

MSC suspends certifications of French, Spanish sardine fisheries

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) announced Tuesday that it is suspending its certifications for the purse seine sardine fisheries south of Brittany, France, and in Spain's Bay of Biscay, starting on March 12.

The notice of suspension issued by independent certifier Bureau Veritas, follows publication, in July 2018, of updated scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) that revised the understanding of the sustainability of the sardine stock and consequently advised a reduction in fishing effort, MSC explained.

The Bay of Biscay sardine stock remains healthy, but the fishing effort is now considered to be significantly greater than the maximum sustainable yield, the organization has determined. This puts sardines, low trophic-level and short-lived species, especially at danger because they can experience large fluctuations in stock size over very short timeframes.

The fisheries have 90 days, from Feb. 11, to prepare a corrective action plan that demonstrates mechanisms are in place to ensure catches are in line with the new ICES scientific advice. Otherwise the certificates must be withdrawn, MSC said.

"This news is extremely disappointing for the French and Spanish sardine fishers who have worked hard together over the years to manage their fishing effort and their fisheries sustainability," said Edouard le Bart, deputy director of South Europe and AMESA. "This new scientific advice changes the game, but the efforts the fisheries have made so far are not in vain. On the contrary, the sardine stock remains healthy, and I strongly encourage fisheries to continue efforts to adapt to these new circumstances and, I hope, to recover their certification in the future."

The purse seine sardine fishery in the south of Brittany was first certified for MSC in 2009 and re-certified in January 2017. The Spanish Bay of Biscay purse seine sardine fishery was first certified in January 2017.