**PRESS RELEASE: Experts, NGOs and retailers jointly** **call for urgent rethink from Marine Stewardship Council on shark finning**

* **Stakeholders including from NGOs, the seafood supply chain and retailers including M&S (UK), Migros (Switzerland) and Woolworths (South Africa) have written to the Marine Stewardship Council ahead of its upcoming Board meeting to urge rethink on shark finning.**
* **The signatories call on MSC to require a ‘Fins Naturally Attached’ policy without exemptions for all certified fisheries in line with global best practice.**
* **The signatories express concerns regarding the weaker proposal currently being deliberated on by MSC, which would continue to allow exemptions – “an industry-friendly rebranding of the status quo with very limited ability to drive change on the water”**

**London/ Zurich/ Cape Town, Thursday 16th December:** A group of concerned stakeholders, from the NGO, retail and supply sectors recently [wrote jointly](https://finfreemsc.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Letter-to-MSC-3-November-2021.pdf)  to the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) to request the organisation to urgently rethink its proposals on shark finning. The letter comes ahead of the final stages of MSC’s ongoing five-yearly Fisheries Standard Review process, for which shark finning is one of the topics on the agenda.

The letter notes the signatories’ longstanding and serious concerns about MSC’s requirements regarding shark finning. Specifically, the stakeholders denounce MSC’s inability to deliver on its stated policy of ‘zero tolerance’ towards shark finning and its failure to introduce a Fins Naturally Attached (FNA) requirement, in line with globally acknowledged best practice for preventing shark finning.

FNA as a prerequisite for certification of all fisheries interacting with sharks with no exemptions has been requested by stakeholders from across science, retail, the supply chain, and civil society for many years. The signatories also note a strong consensus for this approach in workshops and consultations conducted by MSC in 2019 and 2020 and therefore their disappointment at the weakened proposal presented by MSC this year. Although this proposal was overwhelmingly rejected in a stakeholder survey published in September, MSC has not indicated any intention for further proposals or consultations.

**Paul Willgoss, Director of Food Technology at M&S** said: “Fins Naturally Attached without exemptions is globally acknowledged as the only truly effective means of enacting a shark fin ban. Our policy has included a ban on shark finning for over a decade and we believe it must be a minimum requirement for fisheries seeking a sustainability certification. It was hugely encouraging to see so many stakeholders express their support for such an approach during last year’s workshops, and subsequently disappointing that MSC then presented a weaker proposal for consultation in June of this year.”

The proposal presented by MSC for consultation this summer was that fisheries where sharks are a target, or primary, species would be exempt from a Fins Naturally Attached approach and permitted to continue using an ‘alternative approach’.

**Iris Ziegler, Head of International Cooperation, Sharkproject International** said: “MSC’s proposal is extremely worrying due to the well-known loopholes of all existing alternative approaches. While MSC has sought to position its proposal as ‘Fins Naturally Attached’, it is in fact just an industry-friendly rebranding of the status quo with very limited ability to drive change on the water. With shark populations in drastic decline around the world, the time has passed for more half measures and it’s time for MSC to adopt a tried-and-tested policy: a Fins Naturally Attached policy without exemptions.”

The letter highlights that MSC’s proposal was consequently widely rejected in the most recent round of consultation: 66% of respondents felt it was not aligned with best practice and 68% that it was not acceptable.

On that basis, the letter concludes by highlighting that the MSC proposal ‘does not meet stakeholder expectations, does not represent best practice, and will not be effective in finally eradicating shark finning from certified fisheries’. The signatories therefore urge MSC to rethink its proposal and present an updated version for consultation ahead of the upcoming Board meeting where final decisions are expected on the updated Fisheries Standard Review.

**Migros** said: "As a cooperatively operating retailer we believe in transparency and believe our customers are entitled to know how the fish they buy has been caught and which impact this fishery has caused to other marine species. We know our customers want to be assured - as we want to - that tuna labelled as sustainably caught, has not been caught in fisheries associated with the finning of sharks. In order to implement a 'Zero Tolerance' policy on finning, we believe MSC must introduce 'Fins Naturally Attached' as a prerequisite for certification - without any exemptions."

**Latiefa Behardien, Woolworths Foods Chief Technology and Sustainability Officer** said: “Shark finning is an abhorrent practice and Woolworths South Africa fully supports the various global efforts to eradicate it, including the prohibition thereof in MSC certified fisheries. Seafood sustainability certification is an essential tool to drive the responsible production and consumption of seafood and the MSC’s position on shark finning is therefore critically important. While its prohibition of shark finning is laudable, to ensure that shark finning does not occur in MSC certified fisheries, the MSC must adopt a Fins Naturally Attached policy with no exemptions. The protection of vulnerable and endangered shark species is vital to maintain a healthy ocean and the MSC and other stakeholders in the seafood sustainability movement just cannot afford to be lenient on this matter.”

The MSC [responded](https://finfreemsc.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/MSC_Shark-Finning-Response_Concerned-Signatories-Letter.pdf) on 2nd December 2021 to the joint letter signatories, noting that they are “currently refining policy proposals” and that a “consolidated draft” of an updated Fisheries Standard will be released in early 2022 for a final 60-day Public Review. No commitment is made, as requested, to re-examining the issue of shark finning specifically or to engaging further with signatories ahead of the January board meeting.

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