

NFFF/ MSC Seaspiracy Q&A

6th April 2021

Recorded.

Useful references

MSC response to Seaspiracy <https://www.msc.org/media-centre/news-opinion/news/2021/03/26/response-to-netflix-seaspiracy-film>

<https://sustainablefisheries-uw.org/fact-check/how-many-fisheries-are-overfished/>

<https://sustainablefisheries-uw.org/science-of-seaspiracy/>

For interest, this is a recent blog post from Seafish, collating a number of points in response to some of the issues raised in the Seaspiracy documentary <https://www.seafish.org/about-us/news-blogs/responding-to-seaspiracy-10-reasons-to-feel-good-about-seafood-in-the-uk/>

Q&A

Q. Did you respond to the film makers before final production, and if not, why not?

A. We declined an interview with the 'Seaspiracy' production team because we did not feel that they would represent our views fairly. In their previous film 'Cowspiracy' they made it clear that they believed that there was no such thing as sustainable fishing, and we were concerned that the film would not portray a balanced view of the issues. The filmmaker alleges there is no clear definition of sustainable fishing yet films himself scrolling through the MSC website. Our definition of sustainable fishing is clearly presented on our website, yet he does not mention this in the film, again suggesting he was not interested in hearing our perspective as it did not fit with his pre-determined narrative. We also know through post-production editing, statements by experts can be taken out of context to communicate a different message than intended. We were not certain that we would be featured in the film before it was actually released on Netflix

The MSC had no second opportunity to contribute or reflect on the film and we were not certain that we would be featured in the film before it was actually released on Netflix. Some organisations featured were not told they'd even be included. The NFFF weren't approached either, despite the industry being referenced to on plastic straw usage. There has also been frustration from marine scientists who weren't consulted on their expertise in the making of the program, yet have had their work discredited in the messaging.

Our work now is to reach those who've been influenced by the documentary.

Q. Has Netflix come back with an invitation to respond to the documentary?

A. Netflix have not been in touch with the MSC, nor has the MSC lodged a formal complaint to Netflix. Content on the streaming platform is incredibly diverse, and has no consistency or preference in what it shows.

Q. How are we (NFFF/Fishers/ industry and customers) going to move forward? What kind of balanced response can be produced?

A. As the damage has been done, we need to move forward positively and proactively. There is a need in the short term for consumer-facing material Fish and Chip shops can hand out or display;

which the MSC will collaborate with the industry on. National Fish and Chip day can be a pivotal moment where the fishing industry, importers, shops and the MSC can come together for the consumer and rebuild trust in seafood sustainability.

The MSC will be launching its annual Sustainable Seafood Week (SSW) in September 2021 for the second year. SSW is a key consumer-facing campaign to build awareness and trust in MSC-certified seafood. For partners using social media to promote their business, the MSC have and are still producing content that can be shared by the shops.

MSC also conduct a consumer insights survey every two years, since 2016, with our next survey not due until 2022. However, we may look to conduct an abbreviated version sooner to see if there has been any change in recognition, understanding or trust of the MSC label. The MSC are very interested to know if Fish and Chip shops customers are asking about the documentary or sustainability. The MSC has in fact received enquiries for shop certification since the documentary, which is promising.

Some viewers will be taking Seaspiracy at face value, so a short film like The Scottish White Fish Producers Association (SWFPA) "[Sea to Plate](#)" short film could be a good format to quickly communicate the response, perhaps using archived footage. The message should be balanced with positive stories as well as recognising the issues. The pandemic has heightened public sensitivity online, and a video will be more impactful than a written statement.

Q. What positive stories would work best for Fish and Chip consumers?

A. Themes mentioned by participants were *fishing waste, by catch and impact to the seabed*. Stories that explain how the MSC is guaranteed as sustainable, particularly for the haddock fishery, would also be useful. Fish and Chip shops are a key point of contact with consumers where more knowledge about the MSC can be imparted, particularly compared to a supermarket where there is less interaction with individual shoppers. We will need to make it easy for shops to understand and communicate why the MSC can guarantee sustainability to customers, and that it's a legitimate answer to many of the issues raised in the documentary. If the messaging is clear for shops, then it could also encourage growth in MSC certified shops.

Q. What has the reaction been from supermarkets?

A. The responses to the briefing released by the MSC have been overwhelmingly supportive from retailers and brand partners. They know what the MSC does and how we operate, and believe in the credibility of the MSC standard. The most discussion around the film has been in the UK and US markets where the documentary has had the highest views, but as a global organisation we have shown from previous negative media that we can withstand misrepresentations of our organisation. There's still very strong commitment, and there's no expectation for the label to disappear from supermarket shelves. The conversations with partners have been fairly pragmatic in how they expect the documentary to fare, and there's a case for not pushing back too strong and or being over-defensive. Many have reaffirmed their commitment to the program and recognise that it has a transformational role to play, delivering real and lasting change to the way our oceans are fished, by rewarding best practice.

Q. Will there be a Seaspiracy 2?

A. The MSC are not aware of a second film being produced.

Q. Positive health benefits of fish– is that something the MSC will promote?

A. The MSC launched a New Year campaign in the UK that focused on the health benefits of seafood, and it remains a key message promoted by the MSC US team. Brands often make the connection to health on packaging and as we come out of the pandemic, health will be of high public priority and this will be something that has a place in our communications going forward.

Q. Has McDonalds responded to the MSC?

A. They were emailed last week with the same statement the Fish and Chip sector received, offering support from the MSC. They thanked us for the response, with no further comments. MSC thinks that may mean they do not consider the impact is strong enough to impact business. They have been a strong communicator in the US on the fisheries they source from, so there may be future opportunities to reach their wide audience.

Q. How do we respond to the interested, engaged listeners as a united industry and on mass?

A. The industry usually has the answers for these questions. The suggestions to roll out material for Fish and Chip shops to share as well as promoting National Fish and Chip day and SSW are opportunities for collaboration and education.

MSC want to reassure the industry that they will continue to support the industry, and suggested holding these round tables semesterly to help answer questions from the industry.

Next steps:

- Create a response road map based on collaboration between the MSC and the industry, with supporting material (such as an in-shop poster) available as soon as possible.