

Enacted in Japanese: 2017.10.03

Effective in Japanese: 2018.02.01

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# **Fisheries Management Standard**

## **Version 2.0**

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**Marine Eco-Label Japan Council  
(2018)**

## Introduction

Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Council have developed a certification standard for fisheries management to promote sustainable and responsible fisheries production by confirming the important aspects, such as the protection of natural stocks, the conservation of environment, and the improvement of consumer's trust. Fishers must satisfy this standard to become MEL certified fisheries.

Japan has one of the world's richest biodiversity with about 3,700 marine fish species which comprise 25% of the 15,000 species known in the world and fishers target a wide variety of species<sup>1</sup>. Also, a large number of fishers exist in Japan, and the proportion of small-scale fishers is particularly high. Fishers have historically belonged to the local fishing communities and/or the regional fisheries organization. Fishers have the basic philosophy that they shall assume responsibility for resource management, and they developed and conducted the practical management of marine resources in compliance with the local and regional situations.

It is commonly said that "*Iso-wa jitsuki, oki-wa iriai*" ("coastal areas are to be managed by local communities, while offshore areas are for communal use"), the management system was established that the coastal areas are exclusively used by local fishers but the offshore areas are commonly used by many fishers. This management system is called co-management and it enables to maintain the high levels of biodiversity and productivity. Also, co-management is often referred to as "*satoumi*", where people manage resources with consideration of the surrounding environment, livelihoods, ecosystems and material cycles that extend from mountain to sea.

The Fishery Act and the Act on the Protection of Fishery Resources set the legal framework of input control in fisheries management by limiting the allocation of fishing right and license. The Act on Preservation and Control of Living Marine Resources set the catch control, total allowable effort (TAE) system, in response to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1996). The Fisheries Basic Act (2001) and Fisheries Basic Plan (2001) are the measures to ensure the stable supply of marine products, the management of catch amount and fishing effort, the promotion of aquaculture, and the conservation of habitats. To this end, the science-based stock assessment has been conducted by joint collaboration among national and local research institutes. The data collected and compiled from these different types of research and surveys are evaluated and approved by committees comprised of government officials and other relevant stakeholders. The catch volume and fishing effort are monitored based on the results of the stock assessment. In addition, the national and local governments prepare the Policies of Stock Management, and fishers develop and implement the Plan of Stock

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<sup>1</sup> Mitsutaku Makino (2013) Analysis of Japanese Fisheries Systems: Fisheries Management and Ecosystem Conservation (In Japanese), Koseisha-Koseikaku

Management based on the policies since 2011. This management system covers the series of existing public rules and regulations, stock recovery plans as well as traditional management efforts of all types of fisheries and waters in Japan. As of the end of March 2017, over 1,930 Plans of Stock Management have been developed and implemented.

Coastal Fisheries Grounds Enhancement and Development Program Act requires that the national and local governments must promote fish farming by improving and optimizing the management of the surrounding environment. Also, fishers shall manage, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of stock enhancement. The Fisheries Basic Act also sets forth that the national government is responsible for promoting the seed production and release of larval fish as well as other necessary measures in a systematic manner, in consideration of harmony with the environment. The National Biodiversity Strategy of Japan 2012-2020 formulated under the Basic Act on Biodiversity stipulates the planning of fish release, seed production and genetic diversity to harmonize among environment, ecosystems and enhanced fisheries.

MEL aims to evaluate the fishers who positively conduct the sustainable utilization of fish stocks and the preservation of ecosystems. MEL is operated based on the relevant policies, laws and regulations in conformity with the natural, social and historical background of Japanese fisheries. Also, MEL aims to become a pioneer with regard to fisheries certification schemes in Asia, as well as in developing countries located in the lower to mid latitudes, where the large number of small-scale fishers exist and fishery stocks are highly diversified.

MEL developed three standards; Fisheries Management Standard (FMS), Aquaculture Management Standard (AMS) and Chain of Custody (CoC) Standard (CoCS). These standards set the requirements to practice the effective management of fisheries. Specific requirements for the assessment of applicants are explained in the supplemental documents;

- 1) Guidelines for Auditors of the Fisheries Management Standard,
- 2) Checklist for Auditors of the Fisheries Management Standards, and
- 3) Requirements for Certification Bodies Certifying Fisheries Management Standard.

Certification shall be handled by an independent third party (certification body) having the capacity and ability conforming to the ISO standard (ISO/IEC 17065:2012) and accredited by a member organization of the IAF (International Accreditation Forum).

Based on the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995), the FAO Guidelines for the

Eco-labelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries adopted (2005, revised 2009), and the FAO Guidelines for the Eco-labelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Fisheries (2011), MEL sets three principles as follows;

1. Requirements for fisheries management system  
(Fisheries shall be operated under an established and effective management system),
2. Requirements for target stock  
(Stock under consideration shall be maintained as sustainable level),
3. Requirements for ecosystem  
(Proper measures shall be practiced for the conservation of the ecosystem).

MEL also applies following principles and philosophy in the FAO Guidelines.

- 1) The implementation of FMS shall be based on the best scientific evidence available (BSEA). Relevant local and traditional knowledge should be obtained, where appropriate, and considered as BSEA when knowledge can be objectively verified<sup>2</sup>.
- 2) FMS can be applied to the small-scale fisheries. Management systems differ substantially for different types and scales of fisheries. Since the data of small-scale fisheries are limited, the historical record of good management practices could be considered as supporting evidence of the adequacy of the management measures and systems. However, if the scientific evidence about the impacts of fishery operation on the stock is uncertain, fishers shall take precautionary approaches to prevent adverse effects on sustainable fishery operations.
- 3) When the information about stock under consideration is limited and the fishery has low risk on the stock, the general evidences based on relevant species can be used. However, the greater the risk, the more specific evidences shall be collected.

The FMS both in Japanese and English shall be equally valid. The FMS shall be reviewed at least once every five years to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness. The FMS can be reviewed in a timely manner, as needed, when revisions are made to the FAO Guidelines, the national government's Fisheries Basic Plan or other relevant legal mandates.

## References

This standard was prepared in conformity with the following existing documents;

- FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries
- FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture

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<sup>2</sup> GSSI Benchmark Tool (Version 1), p.289

#### Fisheries (Revision 1)

- FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Capture Fisheries
- GSSI Global Benchmark Tool (Version 1)
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
- World Trade Organization (WTO) Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)
- Agreement Annex 3 Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standards
- ISO/IEC Guide 59:1994 Code of Good Practice for Standardization
- ISO/IEC 17065:2012 Conformity assessment - Requirements for Bodies Certifying Products, Processes and Services
- ISO/IEC 17067:2013 Conformity Assessment - Fundamentals of Product Certification and Guidelines for Product Certification Schemes

#### **Scope and Unit of Certification**

The scope of certification shall encompass an fishery licensed and operated under the relevant laws and regulations of national and local governments.

The unit of certification is a fishery harvesting the target stock and using a specific fishing method under the management procedures. (Note: Seafood produced by certified fisheries of FMS can be subject to the certification of CoCS.)

#### **1. Requirements for Fisheries Management System**

**The unit of certification shall be operated under an established and effective management system.**

##### **1.1 Acquisition of fishing license and permission**

1.1.1 The unit of certification shall be operated legally in accordance with national legislation, such as acquiring fishery license and permission necessary for operating the fisheries from the competent authority (i.e. national or prefectural governments).

1.1.2 An organization and system shall be established to manage the fishery of which the unit of certification is a part.

- 1.1.3 There shall be knowledge and documentation of the current state of the fishery of which the unit of certification is a part; this includes the following:
- i) Outline of the fishery of which the unit of certification is a part.
  - ii) Fishing gears and fishing methods
  - iii) Catch volume and fishing effort
  - iv) Fishery business form and business condition
- 1.2 Compliance and surveillance with regulations and arrangements concerning the unit of certification and the target fishery.
- 1.2.1 The unit of certification shall be operated in compliance with the relevant regulations and arrangements by national and local governments under the effective and appropriate monitoring, control and surveillance.
- 1.2.2 A Stock Management Plan for the fishery of which the unit of certification is a part and stock under consideration shall be prepared in accordance with the Stock Management Policy (including management objectives and management measures) by the national and local government, in view of the best scientific evidence available. Alternatively, an effective management rules complying with the stock management measures equivalent to the Stock Management Plan shall be established. Further, the implementation status is confirmed.
- 1.2.3 Decision-making process for the management of for the fishery of which the unit of certification is a part shall be transparent and ensure the participation of stakeholders including relevant fishers, scientists, the government and other interested parties.
- 1.2.4 A regional or wide-area stock management system for utilizing the stock under consideration shall be established. If the target stock is internationally managed (such as transboundary fish stocks, straddling fish stocks or highly migratory fish stocks), the fishery shall be operated in compliance with the stock management measures set by the relevant authorities.
- 1.2.5 In the case that releasing the seedlings of stock under consideration is in place, the plan of fish release shall be formulated and implemented upon consultation of the national or local government with relevant fishers.
- 1.2.6 Fishery management shall be precautionarily carried out in consideration of various

uncertainties associated with fishery resources, ecosystem and management. Further, a system shall be available for adaptively amending and improving the content of management measures and policies, in response to the state of the stock under consideration and of the ecosystem.

1.2.7 In case that activities other than fishery production are carried out in the same water for the unit of certification, stakeholders shall have continuous discussions of the effectiveness of management measures, and the record of discussions shall be maintained.

1.2.8 Information on management rules and fishing activities shall be available to the public.

## **2. Requirements on the stock under consideration**

**(Stock under consideration is maintained at a level that allows its sustainable utilization)**

2.1 Biological information (including the following items) of the stock under consideration shall be collected.

- i) Distribution and migration
- ii) Age, growth and life span
- iii) Maturity and spawning

2.2 Scientific evidence for determining the status and trends of the stock under consideration shall be collected and maintained.

2.3 The assessment of the current status and trends of the stock under consideration shall take into account the total fishing mortality caused by other fisheries utilizing the stock under consideration within the distribution area of the stock under consideration, as well as resilience of the stock.

2.4 Assessment of the status and trends of the stock under consideration shall be conducted based on the collected information, and assessment results shall be incorporated into the decision-making process for management. The assessment methods and results shall be available to the public in a timely manner.

2.5 The target reference point by public agencies and the limit reference point or the substitute point based on the best scientific evidence available shall be set for the purpose of maintaining and recovering the stock under consideration to the levels which may achieve the maximum

sustainable yield (MSY) or appropriate substitute point.

- 2.6 In applicable cases, the total allowable catch (TAC) system shall be complied by the fishery of which the unit of certification is a part.
- 2.7 The stock under consideration shall not be overfished. Necessary measures are taken in a timely manner to avoid recruitment overfishing if the stock is below the reference point where stock recovery measures are required to be taken.

### **3. Requirements on Consideration for Ecosystem (Appropriate measures are implemented for the conservation of the ecosystem)**

- 3.1 Establishment of ecosystem-conscious management system
- 3.1.1. Scientific information on assessment shall be collected and maintained on the following items to assess the impact of stock under consideration on non-target species and the ecosystem.
- i) Fish catch and discard of non-target stock
  - ii) Bycatch of endangered species<sup>3</sup> by the target fishery and efforts for conservation
  - iii) Information on the essential habitat for stock under consideration (e.g. spawning and nursery sites)
  - iv) Impacts of fishing gear used in the target fishery on the ecosystem (including benthic environment)
  - v) Predator-prey interaction of the stock under consideration
  - vi) Balance of whole ecosystem (whether the ecosystem is not disturbed)
- 3.1.2. The target fishery shall be operated with consideration for minimizing adverse impact on non-target species and the ecosystem based on the results of items 3.1.1 i) – vi).
- 3.1.3. Applicants shall contribute to the conservation of environment where covers fishing ground and habitat of the stock under consideration.

### **3.2 Consideration of ecosystem in fish farming and resource enhancement**

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<sup>3</sup> Endangered species are specified in the Act on Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.



- 3.2.1 Production and release of artificial seedlings shall be conducted with due consideration given for maintaining the biological characteristics and genetic diversity.
- 3.2.2 Management objectives as to the stock under consideration shall be developed and management measures based on the objectives shall be implemented to maintain an existing the natural reproductive stock components of the stock under consideration.
- 3.2.3 Monitoring of the stock under consideration and its habitat shall be conducted, and measures are taken to avoid the adverse impacts of released seedling on natural reproduction of the stock under consideration and the ecosystem.

End

## Appendix 1. Glossary

## **Glossary**

### **1. Fishing Effort**

The amount of effort employed for fishing activity, such as the number of fishing vessels, the duration (days) of fishing operations, the number of fishing gears, and the duration (hours) of net-towing, etc.

### **2. Stocks under International Management**

#### **1) Transboundary stock**

Fish stocks distributed and migrating over the exclusive economic zones of two or more countries

#### **2) Straddling stock**

Fish stocks distributed and migrating over the high seas and the exclusive economic zone

#### **3) Highly migratory fish stock**

Fish stock with a high swimming capacity migrating not only within or outside of the exclusive economic zone and the high seas but also throughout the ocean

### **3. Maximum Sustainable Yield**

The largest catch or yield that can be allowed continuously from the stock under existing biological or non-biological environmental conditions

### **4. Reference Point**

#### **1) Target reference point**

The benchmark that is set as a level of stock for a fishery to be maintained over the long term, corresponding to the state of the stock and the fishery

#### **2) Limit reference point**

The benchmark that requires the management to take measures to take measures to promote recovery of the stock, in cases where the stock falls below the biological limits or where there are risks of it falling below biological limits

### **5. Total Allowable Catch (TAC)**

In order to manage the target stock, the annual upper limit of the harvesting level shall be set and distributed to the related fishers.

## **6. Recruitment Overfishing**

A situation in which the stock for the next generation is not used sustainably due to the strong pressure from capture fisheries before coming to maturity. Overfishing by capture fisheries is the cause of recruitment overfishing.

## **7. Disturbance of Ecosystem**

The extensive and long-term change of structure to a biotic community caused by changes in the surrounding environment stemming from natural and/or artificial phenomena.

## **8. Endangered Species**

Species listed in Act on Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora by Ministry of Environment.

## Notes

Date of enactment: October 3, 2017

Date of effect: February 1, 2018

Transition period : Three years until January 31, 2021

This standard shall come into effect as of February 1, 2018.

The certified entities with MEL Fisheries Certification ver.1.0 shall undergo an assessment to be certified with MEL FMS ver.2.0 during the transition period.

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Any discrepancy between translations shall be resolved by reference to the definitive Japanese version.