OCEAN STEWARDSHIP FUND – STUDENT RESEARCH GRANTS GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

1) The MSC

a) The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) runs an exciting and ambitious program, working with partners to transform the world's seafood markets and promote sustainable fishing practices.

b) MSC's vision is of the world's oceans teeming with life, and seafood supplies safeguarded for this and future generations.

c) MSC's mission is to use the ecolabel and fishery certification program to contribute to the health of the world's oceans by recognising and rewarding sustainable fishing practices, influencing the choices people make when buying seafood, and working with partners to transform the seafood market to a sustainable basis.

d) MSC's standards for sustainable fishing and seafood traceability seek to increase the availability of certified sustainable seafood and MSC's distinctive blue ecolabel makes it easy for everyone to buy sustainable seafood products.

2) The Student Research Grants (SRG)

a) The Student Research Grants (SRG) support postgraduate research that contributes to efforts by non-certified fisheries to meet the MSC Fisheries Standard as well as certified fisheries to maintain their MSC certification. The SRG is part of the MSC's Ocean Stewardship Fund (OSF).

3) Who can apply?

a) Current Master's or PhD students of fisheries science (or undergraduates who have secured a postgraduate position and will be in post by the time of the project). Integrated Master's students are eligible to apply during their final year only. The fund is open to students worldwide.

b) Projects must have the objective of studying some aspect of environmental improvement, performance or best practice in relation to a specific fishery and the MSC Fisheries Standard. The fishery must be MSC certified, in the ITM Program, a stage 4 pathway project fishery, or a comprehensive FIP. For information on eligible fisheries or to confirm the status of one, please visit Fishery Progress or contact OSF@msc.org.

c) Applicants must be able to accept the OSF Privacy Policy, which can be found on the OSF Grants Portal by clicking on the padlock icon at the upper right corner.

4) Which fisheries are eligible for SRG-funded projects?

a) SRG applicants can submit a project that supports any of the following types of fishery in progressing towards, or maintaining, MSC certification. Certain types of

fishery aimed at achieving an MSC-level of sustainability are also eligible; please read the following for more details.

b) **MSC certified fisheries**

   i) These are fisheries that have been assessed by an independent third party as having met the [MSC Fisheries Standard](#) at a level deemed "best practice" across the three principles of the Standard (further details below). While a fishery must be performing at a high level to be certified, there may be room for improvement on specific areas. These are referred to as "conditions" that the fishery must resolve within a specified timeframe in order to maintain their MSC certification. These improvements are often only possible through carrying out essential scientific research.

   ii) To find a certified fishery, please visit MSC's [Track a Fishery](#) database.

c) **Comprehensive FIPs**

   i) Many fisheries working toward MSC (level) certification find it helpful to be part of a Fisheries Improvement Project (FIP) to implement the improvements needed. A FIP is a multi-stakeholder effort to address environmental challenges in a fishery. The primary differences between basic and comprehensive FIPs are the level of scoping to inform development of the workplan, the objectives, and the verification required.

   ii) FIPs are usually led and coordinated by organisations or individuals known as FIP implementers. The FIP implementer is responsible for coordinating and implementing improvements and reporting on the fishery's progress.

   iii) To be eligible for an SRG project, a comprehensive FIP must demonstrate a commitment towards achieving MSC certification (or an MSC-level of sustainability), conduct a pre-assessment against the MSC Fisheries Standard and develop an action plan to implement improvements.

   iv) To find a comprehensive FIP, please visit [Fishery Progress](#).

d) **Pathway Project fisheries (stage 4)**

   i) This is an MSC initiative for non-certified fisheries that are on the pathway to sustainability and which need more holistic support to improve their practices. A [Pathway Project](#) is any project that uses the MSC's Pathway tools in a strategic way to engage with multiple fisheries at the same time. Pathway Projects aim to involve not only the fisheries and NGO stakeholders, but notably also the management authorities, scientific advisory bodies and the supply chain interested in sourcing from these fisheries and regions.

   ii) To be eligible for an SRG project, a Pathway Project fishery must have reached Stage 4 of the Pathway:
   (1) Scoping review and information collection
   (2) Gap analysis against the MSC Standard
   (3) Development of a plan to address identified gaps
   (4) Implementation of actions

iii) To find a Stage 4 Pathway Project fishery, please contact OSF@msc.org.

e) **ITM (In-Transition to MSC) fisheries**

i) Fisheries in FIPs and/or Pathway Projects can also take part in the In-Transition to MSC (ITM) Program. The ITM Program aims to support fisheries that are committed to achieving MSC certification within a defined period, usually 5 years, and are making improvements to their environmental sustainability. It provides a mechanism for independent verification of a fishery's eligibility and its continual progress by Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs).

ii) To enter ITM, a fishery must undertake an independent assessment of their progress against the Fisheries Standard by an accredited assessor. This pre-assessment identifies areas that the fishery needs to improve on in order to meet the Standard and an action plan is developed with the assessor. A project manager is then assigned to the fishery to support them with the implementation of these actions.

iii) Fisheries that meet the ITM requirements are eligible for the SRG.

iv) A list of current ITM fisheries can be downloaded from the MSC website.

f) **Projects linked to other types of fishery are not eligible for the SRG.**

5) What does the MSC Fisheries Standard assess?

a) The MSC Fisheries Standard is used to assess if a fishery is well-managed and sustainable. It's open to all fisheries that catch marine or freshwater organisms in the wild. This includes most types of fish and shellfish.

b) The Standard has three core principles that every fishery must meet:

i) **Sustainable fish stocks**
Are enough fish left in the ocean? Fishing must be at a level that ensures it can continue indefinitely and the fish population can remain productive and healthy.

ii) **Minimising environmental impact**
What are the impacts? Fishing activity must be managed carefully so that other species and habitats within the ecosystem remain healthy.

iii) **Effective fisheries management**
Are operations well managed? MSC certified fisheries must comply with relevant laws and be able to adapt to changing environmental circumstances.

6) What kind of projects will the SRG fund?

a) Projects must be no longer than 12 months (or up to 18 months in exceptional circumstances) and linked to Performance Indicators within the MSC Fisheries Standard in relation to a specific fishery.

b) Projects within scope of SRG include:
i) data or information collection needed in the fishery partner to address gaps raised in an improvement or client action plan

ii) research to improve understanding of an ecosystem component interacting with the fishery partner

iii) research to improve information available on the target species in the fishery partner

iv) research and analysis to support documentation that might be required by the fishery partner to demonstrate its performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard.

c) Applicants are advised to speak to the fishery, ITM Project Manager or FIP implementer to find out information on improvement actions that can benefit from research support. Details of such contacts can be found on MSC's Track a Fishery database (for certified fisheries and some ITM fisheries) and Fishery Progress (for non-certified fisheries).

7) What does the SRG cover?

a) Travel and project support up to a limit of £5,000. Funds can be used for travel, accommodation, essential fixed assets (up to £250 to cover essential assets such as a computer, software etc.) and the hire or purchase of essential equipment, however, cannot be used to cover salary costs.

8) What should the student's research proposal include?

a) All applicants are required to provide a research proposal, which must be no more than 800 words. This proposal must only describe what the student will be doing and not include any details of wider projects linked to their work. It must cover the following:

b) **Project title**
The title of the project is really important, as this is usually the first thing that reviewers will see. It needs to convey the main aims and focus of the project in a really clear and succinct way. The title also needs to include the name of the fishery involved in the project.

c) **Project summary**
Applicants must provide a brief overview of their project that summarises all the key elements: the aim, method, expected results and timeline. The project summary should be written in such a way that reviewers will be able to read it as it stands and understand the purpose of the project. Applicants may find it easier to write this section last.

d) **Introduction**
Please give brief details about the background and context of the project, the fishery or fisheries involved and the particular issues that the fishery(ies) face with respect to the MSC Standard and intends to address through this project.

e) **Aim of the project**
Please describe how the project connects with improved sustainability and performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard. Applicants will be required to provide more detail on the outputs and outcomes of the project that will demonstrate

how the project has achieved this aim within the "Project Outputs and Outcomes" section of the Application Form.

f) **Method**
Please describe in detail the activities, processes and methods proposed for implementation of the project. For each activity, the method must describe the materials and equipment that would be used, how/when/where they would be used, the measurements and statistical analysis that would be carried out and who would be carrying out each element of the work. Applicants should also explain why they have selected the approach and techniques they are proposing (citing supporting publications where applicable) and explain how their method will help the project meet its aim. Applicants should explain how their method is appropriate for the specific fishery (or fisheries) involved e.g., if the method is suited to the scale of the fishery. Applicants should further consider the timescale in which the project must be completed and any fishing seasons relevant to the research.

g) **Expected results**
This section should indicate what results or outcomes applicants expect to achieve with their project and link this back to the project aim (including any impact on the fishery's performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard e.g. increase in PI scores). The materials and methods used in the project must be able to generate the types of outcome that will address the project aim. Applicants are advised to write this section at the same time as writing their project aim and method, to ensure they all align in this way. This will also help to focus the proposal.

h) **Timeline of proposed SRG-funded work**
Applicants must also provide a timeline that includes all the significant milestones of the project, from the planning stages through to completion. Overall, the project's duration should be no longer than 12 months (or 18 in exceptional circumstances).

i) **Details of how the research will benefit the fishery or fisheries associated with the project**
Applicants are advised to speak to their supervisor and/or the fishery/FIP implementor/project manager to confirm how their project will improve the fishery's progress against the MSC Fisheries Standard. They must be able to link their project to specific Performance Indicators in the Standard and outline how the project might contribute to the fishery's improvements against these e.g., through providing more data to the fishery, supporting progress documentation for MSC etc. More detailed examples are outlined in Section 6 "What kind of projects will the SRG fund?"

j) **Details of the project's key outputs and outcomes**
As part of their proposal, applicants are required to complete a table outlining all of the project outputs and outcomes that would be funded by the grant.
Each activity of the project's Method should have at least one output that will be delivered by the activity. Outputs are essentially products or services such as a meeting, workshop, new tool, information manual, data analysis etc.
Each output will deliver outcomes for the project. Outcomes are desired changes that will occur in the short and medium term as a result of outputs achieved and these

individual changes will indicate progress towards the overall aim of the project. An outcome should be easy to understand and defined clearly as a single change e.g., improved performance against a performance indicator, reduced bycatch etc.

9) What supporting documents are required?

a) The following documents must be submitted in English:

i) **Letter of support from the supervisor**
The supervisor must submit a signed and headed letter of support to accompany the SRG application. This must be no more than 200 words and include information on the student's academic knowledge and understanding as well as their ability to deliver academic work and meet deadlines. Please also provide details of the facilities, equipment, training and support that will be provided for the student during this project.

ii) **Letter of support from the fishery, FIP implementor or project manager linked to the project**
The fishery, FIP implementor or project manager linked to the fishery, must submit a signed and headed letter of support to accompany the SRG application. This letter can be written by any individual who works on behalf of the fishery(ies) to support their sustainability improvement e.g., from a government agency, fishing industry association, fishery cooperative, local management authority or the fishery itself. For certified fisheries (and some ITM fisheries), applicants can identify these organisations by visiting Track a Fishery and viewing the fishery's MSC certificate. For non-certified fisheries, many of them will have a profile on Fishery Progress, which will indicate the organisations involved in supporting the FIP. If in doubt, applicants are advised to speak to their supervisor.
The letter should indicate how the fishery or fisheries will benefit from the SRG research proposed. If the fishery is not MSC certified, the author must be able to demonstrate the fishery's commitment towards achieving MSC certification (or an MSC-level of sustainability) in future: this may be indicated by their profile on Fishery Progress and/or their use of MSC's Pathway tools. The author must also outline their confidence in how the SRG project will improve progress against specific Performance Indicators in the MSC Fisheries Standard.

10) How are applications assessed?

a) All SRG applications are assessed using standardised appraisal criteria by the MSC review panel. The MSC's Chief Science and Standards Officer has the authority to make the final decision in respect of the SRG Awards. The MSC reserves the right to request modifications to applications, in consultation with applicants, before reaching a decision regarding whether to fund an application. To ensure the best quality review of applications, the MSC's assessments remain confidential.

b) Applications will be assessed on a range of criteria including:
i) clarity of research objectives
ii) research outcomes link/relevance to MSC Standard
iii) research contribution to the linked fishery (or fisheries)

iv) research feasibility
v) institutional and supervisory support
vi) budget

11) What happens if an SRG application is successful?

a) Successful SRG applicants will be notified in March 2024 and asked to accept the SRG Terms and Conditions. The offer email will confirm the amount of funding awarded.

b) As a condition of the grant, SRG Awardees will be expected to:
   i) submit a progress report to MSC midway through their project as well as a final report at the end, which must include both a scientific report and a non-technical lay summary along with any supporting communication assets such as images, videos etc.
   ii) share their research findings with a wider audience and keep MSC informed of their plans.
   iii) provide the MSC with timely contributions towards any Q&A, blog or social media posts relating to their project or the SRG as a whole.

12) How will the funding be disbursed?

a) Payment will be made to the SRG Awardee.

b) All receipts over £100 should be retained but will only be requested by MSC when necessary, not as part of the routine reporting.

c) The MSC will make a payment of 75% of the total SRG Award in the month preceding the given start date of the project. Earlier payment may be requested in writing with supporting explanatory information.

d) The remaining 25% of the SRG Award will be made on receipt of a satisfactory final project report and interim report (see Section 11 "What happens if an SRG application is successful").

e) Payments will not be made for retrospective spending made prior to the formal offer of the SRG Award.

13) Dissemination of personal data

a) SRG applicants are strongly advised to read the OSF Privacy Policy before submitting their application. This can be found on the OSF Grants Portal by clicking on the padlock icon at the upper right corner.

b) All applications will be held by the MSC on secure servers in the European Union (the EU) or in the UK (on Microsoft Azure Servers (UK) and Amazon Web Services (AWS) Europe (London Region)) . If an application is successful, details concerning the Award, including the Awardee's name, may be made publicly available on the MSC's website and other media outlets, e.g., annual report, a press release.

c) Applicants have the right to obtain a copy of their personal data that MSC holds, and to require MSC to correct errors in the personal data if it is inaccurate or incomplete. They also have the right at any time to require that MSC deletes their personal data.

To exercise these rights, or any other rights under applicable laws, please contact OSF@msc.org.

14) Further questions

a) Please email any further questions to: OSF@msc.org.