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FIRST STEPS TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL FISHERIES CERTIFICATION CONSIDERING THE STANDARD OF THE MARINE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (MSC): THE CASE OF OPTUNA & ISLATUNA, ARTISANAL LIVE BAIT TUNA FLEETS (CANARY ISLANDS, SPAIN)

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According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP 2009) "*(...) at the present time, the MSC label is seen as something of the 'gold standard' of eco-labels"* (…) "*The MSC is an independent, global, non-profit organization whose role is to recognize well-managed fisheries and to harness consumer preference for seafood products bearing the MSC label of approval*". In the Canary Islands the Producers Organization (OPP) OPTUNA (Lanzarote) and ISLATUNA (Tenerife) are estimated to capture around 60% of the main tuna species. The purpose of our research was to conduct a pre-evaluation of the life bait tuna fishery developed by these OPP to assess the possibility of initiating, with the best guarantees, an evaluation process for achieving the certification of the fishery according to the principles and criteria for sustainability fishing of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). We follow the requirements and guidance of the MSC (version 1.3). Also, we have consulted various sources of information (ICCAT, government, scientific databases, legislative bulletins, own data - unpublished - collected in various research projects on fisheries in the Canary Islands). In addition, we established contact with MSC during the process to make the best possible adaptation to their requirements. Finally, we visited the islands of Lanzarote and Tenerife to interview the managers of the OPP who provided key information about the organization and the fishing activity conducted. We define 5 Units of Certification (UoC) for live bait, considering the 5 main tuna species of commercial interest ("bonito listado" · *Katsuwonus pelamis* · SKJ – "barrilote" · *Thunnus alalunga* · ALB – "rabil" or "albacora" · *Thunnus albacares* · YFT – "tuna" o "albacora" · *Thunnus obesus* · BET – "patudo o atún rojo" · *Thunnus thynnus* · BFT). According to the methodology of the MSC standard, to consider that a fishery is likely to pass a process of evaluation, scoring of each of the 3 core Principles (1/ Sustainable fish stocks, 2/ Minimising environmental impact, 3/ Effective management) must be greater than 80. Our results indicate that UoC-SKJ could pass an evaluation process. On the other hand, the UoC-BET could also be close to pass. Of note, we have been conservative in our ratings since we were in a framework of a pre-assessment. As general recommendations, to fulfill MSC requirements we strongly recommend an analysis of the bait characteristics and its impact on tuna and other fisheries in the Canary Islands.

Project funded by the "Eje 4"- Sustainable Development of Fisheries Areas, co-financed by the European Union through the European Fisheries Fund (EFF), the "Consejería de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca y Aguas del Gobierno de Canarias) and the "Ministerio de Agricultura. Alimentación y Medioambiente del Gobierno de España".

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Keywords: artisanal fisheries; certification; MSC; live bait; tuna; Canary Islands