

# Comparing MSC and SEG Standard

## Q&A

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### Eels and certification: how does it work?

In April 2013, almost all the eel traders and farmers received the Chain of Custody certification according to the Sustainable Eel Standard (SES) from the Sustainable Eel Group (SEG). This certification of traceability and the reporting around it lead to questions on the certification according to SES from the SEG versus the certification from the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). DUPAN Foundation and MSC gave a coordinated response to the most frequently asked questions.

### **Eels are fish who spend parts of their live in both fresh and sea water and who travel long distances over their lifetime. Can fish with these characteristics be considered for the MSC programme?**

Yes, species who spend their entire lifetime, or part of it, in fresh water can be considered for MSC certification. Examples of this are the SC certified Pacific salmon species from Alaska, Canada and Russia who spend parts of their lifetime in rivers. Other examples constitute MSC certified golden perch and croakers from the Australian lakes and the Coorong fishery. Species that migrate over long distances are also eligible for the MSC certification. For these types, file recordings can be set up en these are managed sustainably. The MSC tuna fisheries provide a good example of this.

### **Are Eels eligible for MSC certification?**

Due to the extremely complex life cycle of the eels and the problems that occur during the migration from sea to fresh water and later in their lives from fresh to sea water, it is generally considered at this point in time that the MSC certification is problematic. A number of studies have shown that it is possible to control fisheries of elvers and eels locally to maintain the population. However, the MSC assessment does not solely focus on the influence and management of local fisheries, but also on the state and management of all fisheries across the entire population. The available resources at this point in time (ICES) show that European eels are in a critical state. At European level, a regulation has been called in place and every Member state has an eel management plan. However, the habitat of the eels is much larger than the European Union and therefore the effect of the management plans for the European eel population is difficult to measure and as a result unknown. All this means that it is not possible to fulfil the MSC demands for the existence of effective recovery and management plans for the entire population of eels.

Migration problems offer even more problems. The success of the European recovery measures do not only depend on a good management of the eels, but also so on how the man-made changes to the habitat of the eels are being dealt with. Hydroelectric dams, habitat loss and pollution are the main examples of this. It would only be appropriate to change the reference points, if the decline in eels would be purely due to natural conditions. The reference points determine how large a healthy population should be and what constitutes a sustainable population. In principle, it would be possible to remove human barriers in the environment to bring back the productivity of the eel population. Together with an effective regulation, this would create the preconditions for a recovery of the population and open-up the possibility of an MSC certification in the long run.

## **Why was SEG created?**

The SEG was founded by a number of British conservation organisations and scientists to promote the recovery of the European eel population. By combining the knowledge of all stakeholders, fishermen, the organisation aims to restore the habitat of the eels. Through the establishment of a number of standards, fishermen and eel farmers are being supported in the sustainable engagement and management of the eel population. If that is the case, they can be considered for a SES certification. Fishermen and eel farmers who contribute to the recovery of the eel population are rewarded with the SES certification. In this way, the entire chain will be stimulated to take responsibility in the sustainable management of eels. In several EU member states, different fisheries and eel companies are already SES certified. Nevertheless, the Netherlands is running ahead with the certification of almost all eel companies. Eventually, the SEG-SES certification should lead to an accelerated recovery of the European eel population.

MSC works according to the same principle – through rewarding sustainable fisheries, other fisheries are stimulated to make the necessary improvements. Because, at this point in time, the MSC certification for eels is not possible, it was decided to set a standard that focuses specifically on eels.

## **What are the main resemblances between the MSC and SEG standards?**

MSC and SEG-SES have a similar goal to reverse the worldwide decline of fish stocks and sustain the employment in the fishing sector. MSC focuses on all fish species, while the SEG-SES solely focuses on one species, eels. Both programmes operate on an international scale.

The MSC, like the SEG-SES standard were commissioned by the fishing sector. The creation place in collaboration with scientists, conservation organisations and other experts. Both standards are constantly being evaluated to assess if they adhere to the available scientific knowledge. The assessment whether a fishery meets the standard is taken by an independent third party.

Both programmes have a *chain of custody certification*. This means that the associated labels or references to the ‘MSC or SEG-SES certificate’ are only allowed if the traceability of the certified fish is guaranteed throughout the whole chain.

## **What are the main differences between the MSC and SEG-SES standards?**

The SEG-SES standard also includes the farming of eels. MSC is only applicable to wild catch. The so-called ‘enriched fisheries’- where only during a minimal part of the fish’ life cycle human intervention to stimulate growth takes place- may well be eligible for MSC (i.e. mussel cultures). The cultivation of eels does not fall within these enriched fisheries.

The MSC assessment takes place at the level of the population. The certification consists out of the following combination: the species, the cultivation management, the fishing method and the ships who would like to fall under the certification. This means that if part of the fisheries would like to be certified, it is first assessed whether the entire population is healthy and all the fisheries are being managed sustainably. On the contrary, the SEG-SES assessment takes place on the level of the individual fishery that applies for certification. It is being looked at whether the activities of that particular fishery are sustainable, notwithstanding the state of the entire population and the sustainability adherence of other fisheries.

The MSC assessment is completely public. There are different moments in the process where stakeholders can provide input and a peer-review takes place by independent scientists. The decision of the certifier can be challenged. The SEG-SES assessment takes place through an independent scientific committee, the *Independent Standards Committee*. The committee meetings are not public, but the reports are published via the website.

The certification agencies, accredited with rewarding MSC certificates have their own independent regulator – not attached to the MSC. SEG mostly works with one certification agency and there is no independent regulator yet.

After a successful MSC assessment, the certification agency delivers the certificate. The SEG assessment is being undertaken by the certification agency, however, the decision to reward the certificate lies with the SEG Independent Standards Committee.

### **What is the connection between the DUPAN Foundation and SEG?**

In the future, every European member state will establish their own national SEG branch in which the fisheries work together to restore and sustainably manage the local eel population. These departments will receive a seat in the SEG board. At the moment, The Dutch foundation 'Duurzame Palingsector Nederland' occupies such a seat.

### **Additional information:**

[www.msc.org/nl](http://www.msc.org/nl)

<http://www.sustainableeelgroup.org>