The Seafood Industry Guide to FIPs
An introduction to setting up and running a fishery improvement project
What is a FIP?
Fishery improvement projects, better known as FIPs, are a pragmatic, stepwise approach to enhancing the sustainability of a fishery, encouraging harvesting to continue, while continual improvements are achieved.

FIPs bring together an alliance of seafood buyers, retailers, processors, suppliers, producers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with an interest in a specific fishery to encourage improvements in policy and management at government level. At the same time, FIPs provide motivation for changes to be made to working practices at fishery level, minimizing issues such as illegal fishing, bycatch, and environmental impacts.

Each FIP presents a different challenge, but the common thread is that the supply chain plays a critical role in helping a fishery on the journey toward sustainability.

Sometimes a FIP works toward third-party certification, and sometimes it simply addresses priority issues facing the fishery. Whatever the long-term aim, all FIPs follow a structured path that takes into account the needs of both the fishery and the stakeholders involved.

From tentative beginnings, FIPs are fast becoming valuable tools that are helping businesses to reduce the risk to their reputation and enhance the long-term security of seafood supplies.

Why do We need FIPs?
According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in 2009, 57% of the world’s fish stocks were fully exploited, meaning they were close to or at maximum sustainable production with no room for expansion of the catch. A further 29.9 percent of fisheries were overexploited, and just 12.7 percent were not fully exploited.

Because overexploited stocks perform well below their potential, they need strict management plans to rebuild stock abundance and to restore productivity to sustainable levels. Fisheries can also have problems with bycatch of unwanted species (such as turtles) as well as the impact of particular kinds of fishing gear on the seabed. All of these issues pose problems for the seafood supply chain through impacting the security of supply and creating reputational risks for public-facing brands and retailers.

FIPs represent a dynamic way of bringing together those groups that have an interest in a fishery and creating an improvement program to gradually fix outstanding problems. Sometimes the project may lead to some form of certification, but for other fisheries it’s enough just to tackle the main challenges.

Seafood buyers provide a direct economic incentive for fisheries to make the necessary changes by offering market access while improvements are being made, provided that agreed targets are met. By supporting FIPs, retailers and processors are able to maintain or widen the diversity of their seafood offering, while enhancing their reputation for responsible business practices.
**VIETNAM TRAWL FISHERY FIPs**

UK supermarket chain Morrisons is involved as a major stakeholder in two trawl fishery FIPs in Vietnam where the fisheries generate fishmeal for aquaculture feed.

“We decided to work with SFP to get two pilot projects up and running, and believe it is part of our responsibility as a retailer to get it right for our customers,” said Huw Thomas, Fisheries & Aquaculture Manager for Morrisons. “Together, we can make a difference!”

Morrisons used contacts from their own supply chains to help bring other stakeholders together, including feed companies, pangasius processors, local fishing associations, shrimp farmers, major wholesalers and distributors, NGOs, and other European retailers.

“Our involvement was a key point in moving effort beyond roundtable discussions and into action,” said Thomas. “So far we have brought retailers and global brands together, coordinating and understanding the supply chain in order to develop work plans for the projects in Vietnam.”

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**PUBLIX AND FIPs**

Publix was one of the first retailers in the US to partner with an NGO to assess their seafood products and develop a sustainable seafood policy.

The company was an early adopter of the FIP approach and supported their suppliers in initiating projects before the practice became more commonplace.

In the past few years, Publix has played a key role in bringing NGOs together with suppliers, fishermen, fishing associations, fishery managers, and other key stakeholders in the Florida region, in an effort to secure sustainable local seafood supplies. They are currently involved in FIPs for Gulf of Mexico reef fish and shrimp.

“We are firm believers in the continuous improvement approach for driving change in fisheries. It is a far more effective tool than red-listing a fishery because it does not have sustainability certification,” said Guy Pizutti, Seafood Category Manager for Publix.

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**SRI LANKAN TUNA FIP**

In the UK, New England Seafood is leading a FIP for Sri Lanka tuna, one of the major products it supplies to the retail and food service industry.

Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) originally identified Indian Ocean yellowfin and bigeye tuna as stocks in need of better management and convened a meeting of key UK tuna buyers, who agreed to get involved in pressing for change. The group gained the trust of the Sri Lanka Government, got other stakeholders involved, and identified measures to achieve improvements in sustainability, before launching the FIP in 2011.

“Progress can be frustrating at times, and there is a need for partners to be resolute about their goals, but results are now being achieved in our FIP,” explained Lucy Blow, sustainability director for New England Seafood.

That progress includes the introduction of fishing logbooks to improve data collection, training sessions for fishermen to help them avoid capture of or damage to non-target marine wildlife, and an on-board scientific observer program to monitor interactions with sharks, marine birds, and sea mammals.

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**THE BROWN CRAB FIP**

In the Orkney Isles, UK retailer M&S has teamed up with WWF and Orkney Sustainable Fisheries in a FIP to improve the brown crab fishery, which provides a popular product for its customers.

Orkney fishermen land around one quarter of the Scottish brown crab catch and fish them using lines of creels (traps) strung out on the seabed. This ensures that the fishery has a low impact on the environment, but not enough is currently known about the stock.

“Our customers expect us to have sustainability credentials of the highest quality, and because they love the taste of Orkney crab, we are pleased to help ensure the fishery is well managed and sustainable,” said Hannah MacIntyre, fisheries and aquaculture manager for M&S.

She explained that the project is supporting fishermen to record the size, numbers, and location of crabs, along with other marine life caught in the pots. Undersized crabs are being tagged and released back into the sea to find out more about their movements. The data collected will be used to develop a harvesting strategy to maintain the marine environment, sustain the fishery, and continue supporting the livelihoods of Orkney fishermen.
### ANOVA AND FIPS

Anova Food LLC, a Florida-based importer of tuna, teamed up with USAID and WWF to found Fishing and Living, an organization that develops and promotes FIPs for tuna fisheries in Indonesia and the Western Pacific. The initiative has FIPs in Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Western Central Pacific.

“It’s really up to industry, not just NGOs, to take the lead and develop FIPs,” explained Mark MacPherson, sustainability management consultant to Anova Food. “It’s easier and more effective for companies involved in a fishery to do FIPs themselves and not just farm it out to an NGO.”

“All the Fishing and Living FIPs are structured to follow the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership framework, because we want everything we do to be transparent, public, and credible,” he said.

### WEGMANS AND FIPS

Wegmans is a US retailer that has been involved in many FIPs. Carl Salamone is Vice President of Food and Sustainability and has some useful advice to those starting out with improvement projects:

- Face-to-face meetings are important. Remember that asking for a FIP can seem like a challenge, so expect skepticism and be prepared to reassure suppliers and fishermen that this is a joint project with benefits for all.

- A Memorandum of Understanding is important. The document should be clear about everyone’s intentions, but also non-binding. Getting the legal department to check it is a useful precaution.

- The supplier is the crucial link in the chain when creating a FIP and needs to become a positive participant before a project can succeed.

### TAMPA BAY FISHERIES AND FIPS

Tampa Bay Fisheries Inc. is a Florida-based supplier of private-label seafood as well as branded products. Robert Fields, Vice President of Sales, has helped initiate many improvement projects and has a few tips for how to succeed in persuading the supply chain to participate in FIPs:

- Always send the “right” person to the meeting – which means someone who can talk convincingly about FIPs in non-technical language and has enough seniority to negotiate and make decisions.

- Understand the risks and rewards of a FIP and be able to communicate them to suppliers. For instance, understand the costs but also the benefits of a FIP and be sure to emphasize that the project is a joint venture and that all the participants are going to take responsibility for making it a success.

According to Fields, there are three excuses that he always hears from reluctant FIP participants. They are (along with his suggested solutions):

1. “It is too expensive” – so be sure to understand the actual costs and the cash value of the benefits
2. “We are in good shape and don’t need a FIP” – have a good briefing on the state of the fishery and be prepared to share it and discuss it
3. “We don’t have the technical skill” – be prepared to offer assistance or point toward an NGO or consultant that can help.
1. IDENTIFY THE FISHERY

Retailers and processors will use many different criteria when identifying fisheries in need of FIPs within their supply chain. Such criteria might include commercial importance, the scale of environmental impact, consumer awareness, the amount of leverage to achieve positive change, and so on.

However, although retailers and processors often take a leading role, the success of FIPs in helping fisheries to improve their sustainability has led to a growing number of fisheries organizations taking the initiative themselves. Consequently, a potential FIP can be identified by any organization closely associated with a fishery and that includes the producers as well as the buyers.

2. FORM THE FIP

If you are clear about which fishery you want to improve, it is time to find some allies. You can try to go it alone, but unless you have a lot of time, expertise, and contacts on hand, you will probably find it a frustrating experience. Usually several important stakeholders can be identified in a fishery and they can all be invited to volunteer as FIP participants. However, a small, tight knit group, all committed to the aims of the FIP, is probably ideal, whereas a large gathering can be unwieldy and possibly unworkable.

Who might want to be involved? Sound out your own contacts and ask them to sound out theirs. In this way you can build up a supply chain map and identify the key influencers. These might include catchers, fishery managers, processors, distributors, importers and exporters, wholesalers, and food service companies, as well as NGOs such as WWF and SFP or a small, local NGO. You may also need to get local and national governments involved in the process, depending on what you need to achieve with your FIP.

Involvement can be as a formal participant, providing funds and guidance, attending meetings, carrying out improvement activities, lobbying government bodies, etc., or as an informal stakeholder, providing input and assistance as and when required.

Once a group has been brought together, it is important to set out roles and to identify who is responsible for leading the FIP. Generally companies with the greatest interest in a fishery take on this role, and their energy and commitment will make things happen.

Businesses with in-house capacity and expertise can usually run a FIP themselves using publicly available tools (like those available from SFP). However, if you don’t have the capacity or time to run a FIP it’s quite easy to find a consultant to do the work and the costs can be shared across all participants in the project. SFP is developing a directory of FIP consultants to help in finding professional assistance.

A formalized written commitment of involvement by formal participants is recommended to ensure a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities. A non-binding Memorandum of Understanding is often the best option. A template for this is on the SFP website (a link is provided in the Resources section of this document, below).

With the foundations of the FIP firmly in place, it is time to do some research on the fishery. Resources to help you research a fishery might include FishSource profiles, trade reviews, and market research data.

All of the information can be gathered together into a pre-FIP plan, which provides a useful high level overview of the fishery and the management issues and challenges it faces on the road to sustainability. The pre-FIP plan should also contain a timeline for how the ensuing steps of the FIP are expected to progress. This plan can be shared with the group. A link to a suggested Pre-FIP Plan template is listed in the Resources section, below.
The information should also be made available to buyers, suppliers, and other stakeholders, along with information about the FIP participants and stakeholders. A more in-depth white paper can be written to provide further detailed information, if required. A link to a white paper template is listed in the Resources section, below.

3. EVALUATE THE FISHERY

The next step is to evaluate the fishery to identify the specific areas where improvement needs to happen. Sometimes this can be done through a formal pre-assessment for a certification scheme (such as the Marine Stewardship Council) but a simpler approach could involve creating a fishery-specific evaluation using the fishery profile on FishSource. It is also possible to conduct a gap analysis between the requirements of a specific certification and the current situation in the fishery, without actually commissioning a formal pre-assessment.

4. DEVELOP A WORKPLAN

You will now be ready to prepare a workplan, which sets out the agreed actions and timelines. FIP participants should meet in person to develop the plan and be guided by the evaluation.

If an MSC pre-assessment (or similar) was undertaken, the measures identified to achieve sustainability will form the basis of the FIP workplan. However, if little is known about the size of the catch or stock status, the workplan will initially focus on addressing fundamental data deficiencies in the fishery, and more specific improvement activities can be added as additional information is gathered. If using an evaluation based on FishSource, the priority issues should become clear fairly rapidly and will then shape the content of the plan.

SFP offers a detailed workplan template that is based on the MSC methodology (see Resources section). However, if the fishery is not planning to seek certification, an easier approach is to create a simpler plan that just addresses the priority issues.

It is very important that the workplan is a public document, available on a website, and that its contents are communicated to all the groups that have an interest in the fishery.

5. CREATE A REPORTING SYSTEM

It is essential that the FIP establish a system to ensure that progress on activities is tracked and reported publicly (whether progress is good or not). The monitoring system needs to be clearly based on the workplan and be made public via a website so that all interested groups can view the information. There should be a progress update every 3 months. Regular public reporting helps give FIPs credibility throughout the seafood supply chain and shows buyers evidence of genuine progress.

6. IMPLEMENT THE FIP

Put the workplan into action! This means starting the necessary tasks, encouraging other participants to be supportive, and keeping a keen eye on progress. SFP advises FIPs to try to achieve some sort of solid result (change in management or change in fishing practices) within one year of announcing the FIP, since this shows that the FIP is generating real and measurable benefits.
Funding a FIP

Generally, FIPs need funds for two specific needs—to pay for a fishery evaluation and to pay for the actions required to implement the workplan. These costs can be identified in advance and discussed among FIP participants. General administrative costs associated with running the FIP can be absorbed by FIP participants using their own resources or through the services of a FIP implementation consultant.

Funding for a FIP may be available from national and international grant bodies, but the first place to look is within the supply chain with a view to sharing the cost. It is worth reminding stakeholders that FIPs are fast becoming a normal part of doing business, and need to be seen as an accepted commercial cost, just like that of meeting food safety or traceability standards.

FIPs have been funded in many different ways: by a single company; by multiple companies; by a foundation, an NGO, or an international development agency; and through creative cost sharing, such as self-assessed taxing. A link to a budget template is listed in the Resources section and more information about funding a FIP is available by contacting SFP directly.

RESOURCES

Templates and Basic Documents

Links to a number of resources that will help you develop and deliver your FIP can be found in the SFP FIP tool kit. The tool kit includes templates for FIP agreements, white papers, pre-FIP plans, workplans, budgets and other useful guidance materials.

CASE STUDIES

A series of case studies, which look at the work involved in creating and running a successful FIP, are available on the SFP website, and are recommended as background reading. WWF also runs a useful website dedicated to their own FIPs.

You can also examine information profiles on all current FIPs as well as additional resources at a dedicated website, The FIP Directory.
USEFUL ORGANIZATIONS

Funding Opportunities:

DISNEY WORLDWIDE CONSERVATION FUND
www.thewaltdisneycompany.com/citizenship/environmental-stewardship/
disney-worldwide-conservation-fund

THE DAVID AND LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION
www.packard.org/what-we-fund/local-grantmaking/conservation-and-science/
how-to-get-support

SEA PACT
http://www.seapact.org

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES FUND
www.resourceslegacyfund.org

USAID – GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTAL ALLIANCES
www.usaid.gov/gda

NGO PROGRAMS

CONSERVATION ALLIANCE FOR SEAFOOD SOLUTIONS
www.solutionsforseafood.org

EARTH ISLAND INSTITUTE
www.earthisland.org

FISHSOURCE
www.fishsource.com

FISHWISE
www.fishwise.org/services

GULF OF MAINE RESEARCH INSTITUTE
www.gmri.org

NEW ENGLAND AQUARIUM
www.neaq.org/conservation_and_research/index.php

SEAFOOD WATCH BUSINESS PROGRAM
www.seafoodwatch.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/sfw_restaurants_partner.aspx

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES PARTNERSHIP
www.sustainablefish.org

WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE
www.wwf.org