

## Marine Stewardship Council Responds to NPR Series

On Monday and Tuesday of this week NPR broadcast a three-part series about sustainable seafood and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) program. NPR's portrayal of MSC did not present a complete or balanced view and featured select critics much more prominently than is reflective of the dominant view of MSC by prestigious, internationally recognized scientists, conservation organizations, industry experts and others globally. The skewed opinion this presents to listeners requires a response.

The NPR series featured selected comments by some individuals and environmental organizations critical of the MSC process for not resulting in particular outcomes and left out information vital for listeners to make informed conclusions about the credibility and value of the MSC's market-based change program and contribution to positive transformation of the worldwide seafood industry's approach to sustainable harvesting. MSC welcomes input and criticism and has mechanisms to capture it and engage critics in ways that can lead to positive improvements in the program.

MSC expected such views would be included in NPR coverage. MSC is very concerned, however, that NPR specifically sought out primarily critics and did not balance those views sufficiently with comment from any of the hundreds of scientists, environmental organizations, industry experts, fishery managers, seafood buyers and others who can attest to the credibility and value of the MSC process and validity of the certification of 190 fisheries to date in countries around the world. For instance, while the report contained comments from one organization about a salmon fishery, the broadcast was silent on comments from the organization of fishermen who voluntarily entered the fishery into the MSC program. NPR listeners heard only a single view of the fishery. MSC is an independent, nonprofit organization that maintains a global standard for voluntary assessment of the sustainability of a fishery. The standard was developed globally by hundreds of scientists, conservation organizations, fisherman, industry members and others, and the ongoing governance of the MSC standard includes an international Board of Trustees, Stakeholder Council and Technical Advisory Board with diverse sector representation to ensure the standard continues to reflect consensus on global best practices and the input of a multitude of perspectives. Fishery assessments to the standard follow precise scoring methodologies and are conducted by scientific teams completely independent of the MSC and its governance.

A fishery cannot become MSC certified unless it scientifically demonstrates that it meets a performance standard level that represents at least a minimum level of sustainability. Scores are determined by a team of experts, with requirement for input from stakeholders, and peer review by additional outside, independent scientists. Any fishery that meets the minimum but does not achieve a "best practice" score in stock health, ecosystem impact and management must elevate that particular score over the five year life of the certification. The process is rigorous, scientific, transparent and open to anyone who chooses to participate. As the world's leading standard for sustainable seafood, the MSC standard represents a global consensus on global best fishing practices that are determined in a fair and impartial manner, without lobbying or special interests swaying the outcome.

The NPR reporting touched on the complexities of fishery science in a biased and over-simplified manner that left the listener without significant information. For instance, when the broadcast discussed a swordfish fishery, it provided negative opinions by a conservation organization, without the perspective from the teams of scientists and experts who actually assessed the fishery. Similarly, in discussing a salmon fishery, listeners would have benefitted from knowing that the fishery saw its largest run of salmon in almost 100 years not long after the fishery was certified. Was certification responsible? No, but it underscores the complexity of salmon fishery science. Omission of that information, and lack of reporting on scientific agreement that commercial fishing has not been responsible for previously low salmon returns, leaves listeners to draw an uninformed and inaccurate conclusion. These are only two examples. MSC is responding because the entire series was produced in this manner lacking of key information and expert opinion.

The Marine Stewardship Council came into existence following the collapse of the Grand Banks cod fishery as conservation groups, industry and others recognized the world needed an unbiased, international organization to develop a sustainability standard that would help protect seafood and the lives and livelihoods that depend on it for environmental, food security and economic stability. That is the mission of the MSC and it is carried out impartially around the world.

The MSC regrets that NPR coverage in this instance presented its listeners with reporting that did not meet NPR's customary high journalistic standards. NPR did not depict the true story of the MSC program and damaged more than a decade and a half of contributions by many committed partners in the fishing industry, conservation community and commercial sector who are driving change important to the billions of people around the world who rely on sustainable sources of fish for essential protein and economic well-being.