

# Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification

## Frequently Asked Questions



LRQA





# Frequently asked questions

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## What is MSC certification?

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The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification is a globally recognized standard for sustainable fishing. It ensures that seafood products come from fisheries that are well-managed and environmentally responsible. MSC certification provides assurance to consumers, retailers and businesses that seafood is sourced sustainably.

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## What version of the MSC standard is currently in use?

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The MSC Fisheries Standard version 3.0 is the latest version, incorporating the most up-to-date scientific research and sustainability best practice. For businesses seeking MSC Chain of Custody (CoC) certification, the MSC Chain of Custody Standard (version 5.0) applies.

These standards are periodically reviewed and updated to align with evolving sustainability requirements and regulatory expectations.

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## What are the benefits of MSC certification?

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MSC certification offers several advantages, including:

- **Access to new markets and retailers** – many leading retailers and foodservice providers, including Tesco, Sainsbury's, Aldi, Lidl, McDonald's and IKEA, prefer or require MSC-certified seafood.
- **Regulatory compliance** – MSC certification helps meet national and international sustainability regulations and commitments related to responsible sourcing.
- **Consumer trust and brand reputation** – the MSC blue label is recognized globally and indicates a commitment to environmental sustainability.
- **Improved business opportunities** – many major seafood buyers and supply chain partners prioritize MSC-certified suppliers, enhancing market opportunities.
- **Sustainability leadership** – certification demonstrates a proactive approach to protecting marine environments and fish stocks for future generations.



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## What is the process for obtaining MSC certification?

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The MSC certification process involves several key steps.

### For fisheries (MSC Fisheries Standard)

1. **Pre-assessment** (optional but recommended) – a preliminary review of the fishery against MSC criteria to identify potential challenges.
2. **Full assessment** – a detailed, independent assessment by an accredited certification body (such as LRQA).
3. **Stakeholder consultation** – input is gathered from relevant stakeholders, including scientists, NGOs and industry groups.
4. **Final certification decision** – if the fishery meets the MSC standard, certification is granted for five years, subject to annual surveillance audits.

### For supply chain and retailers (MSC Chain of Custody certification)

1. **Application** – the business applies for certification through an accredited certification body.
2. **Audit and evaluation** – a thorough assessment of supply chain processes to ensure traceability and compliance with MSC requirements.
3. **Certification and ongoing compliance** – once approved, certification is valid for three years, with annual audits to verify continued compliance.

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## How much does MSC certification cost?

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The cost of certification varies depending on several factors, including the size and complexity of the fishery or business, the number of sites and the scope of certification. LRQA can offer a tailored quote based on your organization's needs.

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## What types of businesses need MSC Chain of Custody certification?

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Any business that buys, sells or processes MSC-certified seafood needs MSC Chain of Custody certification to maintain traceability and integrity in the supply chain. This includes:

- Processors and wholesalers
- Foodservice providers
- Retailers and supermarkets
- Hospitality and catering businesses
- Distributors and suppliers



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## How long does it take to become MSC certified?

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The timeframe for MSC certification varies. For fisheries, the process can take 12 to 18 months, while MSC Chain of Custody certification for supply chain businesses typically takes a few months, depending on complexity.

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## Which major brands and retailers partner with MSC?

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MSC-certified seafood is used by globally recognized brands and retailers, including:

- Tesco, Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, Aldi and Lidl
- McDonald's (Filet-O-Fish)
- IKEA (seafood in restaurants and retail products)
- Waitrose & Partners
- Unilever (Knorr and other food brands)
- Nestlé and other food manufacturers

These brands rely on MSC certification to ensure they meet consumer demand for responsibly sourced seafood.

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## Does MSC certification cover aquaculture?

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No, MSC certification applies only to wild-caught fisheries. For aquaculture, businesses should consider Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) certification, which focuses on responsibly farmed seafood.

LRQA offers both MSC and ASC certification (as well as other recognized standards) to help businesses demonstrate sustainability across wild and farmed seafood sourcing.

[Find out more about LRQA's seafood certification services.](#)



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## How does LRQA support businesses in achieving MSC certification?

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As an accredited MSC certification body, LRQA offers independent audits, expert guidance and tailored certification services for both the MSC Fisheries Standard and MSC Chain of Custody certification. Our team helps businesses navigate the process efficiently, ensuring compliance with MSC requirements.

[Find out more about MSC certification with LRQA](#)



In addition to certification, LRQA also offers training, gap analysis and risk management solutions to support businesses at every stage of their sustainability journey.



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## How do I start the MSC certification process?

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To begin the certification process, contact LRQA for an initial consultation. Our team can provide detailed insights, a tailored quote and guidance on the next steps to achieving MSC certification.

[Get in touch with LRQA today to discuss your MSC certification needs.](#)



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## How does MSC certification fit into a wider seafood sustainability strategy, including human rights due diligence?

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MSC certification is a key component of a comprehensive seafood sustainability strategy, but it is just one part of a broader responsible sourcing framework. Companies in the seafood industry are increasingly expected to go beyond sustainability claims and address ethical sourcing, human rights and labour risks in their supply chains.

MSC certification helps businesses meet sustainability commitments, but a complete strategy should also include:

- **Human rights due diligence** – conducting risk assessments to identify and mitigate forced labor, modern slavery and worker exploitation in seafood supply chains.
- **Social accountability and ethical audits** – verifying working conditions through SA8000, SMETA or other social compliance audits.
- **Traceability and supply chain transparency** – ensuring robust chain of custody controls and ethical procurement practices.
- **Compliance with regulatory requirements** – aligning with EU regulations, the UK Modern Slavery Act and the US Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP).
- **Engagement with NGOs and industry initiatives** – participating in global initiatives such as the Global Seafood Sustainability Initiative (GSSI) and the Seafood Task Force.

LRQA provides sustainability assurance, human rights due diligence assessments and ethical supply chain audits to help organizations build a responsible and resilient seafood supply chain.

Would you like to discuss how LRQA can support your responsible sourcing strategy? Contact us today.





About LRQA:

LRQA is a leading global assurance partner, bringing together decades of unrivalled expertise in assessment, advisory, inspection and cybersecurity services – underpinned by data-driven insights – to help its clients navigate a new era of risk.

Operating in more than 150 countries with a team of more than 5,000 people, LRQA’s award-winning compliance, supply chain, cybersecurity and ESG specialists help more than 60,000 clients across almost every sector to anticipate, mitigate and manage risk wherever they operate.

Get in touch

Visit [www.lrqa.com/us](https://www.lrqa.com/us) for more information or email [inquiries-usa@lrqa.com](mailto:inquiries-usa@lrqa.com)



LRQA  
810 Seventh Avenue, Suite 1110  
New York, NY 10019

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