Sustainable Fisheries
PARTNERSHIP

FIP Evaluation:
A standardized tool for measuring FIP progress

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Introduction

This guidance document describes Sustainable Fishery Partnership's (SFP's) draft tool for evaluating fishery improvement project (FIP) progress. It provides background describing the previous method and its limitations, definitions and guidelines, and details on the current methodology. The FIP progress ratings tool laid out in this document is the only of its kind currently in the public domain. One feature that separates it from other tools is the application of time benchmarks to quickly understand the rate at which a fishery is improving with an alphabetic rating. Generally, the more regularly and frequently improvements are being made, the better the progress rating.

The primary audiences for the FIP progress ratings tool are buyers and suppliers of FIPs to help inform sourcing decisions, prioritizing action on poorer-performing (i.e., lower-rated) FIPs. It is not intended as a final determination of a FIP's performance. It provides a quick reference metric of improvement progress in a fishery mainly by tracking the frequency of improvements in fishery policies/practices and actual improvements "in the water." For some users of this tool, due diligence may still be required to understand details such as what type of improvements are (or are not) being made and possibly what activities have happened, have not happened, and are planned.

A previous version of this guidance document is available on SFP's website and the tool is free for anyone to use. Actual progress ratings of public FIPs are shown in the "FIP" section of fishery profiles that are on SFP's FishSource.org. For questions or comments, please contact Indrani Lutchman.

Background

In 2007, SFP started using a simple method for evaluating FIP progress. At that time, we defined five (5) "stages" of achievement: Stages 1 and 2 to track development of the FIP structure, Stage 3 to track implementation, and Stages 4 and 5 to track actual improvements.

The stages are independent of the underlying status of the fishery (i.e., a fishery could be rated high, medium, or low risk for its sustainability, and still have a FIP at any stage). Once a FIP reaches a particular stage, it is always referred to as at least that stage. Thus the SFP

FIP stage measures are used as the "high water mark" for the FIP towards FIP objectives and sustainability goals.

Limitations with this method of only referring to a FIP's stage include:

- No penalty for FIPs that were stalled (e.g., no differentiation between FIPs that reached Stage 4 and never had another result from those that continually delivered Stage 4 results)
- Lack of clarity about what improvements constitute Stage 4 and 5 results
- No measure of the completeness of the FIP (i.e., did it have activities planned or underway to strengthen all known weaknesses of the fishery?).

Since SFP created the five FIP stages, the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions (Conservation Alliance) has refined and clarified the stages and adopted them as part of the most recent "Guidelines for Supporting FIPs" document. The methodology below has been developed to address the limitations above and to include the revised stage definitions along with more specific guidance for using the tool.

Definitions and Guidelines

To evaluate progress of a FIP, at least three key components need to be understood. First, the phase of FIP, that is, whether a FIP is basic or comprehensive, as defined in the following section. Second, it's important for FIP implementers and stakeholders to know which indicators are used to measure achievements and to determine whether a particular FIP stage has been triggered. And third, a FIP evaluation start date is necessary for determining a FIP's rate of progress against time.

Phase of FIP

It is important to note that both basic and comprehensive FIPs fall along a continuum to achieve the end goal of reaching a level of performance to unconditionally pass the MSC standard (actual MSC certification is a market-based choice). Generally speaking, comprehensive FIPs are in a position to reach this goal sooner than basic FIPs. Basic FIPs often have more challenges to overcome, before they are in a position to become comprehensive and/or reach the end goal. Differentiating FIPs by phase is an important reflection of the range of buyer commitments throughout the world. Some buyers have aggressive commitments to source only MSC-certified or "green" product and will tend to support FIPs in the comprehensive phase. While other buyers have longer-term commitments to first improve source fisheries that are in the worst condition, and FIPs in the basic phase are a key tool to meet that objective.

This methodology uses the requirements of two FIP phases to help determine a FIP progress rating (consistent with the Conservation Alliance guidelines[1]):

- Basic FIP (includes all of the requirements listed):
    - Public evaluation of the fishery/fisheries covering stock status, management quality, and environmental impacts or summary scoping document is available (e.g., Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) pre-assessment, FishSource evaluation, Seafood Watch report)

[1] http://www.solutionsforseafood.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Alliance-FIP-Guidelines-3.7.15.pdf

  - Publicly announced with a list of participants (including at least one seafood company)
  - Time-bound objectives of the FIP made public
  - Public workplan describing planned activities on one or more sustainability issues and expected timelines
  - Regular public reporting of activity against the workplan and improvement progress (see FisheryProgress.org for tools and guidance, or SFP's template and guidance).[2]

- Comprehensive FIP (includes all of the requirements listed):
  - MSC pre-assessment or summary scoping document made public
  - Publicly announced with a list of participants (including at least one seafood company)
  - Time-bound objectives of the FIP made public for the fishery to reach a level consistent with an unconditional pass of the MSC standard
  - Public workplan describing planned activities for all outstanding sustainability issues identified in the pre-assessment and expected timelines
  - Regular public reporting of activity against the workplan and improvement progress (see FisheryProgress.org for tools and guidance, or SFP's template and guidance)[3]
  - Every 3 years, make public an audit of activity and performance conducted by a third party experienced with the MSC standard.

It is critical to regularly review FIP phases every 6 months, in line with Conservation Alliance guidelines, and publicly report a FIP's progress against its workplan to demonstrate effort and outcome to interested parties. This can be done on a website hosted by the FIP participant(s) or third parties. The FisheryProgress.org website is now available for public reporting by FIPs and is a key source for information in evaluating progress.

Indicators of progress from Stages 1 through 5

Below are the minimum requirements that should be completed in order to achieve the stage indicated.

- Stage 1 (FIP development) – Assessment of fishery's environmental performance (e.g., MSC pre-assessment, FishSource evaluation, IFFO assessment, Seafood Watch report) or third-party scoping document, with recommendations, made public.
- Stage 2 (FIP launch) – Two components are required for this stage: 1) confirmation of FIP participants (including at least one seafood company) as evidenced by a memorandum of understanding (MOU), press release, or copy of an email; 2) FIP workplan (with activities and anticipated timelines) is made public.
- Stage 3 (FIP implementation) – FIP activities contained in the workplan are implemented and reported.
- Stage 4 (improvements in fishing practices or fishery management) – Regulatory policy change or regulator action to improve the fishery (e.g., new bycatch provision)

[2] SFP and its partners encourage FIP implementers to use the SFP detailed Excel template for their workplans and reporting. However, if other templates are used, they should contain the same information. Workplans and reporting that are not adequate or clear will negatively affect the FIP rating.
[3] Ibid

or fishing practice change (e.g., change in fishing gear) to improve the fishery. Improvement must be reported publicly along with evidence that includes public documentation (e.g., government report, audit report, scientific journal article); a correlating increase in FishSource Scores 1, 2, and 3; and/or an increase in score (BMT scores) in the following MSC criteria for management and information:

- 1.2.1
- 1.2.2
- 1.2.3
- 1.2.4
- 2.1.2
- 2.1.3
- 2.2.2
- 2.2.3
- 2.3.2
- 2.3.3
- 2.4.2
- 2.4.3
- 2.5.2
- 2.5.3

- Stage 5 (improvements on the water) – A publicly verifiable positive change in the water (e.g., increase in biomass of target stock, increase in population of impacted protected species, decrease in habitat or ecosystem impacted). A Stage 5 result regarding the status of the target stock can be reflected by an increase in FishSource Scores 4 and 5, which FIPs can use as evidence for reporting improvement progress. A Stage 5 result can also be shown when a FIP reports an increase in any MSC outcome score (criteria listed below). MSC outcomes scores will increase if there is a positive change in the water, but they may also increase if the precision or confidence limits around estimates of stock size or environmental impacts improves and the status of the issue is shown to be in a favorable condition. Hence, an improvement in the stock assessment method, or the public disclosure of the complete stock assessment, may result in improvements in MSC outcome scores, and hence earn a FIP a Stage 5 result. This would also occur if it was determined that a status is favorable where it was previously unknown (e.g., there is no stock assessment, but once conducted it shows biomass is above B_{MSY} and fishing mortality is below F_{MSY}). MSC criteria where score increases merit a Stage 5 result:

    - 1.1.1
    - 1.1.2
    - 2.1.1
    - 2.2.1
    - 2.3.1
    - 2.4.1
    - 2.5.1

The use of MSC's fishery benchmarking tool (BMT) to evaluate and document improvement progress is strongly recommended, as it provides a transparent platform for a FIP to report progress, including Stage 4 and 5 type achievements, against MSC performance indicators (PIs). For basic FIPs using alternative evaluations (e.g., needs assessment, FishSource profile, rapid assessment, etc.), specific guidance on reporting against the MSC PIs is provided on FisheryProgress.org, the new website maintained by non-profit Fish Choice[4] for reporting and tracking FIPs globally. Other options, like self-reporting progress and evidence of improvements for the one or few specific issues of focus, can be used in the interim.

This evaluation and rating tool does not rely on establishing causality to link a particular FIP action to a particular improvement. This means that, from the view of this tool, a FIP may receive a Stage 4 or 5 result even if the improvement was brought about by the work of others not directly engaged in the FIP. Hence, this methodology does not address key questions of causality and the levels of credit a FIP or FIP participants can take for certain results. It simply requires FIPs to monitor and report all improvements with verifiable evidence, regardless of whether FIP participants were directly involved in influencing a change.

Determining the "evaluation start date" of a FIP

The evaluation start date of a FIP is critically important for the draft tool described below. Because the methodology incorporates timeframe benchmarks, an evaluation start date must be determined to know when to "start the clock." Others, including the FIP itself, may define start dates differently for other purposes.

[4] http://www.fishchoice.com/

For the purposes of this tool, the evaluation start date is defined as the date at which minimum requirements for Stage 1 and 2 indicators have been completed. This applies to both basic and comprehensive FIPs. For example, if a project completed a fishery evaluation and made it public (Stage 1) in January 2015, made the list project participants public in February 2015, and made a workplan public in March 2015 (Stage 2), the FIP evaluation start date would be March 2015.

Further guidance and rules for determining evaluation start dates of FIPs:

- If new participants join the existing FIP, the original evaluation start date still applies.
- If participants from an existing FIP split off and create their own FIP or if participants "reinvent" a new FIP, the evaluation start date for the second FIP remains the same as the original.
- If a separate FIP is initiated in a fishery with an existing FIP (e.g., because participants will not work together), provided the participants in the new FIP were not part of the existing FIP, the new FIP will be given a new evaluation start date pursuant to the guidelines above.
- If a FIP becomes inactive due to lack of financial resources, for example, and becomes active at a later stage, with similar participants and scope, the original evaluation start date applies.

A Tool for Evaluating FIP Progress

This evaluation tool is a "measuring stick" on which any FIP that meets the minimum requirements for basic or comprehensive can be placed and compared. It is more dynamic and informative than focusing only on the FIP stage reached. Actual progress ratings for FIPs are reported on FishSource.org.

Note that this evaluation does **not** prescribe whether or not to source from a particular FIP. Each user of this evaluation can apply the information how she/he chooses and react accordingly. As SFP has noted previously, FIP progress is **only one** of the key factors retailers and other seafood businesses use when deciding whether to continue buying or start buying from a FIP. Other factors include fishery status/rating, presence of "red flag" or "high-risk" issues, and other company-specific factors.

SFP and others view the end goal for all FIPs to be an unconditional pass against the MSC standard with basic and comprehensive FIP along this continuum, recognizing that basic FIPs may often be far away from achieving this goal and comprehensive FIP may be closer (i.e. within 5 years). Therefore, we encourage all basic FIPs to transition to comprehensive FIPs at the appropriate time or to reach the end goal directly. SFP views a FIP as completed when the FIP has successfully addressed all issues in its work plan, if the FIP has achieved the level of an unconditional pass against the MSC standard (i.e., estimated scores of 80 or above across all 28 performance indicators), or when the FIP has graduated to MSC certification. We will continue to evaluate FIPs until they have reached that level and improvements/reporting on all outstanding activities have been completed or until they are MSC-certified. At this point, these FIPs will be archived in the SFP system.

Methodology

Time thresholds are used to differentiate progress by FIPs and the frequency at which improvements are happening. The time thresholds apply to both basic and comprehensive FIPs,

with the most favorable ratings reserved only for FIPs achieving progress against workplan implementation and resulting change/sustainability benefits. See Figure 1, below, for the conditions required to receive one of the five progress ratings (A–E).

Figure 1: Decision tree to determine the rating for all FIPs that meet the minimum requirement of a basic or comprehensive FIP[5]

The decision tree indicates, for all active FIPs, some of the rules used to determine progress ratings A through E:

- Advanced Progress (A): Reserved for comprehensive FIPs that have a Stage 4 or 5 result within the past 12 months.
- Good Progress (B): A FIP that has acheived a Stage 4 or 5 in more than 12 months AND Stage 3 activity in the last year; OR a basic FIP that has achieved Stage 4 or 5 achievements within the past 12 months.
- Some Recent Progress (C): A FIP that has achieved a Stage 4 or 5 result in more than 12 (but less than 24) months but has not generated a Stage 3 result within the past 12 months OR a FIP younger than a year that has never achieved a Stage 4 or 5 result but has completed a Stage 3 activity.
- Some Past Progress (D): A FIP for which the most recent publicly reported Stage 4 or 5 result is more than 24 (but less than 30) months.
- Negligible Progress (E): A FIP older than a year that has not reported a Stage 4 or 5 result in more than 30 month (but less than 36) months; OR a FIP younger than 1 year that has not reported a Stage 3 activity.

This rating system stresses the importance of trying to influence management (regulators) and the catch sector and to deliver a fishing practice or policy (i.e., Stage 4 result) as soon as possible to show buyers and other stakeholders the FIP has impact. FIPs in fisheries that regularly deliver Stage 4 and 5 improvements are rewarded with a favorable rating, as this ensures continued progress and gives buyers confidence for continued sourcing.

[5] Includes FIPs >1 year old and FIPs < 1 year old

This tool is effective at showing FIPs that have made little to no progress. If no results have ever been reported (or it has been a long time, i.e., 24 to 36 months), a poor rating of D or E sends a clear message to stakeholders. The tool is not designed to highlight the best-performing FIPs on high-risk/priority issues. More detailed information on the "red" or high-risk issues for individual FIPs can be found on Fishery Progress.

In addition to the A–E ratings of FIPs, it is critical for stakeholders to know which FIPs have become inactive or have successfully completed. These FIPs fall into two new categories, defined below, and will be calculated manually, outside of the decision tree, because they do not qualify for consideration in the evaluation process.

Inactive FIPs

Inactive FIPs are those that a) no longer meet the minimum requirements (e.g., that lack industry participation or do not have the funds to carry out activities) and have been suspended or b) have stopped activity and have not reported changes in fishing practice or management or change on the water in 36 months. FIPs can emerge from this category to go back into the FIP evaluation process if the FIP requirements are met and the FIP resumes reporting progress.

Inactive FIPs will no longer be monitored and will be not be included in the routine evaluation; instead their trackers will be hidden/archived in FishSource.

Completed FIPs

Completed FIPs are those that have achieved their objectives and/or graduated to MSC certification. A FIP can be considered completed if it achieves its objectives even if it chooses not to enter certification (or for basic FIPs, if performance doesn't reach the level required for certification). For basic FIPs, independent verification of completion could include a revised assessment report, government report, or peer-reviewed paper.

Pre-FIPs

The evaluation system is not designed to include projects still in development, that is, pre-FIPs. In other words, projects that have not yet completed Stage 1 and 2 are not eligible to be run through the decision tree. Those types of projects can and should continue carrying out activities to deliver any stage result, even if they do not meet the minimum requirements of a basic or comprehensive FIP. Pre-FIPs should report publicly as much as they can and continue communicating progress with stakeholders. This evaluation tool is reserved for FIPs that have already reached a certain level of development and progress in which buyers can initially have some confidence.

Evaluation Process

SFP monitors websites (e.g., fisheryprogress.org, MSC, FIP websites), media, conferences, personal communications, and other outlets to be aware of as many FIPs as possible. For FIPs that meet the minimum requirements of a basic or comprehensive FIP, a FIP tracker is created and made public on FishSource.org. The tracker is associated with the fishery or fisheries with which the FIP is connected (fishery profiles at www.fishsource.org). It provides a high-level snapshot of progress

within each of the five stages and links to more information about the results reported by the FIP. For FIPs that do not yet meet the minimum requirements of a basic or comprehensive FIP, SFP continues to monitor progress "behind the scenes" until it achieves that minimum bar.

All FIPs tracked on FishSource are evaluated involuntarily. In other words, SFP does not get permission from the FIPs, nor are FIPs required to ask for an evaluation in order to be tracked. SFP practices open communication with FIP representatives to address any outstanding questions or discrepancies. SFP also uses a FIP monthly report on ratings to get feedback and information from FIPs to ensure that all evaluations are up to date. If an evaluation of a FIP appears inaccurate, SFP asks the FIP representative to contact us to resolve the issue in a timely manner.

Once all reported progress of a FIP is added to the tracker (for the five stages, as relevant), SFP screens the information through the decision tree in Figure 1. The FIP progress rating that is generated is publicly noted as part of the FIP tracker on FishSource. FishSource has recently been redesigned to include, in addition to the rating, brief commentary by SFP FIP evaluators as to why a FIP gets a certain rating or what changed since the last rating and the date that these changes occurred. This will give users a little more information about the FIP's progress or lack thereof.

SFP will track and evaluate all active basic and comprehensive FIPs on a rotating tri-monthly basis, using this methodology to ensure that ratings are up to date and based on current publicly available information.

Appendix 1. Glossary of terms

Conservation Alliance – The Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions connects leading conservation groups that work with businesses representing more than 80 percent of the North American grocery and foodservice markets.

FIP – A fishery improvement project (FIP) is a project designed to improve fisheries towards sustainability. A FIP operates via an alliance of seafood buyers, suppliers, and producers who work together to improve a specific fishery by pressing for better policies and management.

FIP evaluator – Member of the FIP evaluation team responsible for updating the evidence for indicators in the FIP Tracker and evaluation of the FIP using the decision tree

FIP participants – Parties with interest or consulted on issues relating to a fishery or FIP

FIP stakeholders – Entities that have signed the MOU for the FIP implementation and contribute actively

FIP Tracker – Improvement tracker developed by SFP for tracking FIP progress on FishSource with indicators and evidence of progress

MSC Benchmarking and Tracking Tool – MSC scoring used for tracking progress of FIPs towards MSC certification

MSC pre-assessment – A pre-assessment is a preliminary evaluation of a fishery against all MSC performance indicators to provide a picture of the fishery's baseline environmental performance and challenges.

MSC Fisheries Standard – The MSC Fisheries Standard measures the sustainability of wild-capture fisheries based on three principle areas. Each principle has a series of performance indicators that are used to evaluate a fishery's environmental performance.

Needs assessment – Less rigorous than an MSC pre-assessment, a needs assessment is an evaluation of a fishery that covers the three principle areas of the MSC standard to determine environmental challenges and improvements needed in the fishery.

Scoping document – A scoping document summarizes the results of the needs assessment or MSC pre-assessment and recommends strategies for addressing the fishery's challenges to help fishery improvement project participants develop a workplan.

Unconditional pass of the Marine Stewardship Council Standard – The MSC Fisheries Standard is designed to assess whether a fishery is well managed and environmentally sustainable. To pass unconditionally, a fishery must have achieved a score of 80 or more on all performance indicators of the standard.