

RESPONSIBLE SEAFOOD SOURCING

STANDARD OPERATIONS MANUAL

Everything you need to know about how
your organization can help improve
the fishing industry and preserve our oceans.



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Sustainable Fisheries
PARTNERSHIP





PART 1: INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

In recent years, market-based approaches to seafood sustainability have improved supply chains by promoting responsible fishing and sourcing practices. The growing number of seafood evaluation tools in Western markets has helped shift consumer demand toward more sustainable and responsible seafood options. The Certifications and Ratings Collaboration reported that in 2022 credible certified products comprised 11.3 million tons of fish or less than 13% of the world's total marine catch. While the majority of seafood comes from many developing countries in Asia, certified products are mostly available and consumed in developed markets in Europe and North America. Access to these globally recognized tools remains limited for small-scale fisheries in developing countries. This limits the advancement towards sustainability in important fishing regions within Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

The Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP), through the Fish Right Program of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), renewed discussions on seafood sustainability in the Philippines with the aim to advance the Sustainable Seafood Movement (SSM) in the country and recognize the need to develop standards that will highlight local fisheries' development, strengthen national markets for responsibly sourced seafood, and recognize non-certified fisheries for their improvement efforts.

Fish Right is a partnership between USAID and the Philippines' Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR). The program aims to promote sustainable and resilient fisheries by addressing biodiversity threats, enhancing marine ecosystem governance, and increasing fish biomass in select marine key biodiversity and fisheries management areas. Through partnerships with local communities, the private sector, and government partners, Fish Right works to expand the market for responsibly-caught seafood, create livelihood opportunities for fisherfolk, and incentivize sustainable fishing practices.

RESPONSIBLE SEAFOOD SOURCING

To promote the trade of responsibly sourced seafood in the country, SFP previously implemented a Buyer Engagement Program, now called Better Seafood Philippines (BSP) program, to create demand for responsible seafood consumption and promote public commitment to ongoing improvement efforts. Consequently, the Responsible Seafood Sourcing (RSS) Standard was developed to ensure actionable commitments and measurable targets.

Following a set of defined criteria and indicators, the RSS Standard helps define responsibly sourced seafood, looks at risks in supply chain processes, and identifies pathways to improve production and trade responsibly and equitably.

OBJECTIVES

From Producers and Suppliers to Buyers and the Market, the RSS Standard assures responsible seafood production throughout the supply chain to boost benefits and improve our national process toward responsible management of fisheries and ocean resources. The Standard is a set of criteria that assesses the performance of current seafood supply chain practices, from catching and sourcing to trading and buying. It uses market influence to incentivize responsible fishing, trading, and sourcing practices, resulting in improvements in fisheries over time. It also helps prevent illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and strengthen the livelihoods of local seafood producers.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Designed by SFP under the BFAR-USAID Fish Right Program, the RSS Standard was shaped with the help of the government, academia, civil society organizations, and the private sector to support the entire supply chain. It is intended to address the challenges facing SSM in the Philippines, and is periodically updated to provide the latest information and criteria for RSS that are contextual, inclusive, and fit for purpose. It adopts the principles of the 1995 UN FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, looking toward supporting the Philippines in meeting the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, particularly:



As a key tool of the BSP program, the RSS Standard also enables important contributions to SDGs 1, 2, 8, and 13 by facilitating collaborations among coastal communities and government agencies to strengthen livelihoods and food security while facilitating access to climate-resilient infrastructure and technologies.

To develop and finalize the tool, major steps are currently being undertaken. Among others, these include:

- Formation of a consultative body;
- Expert consultations and consensus-building on indicators and thresholds;
- Development of an operations manual, including a guide to compliance verification, compliance rating, and scoring;
- Development of a tracking system for RSS-compliant products and volumes traded

BENEFITS OF RSS

The RSS Standard provides new opportunities for improving legal compliance, traceability, transparency, and social and environmental responsibility. By continuously encouraging responsible fishing, trading, sourcing practices, and eco-friendly consumption, the Responsible Seafood Sourcing Standard aims to transform and enhance Philippine fisheries over time.

Producers and Suppliers

Buyers and Markets



Sustainability

Secure livelihood by ensuring a stable fisheries production, and enjoy recognition for helping protect the environment

Experience assured fresh seafood supply while ensuring healthy oceans and supporting local fishing communities



Legal Compliance

Enjoy preferential sourcing from buyers who want to support compliant fishing communities and suppliers

Highlight the organization's contribution to improving marine resource management by improving supply chain compliance



Traceability

Contribute to science-based decision-making for improved fisheries management through fish catch data collection

Minimize risk of IUU fishing within the organization's seafood supply chains



Transparency

Gain greater access to the latest market information and trends and secure social and financial equity

Have a better understanding of supply chains which helps increase brand value of products through improved communication of product origins and stories



Social Responsibility

Secure more socioeconomic benefits from equitable supply chains and healthy trading relationships

Align the organization's activities with the UN SDG Agenda and contribute to improving the well-being of workers and fishing communities through ethical and equitable production and manufacturing

PART II: UNDERSTANDING THE STANDARD

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The RSS Standard assessment and report utilize the following terms to help simplify the criteria for compliance.

Indicators/ Indicators of Compliance	Parameters used to assess performance against a criteria
Means of Verification (MOV)	Documents or tools that support or validate assessment results against specific criteria
Thresholds or Indicator Thresholds	Quantifiable level of compliance or “acceptability” against an indicator. Divided into: Best Practice, Acceptable, Needs Improvement, No Data

3	2	1	0
Best Practice	Acceptable	Needs Improvement	No Data
Highest threshold. It means achieving beyond the required compliance.	It means any of the following: Good, Satisfactory, Compliant, Sufficient.	It means any of the following: Lacking, Poor or Non-compliance, Requires further improvement. <small>Note: Some data or “bad” data is better than “No Data”</small>	Lowest threshold. It means there is no sufficient data to support the assessment.

CRITERIA FOR COMPLIANCE

There are four main criteria in the Standard, each with its own indicators:

LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Adherence to local and national regulatory requirements

- **Fisherfolk Registration** is the enlistment of fisherfolk in a government database.
- **Boat Registration** is the enlistment of a fishing boat or vessel in a government database.
- **Gear License** is a permit to fish using specific gear within a predetermined area at a specified time.
- **Record of IUU Violation** pertains to any documented violations within the last 12 months related to IUU fishing or any applicable fisheries management regulations.
- **Business Documentation Requirements** pertain to any documents needed to run a business in the Philippines.

TRACEABILITY

Availability of information on sourcing, production, processing, and trading of a product

- **LTP** is short for License to Transport Permit, a mandatory BFAR-issued permit to transport fishery products outside the municipality where it was landed.
- **Auxiliary Invoice** is an LGU-issued permit to transport fishery products upon payment of a fee.
- **Fish Catch Information** is any record detailing the species information, fishing gear or catching method, fishing grounds, and landing location of a specified product.

- **Product Information** records the scientific name (genus-level), local/common name, English/commercial name, volume, and fishing gear or catching method of a specified product.
- **Product Movement Information** is a record detailing a product's point of catch and its point of sale.

SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENT

Showcases actions toward improving fisheries and responsible seafood sourcing

- **Seafood Sourcing Policy** is an organization's written policy for the procurement of seafood that often espouses principles supporting responsible fisheries and/or seafood sustainability.
- **Gear Impact and Selectivity** pertain to the types of fishing equipment in line with responsible sourcing.
 - High selectivity of gears or catching method reduces bycatch (unintended catch).
 - Low-impact gears or catching method minimizes harm to the ocean and interrelated ecosystems
- **Endangered Threatened and Protected (ETP)/Prohibited Species** are any species of which marketing or trade is forbidden/regulated under any applicable international, national, and local regulations.
- **Product Portfolio** is a catalog of products listing the scientific names, commercial names, English and local names, volume, and product specifications of each catch.
- **Landing Sizes** refer to the size of fish upon harvest, usually measured in terms of length and in a few cases using weight or number of pieces per kilogram.
- **Fisheries Management Efforts** refer to activities undertaken by an organization that help support responsible fisheries management and biodiversity conservation.
- **Product Labeling** refers to product labels displaying information in accordance with Philippine legal requirements.

HUMAN AND SOCIAL WELFARE

Ensures proper working conditions and protects the rights of workers

- **Safety and Emergency Measures** refer to the presence of safety devices and knowledge of their use.
- **Gender Representation** relates to the recognition of women's roles and abilities through equal representation and participation.
- **Anti-Harassment and Non-Discrimination** refer to any procedures placed to protect workers from any form of abuse or discrimination.
- **Absence of Child Labor** means that there are no underage workers in accordance with international frameworks and Philippine laws.
- **Labor Laws** pertain to legal requirements on labor, safety, wages, and benefits in accordance with Philippine laws.
- **Responsible Seafood Economy** refers to the fair and equitable distribution of economic value associated with improved transparency in the trade and marketing of seafood products.

LEGAL BASIS

The criteria and indicators of the RSS Standard are based on relevant local and national regulations on Philippine fisheries, biodiversity, and labor, such as but not limited to, the Philippine Fisheries Code as amended by RA 10654, and the Labor Code of the Philippines (PD 442).

The Standard also uses international frameworks adopted by the Philippines, including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Flora and Fauna, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, in order to comply with a world-class standard on responsible sourcing.

PART III: PROCEDURE FOR ASSESSMENT

ELIGIBILITY

The RSS Standard assessment is open to all Philippine individuals and organizations in the business of fishing, sourcing, manufacturing, and retailing of seafood from our local waters.

The RSS Assessment is designed to assess 5 different key players in seafood supply chains.

5 KEY PLAYERS



PRODUCERS are fishers or fishing groups involved in harvesting seafood products and supporting activities.



COMMUNITY CONSOLIDATORS are individuals who consolidate seafood from producers in smaller quantities and distribute products within a limited geographic location, oftentimes at a community or municipality level. Transactions are often subsistence and informal in nature, thus lacking formal business documentation.



SMALL-SCALE BUYERS AND PROCESSORS are individuals or groups of individuals with low capital and low per capita income who buy wholesale fish at one point of the supply chain, consolidate and/or process them, and sell them to the next player or in retail (as in the case of community-based processors).



INSTITUTIONAL DISTRIBUTORS AND PROCESSORS are businesses with medium to high capital that generate regular revenues and employ several people, who buy wholesale fish at one point of the supply chain, consolidate and/or process them, and sell them to the next player.



END-BUYERS are individuals or businesses that buy fish at wholesale prices and sell them at retail prices directly to consumers. These may include Hotel, Restaurant, and Catering (HoReCa) institutions, modern trade channels, and online retail outlets.

In order to enhance our Philippine's fishing industry, each Key Player in the seafood supply chain must be properly assessed. Any organization that wishes to be assessed must have a representative who will be responsible for their company's compliance with the Standard.

Application is voluntary. No direct fees are associated with the assessment.*

*As of August 2023. Costs related to the requirements of the assessment still apply and will be shouldered by the applicant.

SCOPE OF ASSESSMENT

This essential assessment tool covers resource users and supply chain players engaged in fishing, sourcing, manufacturing, and retailing of wild-caught seafood harvested in the Philippines. It focuses on legal compliance and measures social and environmental responsibility in Philippine-based seafood supply chains.



Photo Credit: SeaTrace International

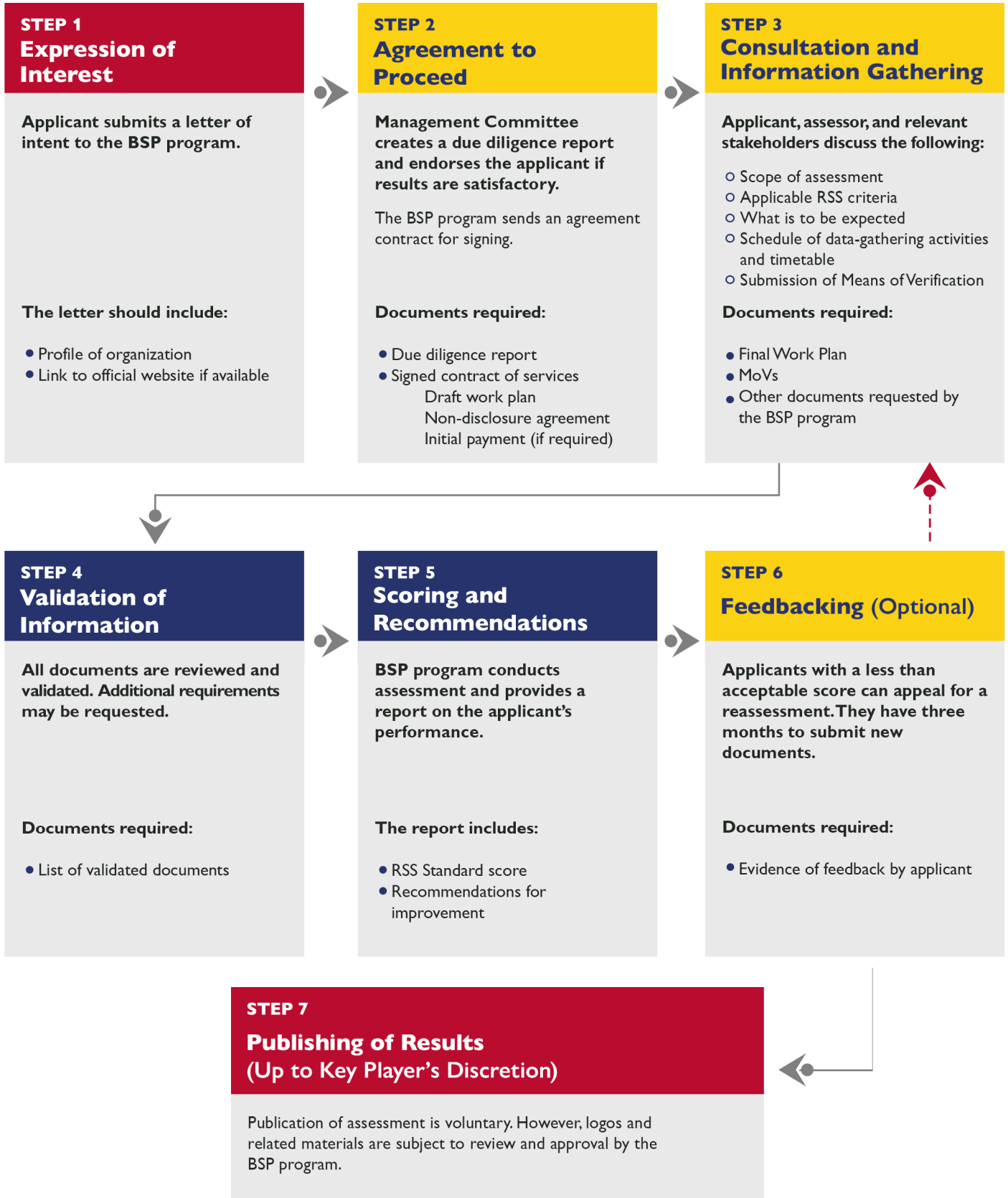


The RSS Standard encourages the participation of fisherfolk-operated entities that have the capacity to source seafood and transact business with a buyer.

Note that this assessment is NOT a certification nor does it replace a certification.

GENERAL STEPS FOR ASSESSMENT

Eligible members of Philippine-based seafood supply chains who seek assessment can follow these simple steps:



CAUTIONARY NOTES AND MARKET CLAIMS

The RSS Standard does not aim to replace certifications and cannot be used to certify any environmental credentials of products or processes. Fishery commodities and supply chains that meet the RSS Standard may claim to be "responsibly sourced," "responsibly caught," or "responsibly harvested." No other terms are allowed unless otherwise stated in the labeling program. Additionally, claims must be supported by evidence (e.g., assessment results) that are available upon request at any given time.

The use of the assessor's logos and/or relevant markings in marketing and promotional materials requires prior written consent from the owner of the standard or the designated body. The use of logos and/or markings on product packaging and labels must follow the rules and regulations under the labeling program.



VERIFICATION

An appropriate verification framework and database are currently being designed to strengthen the credibility of the Standard. The development of the system will consider accessibility, affordability, and appropriateness to the realities on the ground while being able to meet the needs of the market.

The BSP program will undertake utmost due diligence in performing assessments, gathering evidence, scoring outputs and results, and ensuring the legitimacy and validity of source documents. A third-party audit may be performed on a predetermined cycle to ensure that label holders or Standard participants remain compliant until another full-cycle assessment is due. Procedures for auditing will be described in the verification framework and may include spot checks for products carrying the label, reviews of marketing materials published online, and cross-checking with government databases to verify claims.

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Applicants or assessees have the right to complain or appeal with regard to assessment and verification procedures, results, and outcomes. Complaints and appeals must be made in writing, through mail or email, to the assessor. The assessor will directly discuss these concerns and find a resolution as soon as possible. If the concern is not resolved internally between the assessor and assessee, it will be referred to the Management Committee for a formal resolution process.

Likewise, external stakeholders (not affiliated with the applicant or assessee) who have concerns about results and outcomes or particular information published on an official site or portal may submit a written report to the Management Committee for review. If the Management Committee finds sufficient grounds to discuss and, if needed, resolve the concern, the complaint or appeal must go through the resolution process.

PROCESS FOR RESOLUTION



OWNERSHIP OF STANDARD, OUTPUTS, AND OTHER MATERIALS

The development of the RSS Standard, currently owned by the SFP and operated under the BSP program, was made possible through the partnership of the DA-BFAR and USAID under the Fish Right Program.

Any modification of the Standard without prior written consent from the owner and authorized personnel is strictly prohibited. Present and future modules, training materials, manuals, visual designs, and other documents produced for this tool are currently owned by SFP unless otherwise stated. Only fisheries and supply chain assessment results and outputs will be jointly owned by the BSP program and the assessee. The use and utilization of assessment results and outputs will be under a separate agreement between the assessor and the assessee.





LET'S WORK TOGETHER

FOR A BETTER SEAFOOD PHILIPPINES



If you have any questions, feedback, or suggestions about the RSS Standard and its related documents, please contact Better Seafood Philippines through the following channels:



Email:

info@betterseafoodphilippines.com



Website:

<https://betterseafoodph.org/>



Social Media Pages:



facebook.com/betterseafoodph



[linkedin.com/company/
better-seafood-philippines](https://linkedin.com/company/better-seafood-philippines)