

Haarlem, 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2019

**Satoshi Maekawa**

Ocean and Seafood Group Officer  
WWF Japan  
1 Chome-4 Mita, Minato City,  
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Subject: Response to the World Wildlife Fund Japan

Dear Satoshi Maekawa,

Many thanks for taking the time to provide your comments on the GSSI Benchmark Report for the Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL) Program.

GSSI is committed to a transparent benchmark process with opportunity for engagement and comments. Following the consultation, the comments received from WWF Japan and other stakeholders have been carefully reviewed by the Independent Experts, Benchmark Committee and the GSSI Board. Comprehensive responses to each of the comments are provided in this and other letters. After careful deliberations, the Benchmark Committee concluded the comments had been sufficiently addressed and recommends GSSI recognition of the MEL program.

In response to the comments referring to version 1.0 of the MEL Japan Fisheries Management Standard, GSSI explicitly points out that the GSSI benchmarking process and recognition only applies to version 2.0 of the MEL Japan Fisheries Management Standard (2018) and version 1.0 of the MEL Aquaculture Standard (2018). Furthermore, during the transition phase up until January 31 2021, MEL-Japan will be required to clearly differentiate between the different versions of its standard through the logo.

In response to comments concerning the present limited availability of evidence proving implementation of the MEL Japan Fisheries Management Standard v.2.0 (2018), the GSSI requirement of having at least 1 accredited certification in place before being able to achieve recognition is met.

That being said, GSSI requires a stringent monitoring of continued alignment. Under normal circumstances, the Monitoring of Continued Alignment (MOCA) review process is to take place after 1.5 years of recognition. However, in response to the comments received, the GSSI Steering Board has decided that for the case of MEL, this MOCA will be advanced to 1-year post recognition and will comprise of a public consultation to provide stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the new evidence of implementation provided and the continued alignment of the MEL scheme with the GSSI benchmark Tool.

GSSI's detailed responses to your comments by component number raised in relation to the GSSI Benchmark of MEL aquaculture standard are set out below.

The response to each of the comments is structured as follows:

1. Description of the component: Essential or Supplementary and the corresponded numeration
2. Text of the Component
3. Submitted Comment
4. Answer from GSSI
5. Conclusion [old part in black] [new part in blue]
6. References [old part in black] [new part in blue]

The answers to the comments and conclusions of the components make use of the GSSI benchmark language, including the following acronyms:

IE: Independent Expert

EC: Essential Component

SC: Supplementary Component

BC: Benchmark Committee

MOCA: Monitoring of Continued Alignment

## ■ **Section C - Aquaculture**

### **ESSENTIAL COMPONENT C.4.02**

*The standard requires the aquaculture facility sources feed from a manufacture that prohibits fishmeal and fish oil from endangered species.*

#### ■ **WWF Japan comment**

AMS adopts only national law as list of endanger species. This does not include most of marine fish species such as bluefin tuna and sharks. AMS should adopt also IUCN red list and appendix of CITES.

#### ■ **GSSI response**

MEL-J is in alignment with Essential Component C.4.02. Based on the comment of WWF Japan, no additional information has been included in the final conclusion.

C.4.02 focuses on the origination of fish used to produce fishmeal and fish oil. The Essential Component prohibits the use of fish that are defined as endangered species. The guidance statement for this Essential Component indicates that considerable latitude is provided on the statutory references used to define endangered species. Although it is certainly desirable to make reference to international listings provided by CITES and the IUCN, the guidance statement indicates that national listings, such as that provided by Japan's Act on Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, are sufficient by themselves as evidence of alignment. The guidance statement indicates "and/or" when referencing appropriate national and international listings, indicating that inclusion of international listings is desirable but not required, as long as national listings are referenced, as is the case with the MEL Aquaculture Management Standard.

### **Conclusion on GSSI Essential Component C.4.02**

**Conclusion:** The MEL Aquaculture Management Standard is in alignment because it includes a standard that prohibits fishmeal and fish oil originating from endangered species.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Aquaculture Management Standard, Ver.1, 2018  
<https://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Aquaculture-Management-StandardAMSver.1.0.pdf>
2. Aquaculture Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors - Indicators of Conformity - Version 1.1. 2019  
<https://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Aquaculture-Management-Standard-Guidelines-for-Auditors-Indicators-of-Conformity-Version.-1.1.pdf>
3. Checklist for Auditors 2018  
<http://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/C3.%E3%80%90Checklist%E3%80%91-Aquaculture.pdf>  
Standard 4.2.2

#### 4. First Annual Surveillance Report: Azuma-cho Fishery Cooperative Association JFRCA Assessment plan dated 1 September 2019

### ESSENTIAL COMPONENT C.5.01

*For cage production systems, the standard requires appropriate management measures for preventing excessive impacts of aquaculture facility waste on benthic environments.*

#### ■ WWF Japan comment

AMS does not define criteria for sediment pollution in 4.1.3. In Water Quality Standards for Fisheries, sulphide concentration in sediment should be less than 0.2mg/g (dry mud).

#### ■ GSSI response

MEL-J is in alignment with Essential Component C.5.01. Based on the comment of WWF Japan, additional information has been included in the final conclusion.

C.5.01 does not require MEL to define specific criteria for sediment pollution, such as maximum sulphide concentration. The component requires that the scheme includes “appropriate management measures” to address benthic impacts. The MEL Aquaculture Management Standard requires regular monitoring of sediment organic matter and oxygen concentration of bottom water at cage sites. The MEL Guidance statement on Standard 4.1.3 requires calculation of site carrying capacity (and thus organic matter accumulation) on the basis of water depth and current speed. Sites with a current speed > 8 cm/sec are considered to be in alignment because organic matter will not accumulate at such sites.

### Conclusion on GSSI Essential Component C.5.01

**Conclusion:** The MEL Aquaculture Management Standard is in alignment because it includes a criterion that requires that aquaculture activities be carried out in accordance with suitable operating procedures established to minimize environmental impact caused by aquaculture equipment and materials, excretions of aquatic animals, and feed residues.

It also includes specific standards that require that:

1. The density of fish be controlled adequately, and organic matter shall be monitored to prevent increased sedimentation of organic matter and occurrence of de-oxygenated water, and
2. waste disposal from aquaculture operated in closed water be managed properly to prevent negative impact on the benthic environment.

The MEL Aquaculture Management Standard is in alignment because it also includes a criterion that requires that aquatic animals be managed in a suitable environment to minimize stress on them.

It also includes specific standards that require:

1. use of water in accordance with Water Quality Standards for Fisheries based on target species and life stage, including sediment quality,
2. providing sufficient cage space and rearing density to maintain satisfactory environmental conditions at the growing site, and
3. monitoring of the environmental conditions of the farming site.

## REFERENCES

1. Aquaculture Management Standard, Ver.1, 2018  
<https://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Aquaculture-Management-StandardAMSver.1.0.pdf>
2. Aquaculture Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors - Indicators of Conformity - Version 1.1. 2019  
<https://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Aquaculture-Management-Standard-Guidelines-for-Auditors-Indicators-of-Conformity-Version.-1.1.pdf>
3. Checklist for Auditors 2018  
<http://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/C3.%E3%80%90Checklist%E3%80%91-Aquaculture.pdf>  
Criterion 4.1, Standards 4.1.3 and 4.1.4  
Criterion 2.1, Standards 2.1.1 - 2.1.3  
Appendix 1: Water Quality Standard for Fisheries (2012)
4. [First Annual Surveillance Report: Azuma-cho Fishery Cooperative Association JFRCA Assessment plan dated 1 September 2019](#)

## ■ Section D – Fisheries

### ESSENTIAL COMPONENT D.4.03

*The standard requires the collection and maintenance of adequate, reliable and current data and/or other information on non-target catches and discards in the unit of certification.*

#### ■ WWF Japan comment

FMS need to add a requirement for publicly available scientific evidence in order to evaluate it properly because it is difficult to judge externally that the audit are conducted properly without enough transparency.

#### ■ GSSI response

MEL-J is in alignment with Essential Component D.4.03. Based on the comment of WWF Japan, no additional information has been included in the final conclusion.

WWF Japan raises concern that FMS is currently lacking any requirement for publicly available scientific evidence in order to evaluate it properly. The EC states that the standard must require the collection and maintenance of adequate, reliable and current data and/or other information on non-target catches and discards in the unit of certification. Using publicly available scientific evidence is not required by this GSSI EC. However, the commenter could contact Japanese Fisheries Resource Conservation Association (JFRCA), the certification body, to obtain clarifications on the available scientific evidence used. Additionally, MEL has a clear and easily accessible point of contact and process for submission of comments at any time.

Regarding the delay in publication of the audit report, JFRCA has measures to prevent recurrence and to make public reports part of the requirements for certification. Administrative procedures ensure that certification shall will not take effect until the audit report are ready to be made public.

Updated JFRCA administrative procedure referenced:

S-7 is 認証判定書 “decision making on Certification” 申請者が同意した公開用の報告書が用意され、認証発効時に公開できる。A report for publication that the applicant has agreed to is prepared and can be published when the certification comes into effect and put in their procedure.

F-1 認証管理シート “certification management sheet”

The certification comes into effect when the assessment report is made public on the website.

As the GSSI benchmark tool requires transparency in a timely manner, including the public disclosure of audit reports, proof of alignment with this component will need to be verified during the MOCA at the one year mark following the benchmark recognition.

### **Conclusion on GSSI Essential Component D.4.03**

**Conclusion:** MEL is in alignment because requirement(s) in the Fisheries Management Standard (version 2.0) and indicator(s) in the Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1) state as follows;

Requirement 3.1.1 in the Fisheries Management Standard (version 2.0)

Data and/or other information based on the best scientific evidence available covering the following factors shall be collected and maintained in order to assess the impacts of the unit of certification on non-target stocks and ecosystem:

1. Catches and discard of non-target stocks
2. Impacts of the unit of certification on endangered species, and efforts to conserve and protect those species as well as to avoid by-catch of those species
3. Information on the essential habitat for stock under consideration (e.g. spawning and nursery sites)
4. Impacts of fishing gear used by the unit of certification on ecosystem (including the seabed)
5. Prey-predator relationship of the stock under consideration in the food-web
6. Balance of whole ecosystem (i.e. whether there is any severe disturbance by the unit of certification on ecosystem)

Indicator(s) 3.1.1 (a) (1) in the Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1).

- a. Whether adequate, reliable and current data and/or other information of followings exist:
  1. Assessment of the extent to which non-target catches and discards by the unit of certification of stocks other than the stock under consideration threaten those non-target stocks with recruitment overfishing or other impacts that are likely to be irreversible or very slowly reversible with appropriate related data/information.
    - Existence of collected and maintained information referred in (1) – (5) above.

Additional information for the above requirement(s) and indicator(s) can be found in the Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1): Requirements 3.1.1; Indicators 3.1.1 (a) (1). p. 37-40.

Examples of the requirement(s) in use can be found in the Assessment Report Fisheries Management Standard (Salmon, Hokkaido): Summary Evidence and Evidence 3.1.1 (a). p. 76-81.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Fisheries Management Standard (version 2.0), 2018: Requirement(s) 3.1.1. p. 8.  
<https://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Fisheries-Management-StandardFMSver.2.0.pdf>

2. Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1), 2019: Indicator(s) 3.1.1 (a) (1). p. 37-40.  
<https://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Fisheries-Management-Standard-Guidelines-for-Auditors-Indicators-of-Conformity-Version.-2.1.pdf>
3. Assessment Report Fisheries Management Standard (Salmon, Hokkaido), 2019: Summary Evidence and Evidence 3.1.1 (a). p. 76-81.
4. [First Annual Surveillance Report. Hokkaido Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Association Chum Salmon Set-net Fishery Certification No.: JFRCA 20F2200011 Date certified: February 28, 2019. Report Prepared: August 2019. On site assessment July 21, 2019.](#)

#### ESSENTIAL COMPONENT D.4.04

*The standard requires the collection and maintenance of adequate, reliable and current data and/or other information about the effects of the unit of certification, including any associated enhancement activities, on endangered species in accordance with applicable international standards and practices.*

##### ■ WWF Japan comment

FMS need to add a requirement for publicly available scientific evidence in order to evaluate it properly because it is difficult to judge externally that the audit are conducted properly without enough transparency.

##### ■ GSSI response

MEL-J is in alignment with Essential Component D.4.04. Based on the comment of WWF Japan, no additional information has been included in the final conclusion.

WWF Japan raises concern that FMS is currently lacking any requirement for publicly available scientific evidence in order to evaluate it properly. The EC states that the standard must require the collection and maintenance of adequate, reliable and current data and/or other information on non-target catches and discards in the unit of certification. Using publicly available scientific evidence is not required by this component. However, the commenter could contact Japanese Fisheries Resource Conservation Association (JFRCA), the Conformity Assessment Body (CAB), to obtain clarifications on the available scientific evidence used. Additionally, MEL has a clear and easily accessible point of contact and process for submission of comments at any time.

Regarding the delay in publication of the audit reports, JFRCA has measures to prevent recurrence and to make public reports part of the requirements for certification. Administrative procedures ensure that certification shall will not take effect until the audit reports are ready to be made public.

Updated JFRCA administrative procedure referenced:

S-7 is 認証判定書 “decision making on Certification” 申請者が同意した公開用の報告書が用意され、認証発効時に公開できる。A report for publication that the applicant has agreed to is prepared and can be published when the certification comes into effect and put in their procedure.

F-1 認証管理シート “certification management sheet”

The certification comes into effect when the assessment report is made public on the website.

As the GSSI benchmark tool requires transparency in a timely manner, including the public disclosure of audit reports, proof of alignment with this component will need to be verified during the MOCA at the one year mark following the benchmark recognition.

## Conclusion on GSSI Essential Component D.4.04

**Conclusion:** MEL is in alignment because requirement(s) in the Fisheries Management Standard (version 2.0) and indicator(s) in the Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1) state as follows;

Requirement 3.1.1 in the Fisheries Management Standard (version 2.0)

Data and/or other information based on the best scientific evidence available covering the following factors shall be collected and maintained in order to assess the impacts of the unit of certification on non-target stocks and ecosystem:

1. Catches and discard of non-target stocks
2. Impacts of the unit of certification on endangered species, and efforts to conserve and protect those species as well as to avoid by-catch of those species
3. Information on the essential habitat for stock under consideration (e.g. spawning and nursery sites)
4. Impacts of fishing gear used by the unit of certification on ecosystem (including the seabed)
5. Prey-predator relationship of the stock under consideration in the food-web
6. Balance of whole ecosystem (i.e. whether there is any severe disturbance by the unit of certification on ecosystem)

Indicator(s) 3.1.1 (a) (2) in the Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1)

- a. Whether adequate, reliable and current data and/or other information of followings exist:
  2. Assessment of the impacts of the unit of certification on endangered species with appropriate related data/information collected in accordance with applicable international standards and practices.
    - Existence of collected and maintained information referred in (1) – (5) above.

Standard 3.2 particularly requires the consideration of ecosystem in the associated fish farming and resource enhancement.

Requirement 3.2.3 in the Fisheries Management Standard (version 2.0)

(In case of the associated fish farming and resource enhancement,) There shall be continuous monitoring of the state of the stock under consideration and its habitat, and measures shall be implemented in order to avoid significant adverse impacts of enhancement activities on the natural reproductive stock components of the stock under consideration and ecosystem.

Indicator(s) 3.2.3 (b) (2) in the Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1)

- b. Whether following information about the impacts of release of artificial seedling on other species and the ecosystem exists:
  2. Assessment of the impacts of associated culture and enhancement activities on endangered species with appropriate related data/information collected in accordance with applicable international standards and practices.
    - Existence of information about the distributional area of seedling and growth after the seedling is released, including information to confirm that the natural reproductive stock component of enhanced stocks is not substantially displaced by stocked components.
    - Existence of information about impacts on other species and the ecosystem referred in (1) - (4) above.

Additional information for the above requirement(s) and indicator(s) can be found in the Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1):

Requirements 3.1.1, 3.2.3; Indicators 3.1.1 (a) (2). p. 37-40 and 3.2.3 (b) (2). p. 53-55.

Examples of the requirement(s) in use can be found in the Assessment Report Fisheries Management

Standard (Salmon, Hokkaido): Summary Evidence and Evidence 3.1.1 (a). p. 76-81. and 3.2.3 (b). p. 102-103.

## REFERENCES

1. Fisheries Management Standard (version 2.0), 2018: Requirement(s) 3.1.1. p 8. and 3.2.3. p. 9. <https://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Fisheries-Management-StandardFMSver.2.0.pdf>
2. Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1), 2019: Indicator(s) 3.1.1 (a) (2). p. 37-40 and 3.2.3 (b) (2). p. 53-55. <https://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Fisheries-Management-Standard-Guidelines-for-Auditors-Indicators-of-Conformity-Version.-2.1.pdf>
3. Assessment Report Fisheries Management Standard (Salmon, Hokkaido), 2019: Summary Evidence and Evidence 3.1.1 (a) .p 76-81. and 3.2.3 (b). p. 102-103.
4. [First Annual Surveillance Report. Hokkaido Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Association Chum Salmon Set-net Fishery Certification No.: JFRCA 20F2200011 Date certified: February 28, 2019. Report Prepared: August 2019. On site assessment July 21, 2019.](#)

## ESSENTIAL COMPONENT D.5.02

*The standard requires that the assessment of the current status and trends of the stock under consideration considers total fishing mortality on that stock from all sources including discards, unobserved mortality, incidental mortality, unreported catches and catches in all fisheries over its entire area of distribution.*

### ■ WWF Japan comment

FMS need to add a requirement for publicly available scientific evidence in order to evaluate it properly because it is difficult to judge externally that the audit are conducted properly without enough transparency.

### ■ GSSI response

MEL-J is in alignment with Essential Component D.5.02. Based on the comment of WWF Japan, no additional information has been included in the final conclusion.

WWF Japan raises concern that FMS is currently lacking any requirement for publicly available scientific evidence in order to evaluate it properly. The EC states that the standard must require the collection and maintenance of adequate, reliable and current data and/or other information on non-target catches and discards in the unit of certification. Using publicly available scientific evidence is not required by this GSSI EC. However, the commenter could contact Japanese Fisheries Resource Conservation Association (JFRCA), the certification body, to obtain clarifications on the available scientific evidence used. Additionally, MEL has a clear and easily accessible point of contact and process for submission of comments at any time.

Regarding the delay in publication of the audit reports, JFRCA has measures to prevent recurrence and to make public reports part of the requirements for certification. Administrative procedures ensure that certification shall will not take effect until the audit reports are ready to be made public.

Updated JFRCA administrative procedure referenced:

S-7 is 認証判定書 “decision making on Certification” 申請者が同意した公開用の報告書が用意され、認証発効時に公開できる。A report for publication that the applicant has agreed to is prepared and can be published when the certification comes into effect and put in their procedure.

F-1 認証管理シート “certification management sheet”

The certification comes into effect when the assessment report is made public on the website.

As the GSSI benchmark tool requires transparency in a timely manner, including the public disclosure of audit reports, proof of alignment with this component will need to be verified during the MOCA at the one year mark following the benchmark recognition.

### **Conclusion on GSSI Essential Component D.5.02**

**Conclusion:** MEL is in alignment because requirement(s) in the Fisheries Management Standard (version 2.0) and indicator(s) in the Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1) state as follows;

Requirement 2.3 in the Fisheries Management Standard (version 2.0)

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.

Indicator(s) 2.3 (a) in the Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1)

- a. Whether the assessment of the stock under consideration considers trend and status on catch by fishery of which the unit of certification is a part and others and this assessment considers total fishing mortality on that stock from all sources such as discards, incidental mortality and catches in all fisheries over its entire area of distribution.
  - Data on the trend and status by fishery of which the unit of certification is a part
  - Data on the trend and status by other fisheries

Additional information for the above requirement(s) and indicator(s) can be found in the Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1): Requirements 2.3; Indicators 2.3 (a). p. 23-24.

Examples of the requirement(s) in use can be found in the Assessment Report Fisheries Management Standard (Salmon, Hokkaido): Summary Evidence and Evidence 2.3 (a). p. 53.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Fisheries Management Standard (version 2.0), 2018: Requirement(s) 2.3. p. 7.  
<https://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Fisheries-Management-StandardFMSver.2.0.pdf>
2. Fisheries Management Standard: Guidelines for Auditors – Indicators of Conformity – (version 2.1), 2019: Indicator(s) 2.3 (a). p. 23-24.  
<https://melj.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Fisheries-Management-Standard-Guidelines-for-Auditors-Indicators-of-Conformity-Version.-2.1.pdf>
3. Assessment Report Fisheries Management Standard (Salmon, Hokkaido), 2019: Summary Evidence and Evidence 2.3 (a). p. 53.
4. [First Annual Surveillance Report. Hokkaido Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Association Chum Salmon Set-net Fishery Certification No.: JFRCA 20F2200011 Date certified: February 28, 2019. Report Prepared: August 2019. On site assessment July 21, 2019.](#)

Many thanks again for participating in the Public Consultation and we do hope that the above responses have been helpful. We look forward to a continued collaboration and dialogue going forward.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Wisse', with a stylized, cursive script.

**Herman Wisse**  
GSSI Managing Director