ecolabel they can choose seafood products that have been independently assessed and certified as ecologically sustainable and fully traceable. It ensures that MSC certified seafood only comes from MSC certified sustainable fisheries and assures customers that the product has not contributed to the environmental problem of overfishing.

In 2010/11 the global market for certified sustainable seafood was worth US\$2.6 billion across 80 countries. The number of fisheries and seafood companies taking part in the MSC program is increasing year on year, showing how commitment and ethical leadership can make a difference to the world's oceans.

Thousands of certified sustainable seafood products now carry the MSC ecolabel in supermarkets, fishmongers and restaurants around the world. They are listed at [www.msc.org/where-to-buy](http://www.msc.org/where-to-buy).

## Essentials

*The MSC's Chain of Custody standard for seafood traceability ensures that the MSC ecolabel is only displayed on seafood sourced from an MSC certified sustainable fishery.*



If your company wants to display the MSC ecolabel on a product or menu, you will need Chain of Custody certification.

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### What is Chain of Custody?

It means that consumers and seafood buyers can have confidence that the fish they are buying can be traced back to a fishery that meets the MSC environmental standard for sustainable fishing.

Each company in the supply chain must become Chain of Custody certified from an independent, third-party certifier in order for the end product to display the MSC ecolabel.

More information about Chain of Custody can be found on the MSC website at [www.msc.org/about-us/standards/standards/chain-of-custody](http://www.msc.org/about-us/standards/standards/chain-of-custody).

### Benefits of Chain of Custody certification

The MSC program recognises and rewards good management and sustainable practices and, in many cases, improves market access and price premiums. Many retailers, restaurants and consumers are now demanding assurance that their product is sustainably sourced – MSC certification can provide this assurance.

With Chain of Custody certification you can:

- Demonstrate your company's commitment to sustainable sourcing
- Choose to display the MSC ecolabel on seafood products to demonstrate that they are sustainably sourced
- Access new markets and secure existing ones by joining the MSC certified supply chain
- Include independently verified traceability systems as part of your offer
- Promote your company and attract new customers through the MSC's online 'find a supplier' search and the product finder which allows customers to find your MSC labelled seafood products.



© MSC / A Jackson

The MSC Chain of Custody program ensures traceability from boat to plate.

### Do I need Chain of Custody?

Under the Chain of Custody program, each company in the supply chain of a MSC certified product, from the fishery to the producer of the final consumer-ready product, must have a valid MSC Chain of Custody certificate.

Examples of companies that need Chain of Custody certification include:

- Processors and distributors who want to sell MSC certified fish
- Restaurants wanting to display the MSC ecolabel on their menu
- Wholesaler for foodservice companies who sell MSC certified products to their customers
- Retailers and fishmongers that want to display the MSC ecolabel on fresh fish counters.

In general if your company purchases and sells a MSC certified product and this product is not in its final packaging, your company will need Chain of Custody certification in order to sell the product as MSC certified.

To find out if you need Chain of Custody, please visit [www.msc.org/get-certified/supply-chain/chain-of-custody-faqs](http://www.msc.org/get-certified/supply-chain/chain-of-custody-faqs).

### When Chain of Custody is not needed

- You do not need Chain of Custody certification if you buy pre-packed, consumer-ready products that are supplied with the MSC ecolabel and will not be opened or re-labelled in any way. If you think this describes your company's situation, please contact the MSC for advice and confirmation before selling the products. You will still need an Ecolabel License Agreement to promote these products – see page 8.
- You do not need Chain of Custody certification if you buy MSC certified fish but do not use the MSC ecolabel, MSC name, or MSC claim when you sell it or when you promote your company or products. In this case none of your buyers (or their buyers) may make reference to the MSC and any claim that the fish or product is from an MSC certified source would be a trademark infringement.



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### Special case: Group certification

Group certification can lead to substantial savings in the cost of Chain of Custody certification. A group may be one company with several production sites, a supermarket or restaurant chain, or a group of individual businesses, such as independent restaurants and fishmongers, that form an association to become certified together.

One major benefit of group certification is that only a sample of sites must be audited, thereby saving time and money. The specific requirements for group managers and a guidance document are available at [www.msc.org/get-certified/supply-chain/group-certification](http://www.msc.org/get-certified/supply-chain/group-certification).

### How long will the audit take and what does it cost?

The cost of the audit varies and depends on the complexity and size of your operation and your certifier's rates and expenses. The certifier will be able to estimate the amount of time the audit will take and its costs but the more you can prepare for the audit, the quicker it will be.

- For a single site, the certifier spends approximately one day at your location.

- For a group certification, depending on your activities and geographical situation, the certifier spends one or two days at the headquarters, and several hours at individual sites. The headquarters will always be audited, but not all sites. The certifier will determine the number of sites to be audited according to various data. Please note that it will never be more than the square root of the total number of sites (for example, a group with 25 outlets would have a maximum of five sites audited).

When evaluating the cost of certification, remember that you will undergo regular surveillance audits (generally one every year). It is also worthwhile to check with your certifier if additional expenses incurred during the audit will be invoiced, as well as if there are other additional certification costs such as scope extensions or issuing a certificate.

The MSC does not receive any payment for audits or certifications, and has no role in overseeing the contract between you and your chosen certifier. However, if you intend to use the MSC ecolabel on seafood products you will also need to pay license fees to the MSC's trading company, Marine Stewardship Council International (MSCI) – see page 8.

Site visits from your chosen certifier check that you meet the MSC Chain of Custody standard.

## Step one: Before you start

*To become certified, a Chain of Custody audit needs to be carried out by an independent and accredited certifier.*

### Find a supplier search:

[www.msc.org/where-to-buy/find-a-supplier](http://www.msc.org/where-to-buy/find-a-supplier)

### Dining out:

[www.msc.org/where-to-buy/dining-out](http://www.msc.org/where-to-buy/dining-out)

### Sustainable seafood product finder:

[www.msc.org/where-to-buy/product-finder](http://www.msc.org/where-to-buy/product-finder)

### Ecolabel User Guidelines:

[www.msc.org/get-certified/use-the-msc-ecolabel/rules](http://www.msc.org/get-certified/use-the-msc-ecolabel/rules)

### Where do I begin?

The certifier will visit your company to complete the audit, checking that your company and employees always:

- Buy MSC certified seafood only from suppliers with a valid Chain of Custody certificate
- Keep MSC certified seafood separate from non-certified seafood
- Make sure MSC certified seafood is clearly identified
- Keep track of deliveries, processing and sales of MSC certified seafood
- Make sure the MSC ecolabel is only applied to MSC certified seafood.

You will also need to decide which fish species, from which MSC certified fishery, and which product(s) you want to sell as MSC certified. This will be the ‘scope’ of your certification. You do not need to purchase the products before the audit takes place. In some cases you may also be able to include products from fisheries that are still under assessment, so that you are ready to sell them if they become certified. Please check with your certifier for further information.

The MSC’s online search tool makes it easy to find a supplier of MSC certified seafood.

#### SIMPLE SEARCH

Country:

Species:

Supplier name:

Product form:

Storage:

Presentation:

Activity:

Hide 'not valid':

▶ RESET FILTER

#### ADVANCED SEARCH

Fishery:

Species (latin name):

Certificate code:

▶ RESET FILTER

▶ SUBMIT SEARCH

Print Page

Print Search Results

▶ SEARCH HELP

#### SEARCH RESULTS

Certificate Code	Name	Status	Country	Address	Sales contact
C-FCL-0027	Caley Fisheries Ltd	Valid	United Kingdom	Castle Street, AB42 1EN Peterhead	Ian Lake
C-FCL-0021	Denholm Seafoods Ltd - Alexander Buchan Ltd.	Valid	United Kingdom	East Quay, AB42 1JF Peterhead	Robert Duthie +44 (0)1775 477360 robert.duthie@denholm-seafoods.co.uk
C-FCL-0022	IFC Holdings Ltd (Ilor-Sea Foods Ltd)	Valid	United Kingdom	Bath Street, AB43 5DY Fraserburgh	David Cook
MML-C-1028	Interfish Ltd	Valid	United Kingdom	Yallsend Industrial Estate, Cattedown Road, Cattedown, Plymouth, PL4 0RW Devon	Mark Webber +44 (0)1752 267261 mark@interfish.co.uk
C-FCL-0023	Lunar Freezing & Cold Store Company Ltd	Valid	United Kingdom	East Quay, AB42 1JF Peterhead	Sinclair Banks

### Who to call?

The MSC does not audit companies for Chain of Custody or issue certificates – this is done by an independent and accredited certifier. Appointing a certifier is an important step and is likely to result in a long-term business relationship.

- Always get a quote from more than one certifier.
- You may be able to synchronise your audit with audits for other standards, such as ISO 9000, IFS or BRC, if the certifier and their auditors qualify to undertake both.

You can find contact details for accredited certifiers at [www.msc.org/get-certified/find-a-certifier](http://www.msc.org/get-certified/find-a-certifier).

### Where do I find certified suppliers?

All companies with valid Chain of Custody certificates are listed on the MSC’s online supplier search directory at [www.msc.org/where-to-buy/find-a-supplier](http://www.msc.org/where-to-buy/find-a-supplier). You can use the search tool to find nearly 2000 companies selling a wide range of MSC certified sustainable seafood in various formats and categories to meet your business needs.

Remember that if you want to sell MSC certified seafood you must buy products from a company with a valid Chain of Custody certificate. This may be another seafood company, a processor or direct from the fishery. It may be an existing supplier or a business you have not worked with before.

The supplier search will display the scope of certification of each certified supplier. Please ensure your chosen supplier has ‘scope’ to sell you the particular products you need.

Having a valid Chain of Custody certificate means your company will be automatically added to the MSC online ‘find a supplier’ search and ‘the sustainable seafood product finder’ (if you are a retailer or a consumer brand) to promote your company’s certification.

## Step two: Preparing for your audit

*Every company is different and certifiers will adapt their questions to your unique situation to ensure you meet the MSC Chain of Custody standard.*

The points below will be common to most companies, but you should expect the certifier to check your operations closely and ask further detailed questions.

### Pre-audit checklist

The following is a summary of the questions that certifiers are likely to ask managers or relevant on-site staff. You could use this as a checklist to prepare your team for the audit.

In addition, the certifier will usually undertake a traceability test and an input and output reconciliation on a randomly chosen product or batch. In a traceability test, the certifier may look at your records to follow a product from 'goods-in' to 'goods-out' (or the reverse). In an input and output reconciliation, the certifier usually checks that the weight of a sample batch at 'goods-in' is equal to the sales (by weight) of MSC certified fish, minus any recorded wastage.

### Management control system

- Is there a procedure that describes how traceability is maintained and how products are identified at each stage of operation?
- Are the responsibilities defined and known regarding traceability and Chain of Custody, including internal staff and subcontractors?
- Is it understood and applied by the staff?

### Ordering and Goods in

- Do you check your supplier has a valid certificate for MSC Chain of Custody before ordering? Do you check if the product you would like to purchase is included in the scope of certification of your supplier? How do you check this? Is it recorded?
- When ordering, do you specify your requirement for MSC certified fish?
- Do you record your orders for each delivery of MSC certified fish, clearly showing the product name and that you ordered MSC certified products?
- How do your staff identify MSC certified product when it arrives in your facilities?

How is it recorded: dates, quantities, species, name of supplier, Chain of Custody certificate number, batch code, storage destination?

- The certifier might ask for examples of records for any batch of MSC certified fish in storage. Are you able to find them quickly?

### Processing / packing / storage

- How do you ensure that MSC certified fish is not mixed with non-certified fish in your company?
- Do you have processing records showing how each batch of MSC certified fish received was used (including, where appropriate, processing location and final product), and can you find them easily?
- How do you record your production yields? Do you keep track of the quantities of raw material used, finished products and wastage obtained?
- Do you add non-MSC certified seafood ingredients to your MSC certified products? If so, what percentage, and does it comply with the Chain of Custody standard and Annex BD?
- Do you have a clear list of the products in stock with their identification and their quantities?
- Walk through your premises and visually check what's in place (for example, check that theoretical stock matches what is really in stock). Do you know what to do when processing, packing and storing MSC product?



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Keeping MSC certified fish separate from other fish, and clearly labelled, is a key part of Chain of Custody certification.



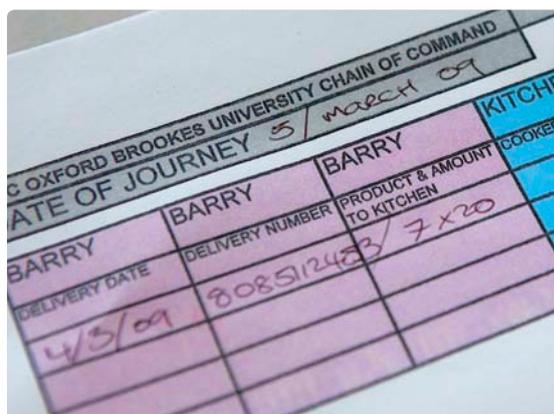
© MSC / J Simpson

Your certifier will check your company records – held on paper or electronically – to make sure that you are able to trace MSC certified fish at any time on any day.

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### Product and packaging material identification

- How do you identify MSC certified products at different stages of your operations?
- Where there are similar fish species, or products, are they clearly labelled and segregated? Is there any risk of picking the wrong product? If so, what happens? Has it already happened? What did you do?
- How do you make sure that packaging with the MSC ecolabel will not be confused with other packaging? (Examples of measures taken: physical separation of stocks, clear identification of a dedicated storage area for MSC labelled packaging).
- How do you ensure the MSC ecolabel is only used on MSC certified products? (Examples of measures you could take: labelling control at the beginning of the processing, or a comparison between the quantity of packaging ordered and the quantity used).
- Do you have a copy of the *MSC Ecolabel User Guidelines* (see page 5), and do relevant members of staff know where to find information about using the MSC ecolabel?

### Goods out

- Is there a procedure to ensure traceability of the goods out: what information you put on products and what information you report on your internal documents and systems?
- Can you present records for all the batches of MSC certified fish you have sold to customers, including product name, species, weight and customer\*?



© MSC / N Steins

- How do you make sure that every time MSC certified fish is sold to your customers it is clearly identified as MSC certified (with or without the MSC ecolabel on the packaging)? Is your Chain of Custody certificate number shown on your invoice in association with the MSC certified product\*?
- Do you identify each MSC certified product on your sales invoices? Do they include sufficient traceability information (for example, the batch number)?
- From a finished product, can you show all records that enable you to know which raw material was used (traceability test)?
- Can you demonstrate that you can determine how raw material was used and in what quantities (input and output reconciliation)?
- Do you record the total amount of fish you sell as MSC certified fish?
- How do you ensure that when your customer orders MSC certified fish, they are supplied with MSC certified fish? What happens in an 'out of stock' event?

### Record keeping

- Do you keep sufficient records proving how you comply with the sections above?
- Can you supply any and every document regarding MSC certified products?
- How long are the records kept by the business (a minimum of three years is required)?

\*This is not required when selling directly to consumers

## Step three: After certification

*Your certifier will give you a Chain of Custody certificate and a unique Chain of Custody certificate number, which may be requested by your clients.*

Your certifier will also record a list of your suppliers, but this will not be made public. They will then input details of your company, certificate number and product(s) to the MSC database so that customers can find you on the MSC 'find a supplier' search.

Remember that providing marketing information and your company logo to your certifier will increase your visibility and profile on the MSC website. Further product marketing information will be requested by the MSC if you apply to use the MSC ecolabel.

### Using the MSC ecolabel

To use the MSC ecolabel on your product(s), menu or promotional literature (eg. brochures, stands, letterhead, website), contact your local MSC office or email [ecolabel@msc.org](mailto:ecolabel@msc.org) so we can set up an agreement with you (a license) and send you copies of the ecolabel. The MSC ecolabel is a registered trademark and cannot be used without the agreement of the MSC. We advise you to apply for a license to use the MSC ecolabel while you are preparing for your audit. This way, as soon as your company is certified, you will be able to use the MSC ecolabel.

Different rules apply depending on how you intend to use the MSC ecolabel. The *MSC Ecolabel User Guidelines* helps you find the

best way for your business to use the ecolabel, and sets out the rules about how to use it correctly (for example, on bulk packaging, on menus and products, on promotional materials, or with a marketing message).

Using the MSC ecolabel is voluntary and on-product use incurs the payment of administrative fees and royalty fees to the MSC, which are calculated annually.

Further details about the costs associated with using the MSC ecolabel are included in the *MSC Ecolabel User Guidelines*. The guide is available from your local MSC office, from [ecolabel@msc.org](mailto:ecolabel@msc.org), and online at [www.msc.org/get-certified/use-the-msc-ecolabel/rules](http://www.msc.org/get-certified/use-the-msc-ecolabel/rules).



You will need a licence to use the MSC certification ecolabel on your product, menu or packaging.

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### How much does it cost to use the MSC ecolabel?

Value of MSC labelled fish sold or purchased	Annual fee	Volume royalty	Sample total
0 – \$200,000	\$250	0.5%	
e.g. \$10,000	\$250	\$50	\$300
\$200,000 – \$500,000	\$1,000	0.5%	
e.g. \$400,000	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$3,000
>\$500,000	\$2,000	0.5%	
e.g. \$1,000,000	\$2,000	\$5,000	\$7,000



© MSC

Once you are using the MSC ecolabel you might want to increase your range of products – your certifier can tell you how.

### Next steps

Once you are certified, have a signed Ecolabel License Agreement and have your packaging approved, you can sell MSC certified products – congratulations!

Remember the following:

- Regularly check that your suppliers have a valid Chain of Custody certificate (check on the MSC website ‘find a supplier’ search).
- Before contracting a new supplier, check its scope on the MSC website to be certain that it can supply the specification you need.

Your certificate is valid for three years. During this period, your certifier will visit you again at regular times to check that your systems are still working well. These are the surveillance audits. After this period, you will be re-assessed if you wish to remain in the Chain of Custody program.

The certifier also has the right to make unannounced audits of your business at any time. Refusing to allow your certifier entry could jeopardise your certificate.

### Staying in touch with your certifier

During the life of your certificate, you must keep your certifier updated on several important points:

- If you wish to extend the range of MSC products you handle, you must request an extension to the scope of your certificate, before you purchase these new products.

- If you had not chosen your suppliers at the time of the audit, or if you start to use a new supplier, you must communicate the supplier’s name to your certifier within ten days of receiving their first delivery to you.
- If your scope refers to fish from a fishery that is still under assessment, your certifier will contact you when, or if, the fishery gets certified. They will then update your scope so that your Chain of Custody certification is valid for this product. Until this occurs, you are not usually authorised to sell these products as MSC certified. Violation of these rules may lead to loss of your certificate. However, there are some exceptions to this rule so check with your certifier who can explain the rules in detail.
- Before each surveillance audit your certifier will contact you to update their information about your company and prepare the audit.

The MSC aims to protect the value of the certification program and of its ecolabel. We take any breach of the standard and the ecolabel licensing agreement very seriously. In such cases, the MSC requests that the certificate is immediately suspended. This is the only way for us to protect your investment in becoming certified.

The MSC is constantly growing as new fisheries and new businesses get certified. Check the MSC website to stay up to date and find new business opportunities.

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[www.msc.org/product-finder](http://www.msc.org/product-finder)  
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Participation in MSC's certification program changes over time; all details within this document are accurate at the time of publication.