

Seafood Futures Forum, MSC
The power of business as a lever of change
Seafood Expo Global
27th April 2022 (on-line)

Peter Thomson, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean commended the good efforts of MSC in dealing with ocean's health. Pollution is pushing the oceans to a catastrophe. Global demand for fish will double by 2050. All must fish in a sustainable way. Governments recognise this need. The target is to end overfishing. Fishing industry has a huge role to play. Business commitments are driving change. He thanked MSC for being part of this global effort.

Scene setter and opening remarks, Rupert Howes, Chief Executive of MSC

How to tackle the challenge of overfishing? The oceans are in trouble. We have 8 years to act. MSC was founded 25 years ago. MSC helps to get access to markets and is good for environment. 19% of world catches are now certified. He highlighted some examples of what MSC is trying to achieve. MSC is building a pathway to sustainability. Much effort goes to small scale fisheries. MSC works in partnership with business. Climate change has huge impact on the ocean ecosystems. MSC is aiming at sustainable development goals. New MSC fisheries standards will be launched. On the agenda of the meeting: how we tackle the urgent challenge to end overfishing and the latest news from the MSC, including new research, programme developments and market trends.

Growth in sustainable seafood, an update from the MSC

MSC shared market trends and the results of its work. MSC is a truly global programme. There is increased engagement in MSC projects in developing countries. There is increasing demand for MSC products. At regional level, there is good engagement in southern Europe. MSC popularity is growing. Key trends: 49% of global catch of tuna is MSC certified. Many brands give commitments to MSC and use the MSC label (such as Tesco, Lidl, Aldi, Coop, Edeca etc.). This progress could be undermined if long term strategy for tuna is not adopted by relevant RMFOs. However, many certifications had been suspended. The quotas must be set in line with scientific advice. Some retailers source fish from other fisheries as alternatives to endangered stocks. White fish products: frozen products. MSC continues to grow its profile. 78% consumers trust the label. Consumer concerns include pollution, overfishing and climate change.

Keynote presentation, Justin King, leader in consumer-facing business and former CEO of Sainsbury's. He has served in many senior roles at companies including Sainsbury's, M&S, Asda, Häagen-Dazs, PepsiCo and Mars where he has been instrumental in introducing responsible business strategies, including the early adoption of sustainable seafood certification. MSC has been in his working time for 20 years. So much achieved and so much still to achieve. Only 25% of consumers think that they can make a difference. This is a challenge. We have to change the narrative and the language. He spoke on the role of business vs role of government,

collaboration vs competition, dynamic between celebrating success and punishing failure, the role of consumers, big versus small targets. On the role of business: fisheries had a big role in Brexit debate. One of most adversely hit. Business plays a powerful role. There is pressure to identify long-term sustainability goals in businesses. Collaboration vs competition: the most powerful force is competition. Collaboration is necessary, but not sufficient. Celebrating success: we need to remember that what gets rewarded, gets repeated. There is pathological desire to punish for lack of success. Use the pressure of changes to change the bad. Answers to questions build trust. We need big targets for big changes. Problem of hopelessness: business must take the lead to achieve success.

Moderated panel discussion: 8 years to save our ocean? The power of business as a lever for change.

The panel was moderated by Nastasja van den Berg.

Panelists: Justin King, Nicolas Guichoux, Minna Epps, Jose Luis Jauregui, Rupert Howes.

What steps should be taken to achieve the goal?

Minna Epps (IUCN) talked about the chemistry of the oceans. Acidification has increased. Lack of oxygen has great impact. Habitats are shrinking. This is the context. The situation is really urgent. We have to act to stop decline of oceans, to stop the threats. Representative of Lidl Spain talked about the growing share of MSC certified products in Lidl. Buyers ask for certified sustainable food.

The power of business as a lever of change: regulation is the biggest barrier for change. We need to accept legitimacy of governments to regulate. How can businesses and governments work together?. Competition can be a barrier. Need competition and coherence. Oceans are busy places. We need cross-sectoral collaboration. We need to manage oceans together and adopt ambitious goals. We are on a way. Minna Epps: There is no legal basis to create MPAs at global level. How to do it at global level? Regionalism is good, but also need a global approach.

Business by investing in sustainable fishing informs the governments.

Q&A session:

How can we better communicate our messages to consumers: we have to find the best option? There has to be communication to consumers – my participation can make a difference.

What can business do to get harvest strategies in place: the harvest control tools need to be implemented? There are many different perspectives, so getting agreement is not easy. It is also very political.

On bycatch: low in the concerns of people. Why? It is one of the biggest problems we have. Many consumers do not know where the products come from. Lack of knowledge on how much damage is done is the reason.

How to incentivise fishers to act sustainably? MSC is the incentive.