



FIP Progress Ratings:

A standardized tool for evaluating FIP progress

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Introduction

This guidance document describes Sustainable Fishery Partnership's (SFP's) updated tool for evaluating fishery improvement project (FIP) progress. It provides background describing the previous method and its limitations, useful definitions and guidelines, and details on the current methodology. The FIP progress ratings tool laid out in this document is the only of its kind currently in the public domain. One feature that separates it from other organizations' "FIP Trackers" is the application of time benchmarks to quickly understand the rate at which a fishery is improving. Generally, the more regularly and frequently improvements are being made, the better the progress rating.

The FIP progress ratings tool is not intended as a final determination of a FIP. It provides a quick reference metric of improvement progress in a fishery mainly by tracking the frequency of improvements in fishery policies/practices and actual improvements "in the water." For many users of this tool, due diligence is still required to understand details such as what type of improvements are (or are not) being made and possibly what activities have happened, have not happened, and are planned.

This guidance document is available on [SFP's website](#) and the tool is free for anyone to use. Actual progress ratings of public FIPs are shown on the "Improvement" tab of FIP fishery profiles that are on SFP's [FishSource.com](#). For questions or comments, please contact Braddock Spear at braddock.spear@sustainablefish.org.

Background

In 2007, SFP started using a simple method for evaluating FIP progress. We defined five (5) "stages" of achievement:

Stage #	Description
1	Fishery evaluation or improvement recommendations made public
2	FIP members are organized (e.g., MOU signed) and they are evaluating the fishery
3	Workplan activity is undertaken, and must include efforts by the FIP participants to influence regulators and catchers as appropriate
4	Regulatory policy change or regulator action to improve the fishery, or fishing practice change to improve the fishery
5	Positive change in the water (e.g., increase in biomass, increase in population of impacted PET species, decrease in habitat impacted) as reported publicly

The stages are independent of the underlying status of the fishery (i.e., a fishery could be rated high, medium, or low risk for its sustainability, and still have a FIP at any stage). Once a FIP reaches a particular stage, it is always referred to as at least that stage. Thus the SFP FIP stage measures the "high water mark" for the FIP.

Limitations with this method of only referring to a FIP's stage include:

- The absence of thorough guidance about whether a FIP was good or not, and the implication that any Stage 4 FIP was "good"

- No penalty for FIPs that were stalled (e.g., no differentiation between FIPs that reached Stage 4 and never had another result from those that continually delivered Stage 4 results)
- Lack of clarity about what improvements constitute Stage 4 and 5 results
- No measure of the completeness of the FIP (i.e., did it have activities planned or underway to strengthen all known weaknesses?).

The methodology described below includes features to address all of these limitations.

Definitions and Guidelines

To evaluate progress, at least three key components need to be understood. First, how structured a FIP is and the current scope of improvements are critical. Second, it's important for FIP implementers and stakeholders to know what indicators are used to determine whether a particular FIP stage has been triggered. And third, a FIP start date is necessary for determining a FIP's rate of progress.

Type of FIP

The methodology uses the following categories of FIPs to help determine a FIP progress rating (these largely match up with the [Conservation Alliance FIP Guidelines](#)):

- Basic FIP (includes all of the requirements listed)
 - Publicly announced with a list of participants
 - Public evaluation of the fishery(ies) is available (e.g., MSC pre-assessment, FishSource evaluation, other)
 - Public workplan describing planned activities on one or more sustainability issues (e.g., fishery performance criteria scoring less than 80 against the MSC standard)
 - Regular public reporting of progress against the workplan (see the preferred [template](#) and [guidance](#)).¹
- Comprehensive FIP (in addition to requirements of a Basic FIP)
 - Public workplan includes comprehensive scoring estimates across all 31 of the MSC criteria
 - Activities planned against all of the 31 MSC criteria that are estimated to score < 80 (except where some activities are “to be determined/TBD” because the need for and nature of the activity depends on the results of existing activities on other criteria. But the workplan should show, for those criteria that are <80 and TBD, a deadline for when activities will be defined and started).
- Minimum FIP (if a project does not meet all of the following minimum requirements, it cannot be classified as a FIP and cannot be run through the FIP progress ratings tool):
 - Publicly announced with a list of participants

¹ SFP and its partners encourage FIP implementers to use the SFP detailed Excel template for their workplans and reporting. However, if other templates are used, they should contain the same information. Workplans and reporting that are not adequate or clear will negatively affect the FIP rating.

- Public workplan describing planned activities on one or more sustainability issues (e.g., fishery performance criteria scoring <80 against the MSC standard)
- A system for public reporting of progress.

Regardless of the type of FIP, it is critical to regularly and publicly report progress of the FIP against its workplan to demonstrate effort and outcome to interested parties. This can be done on a website hosted by the FIP participant(s) or third parties. A neutral “FIP Directory” website, which serves as free option for public reporting, is available at <http://fisheryimprovementprojects.org/>.

Indicators of progress at Stage 4 and 5

- Stage 1, 2, and 3 definitions remain as defined above in the Background section.
- Stage 4 – Regulatory policy change or regulator action to improve the fishery, or fishing practice change to improve the fishery. Evidence of improvement reported publicly, an increase in [FishSource Scores](#) 1, 2, and 3, and/or an increase in score in following MSC criteria:

○ 1.1.2	○ 2.1.3	○ 2.5.2	○ 3.2.2
○ 1.1.3	○ 2.2.2	○ 2.5.3	○ 3.2.3
○ 1.2.1	○ 2.2.3	○ 3.1.1	○ 3.2.4
○ 1.2.2	○ 2.3.2	○ 3.1.2	○ 3.2.5
○ 1.2.3	○ 2.3.3	○ 3.1.3	
○ 1.2.4	○ 2.4.2	○ 3.1.4	
○ 2.1.2	○ 2.4.3	○ 3.2.1	
- Stage 5 – Previously, SFP reserved a Stage 5 result for a publicly verifiable positive change in the water (e.g., increase in biomass, increase in population of impacted PET species, decrease in habitat impacted). A Stage 5 result regarding the status of the target stock would typically be reflected by an increase in [FishSource Scores](#) 4 and 5. Moving forward, a Stage 5 result includes an increase in any MSC outcome score (criteria listed below). MSC outcomes scores will increase if there is a positive change in the water, but they may also increase if the precision or confidence limits around estimates of stock size or environmental impacts improves. Hence, an improvement in the stock assessment method, or the public disclosure of the complete stock assessment, may result in improvements in MSC outcome scores, and hence earn a FIP a Stage 5 result. This would also occur if it was determined that status is good where it was previously unknown (e.g., there is no stock assessment, but once conducted it shows biomass is above B_{MSY} and fishing mortality is below F_{MSY}). MSC outcome criteria are:

- 1.1.1
- 2.1.1
- 2.2.1
- 2.3.1
- 2.4.1
- 2.5.1

The use of [MSC's fishery benchmarking tool](#) (BMT) to evaluate and document improvement progress (i.e., Stage 4 and 5 impacts) is strongly recommended, as it provides a comprehensive and transparent platform for a FIP to report progress. We recognize that this tool may not be practical for some FIPs that are not yet at the point where they are addressing all outstanding sustainability issues (e.g., a FIP has identified a clear need, like addressing IUU as the only priority activity at the time). In cases like this, other options, like self-reporting progress and evidence of improvements for the one or few specific issues of focus, should be used in the interim.

Determining the start date of a FIP

Although it may seem trivial, the start date of a FIP is critically important for the updated tool described below. Because the methodology incorporates timeframe benchmarks, a start date must be determined to know when to “start the clock.” In the absence of an official FIP registry or standard, the following guidelines and rules are employed to determine the start date of a FIP:

- Start date is determined by the first public announcement (e.g., via presentation, press release, speech) that a FIP exists or is being worked on.
- For FIPs that operated privately before a public announcement, the date will be set when the evaluator (e.g., SFP) was first privately notified about it, or the start date they claim or reveal in their reporting if it is earlier than the date we were notified.
- If the evaluator was not notified privately about the FIP beginning, the start date is when they went public or an earlier start date they claim or reveal in their reporting.
- For fisheries in the MSC program, with no prior FIP, the FIP start is the date at which full assessment was announced. However, if the participant(s) announce they've been running a FIP since doing MSC pre-assessment on a particular date, or some such earlier claim, the start date is set at that earlier date.
- If new participants join the existing FIP, the original start date still applies.
- If participants from an existing FIP split off and create their own FIP or if participants “reinvent a new FIP, the start date for the second FIP remains the same as the original.
- If a separate FIP is initiated in a fishery with an existing FIP (e.g., because participants will not work together), provided the participants in the new FIP were not part of the existing FIP, the FIP will be given a new start date pursuant to the guidelines above.

Updated Tool for Evaluating FIP Progress

This tool is a “measuring stick” on which any FIP with public information can be placed and compared. It is more dynamic and informative than the previous version that focused only

on the FIP stage reached. Actual progress ratings for FIPs are reported on the 'Improvement' tab of fishery profiles associated with FIPs on [FishSource.com](https://fishsource.com).

Note that this evaluation does **not** prescribe whether or not to source from a particular FIP. Each user of this evaluation can use the information how she/he chooses and react accordingly. As SFP has noted previously, FIP progress is **only one** of the key factors retailers and other seafood businesses use when deciding whether to continue buying or start buying from a FIP. Other factors include fishery status/rating, presence of "red flag issues," and other company-specific factors.

SFP advises partners to evaluate FIPs based on publicly available information, and only accept private information on a limited and temporary basis. For instance, a FIP may be involved in a particularly sensitive improvement effort that would be jeopardized by making the details public at that time. In several cases, FIP participants have agreed to provide information to SFP on the basis it is kept private. If we have private information on a FIP that is confirmed by a Conservation Alliance member or collaborator, and some aspects of claimed progress can be confirmed by public information, then we will acknowledge this progress in our private advice to our partners, but not acknowledge the FIP rating in our public communication.

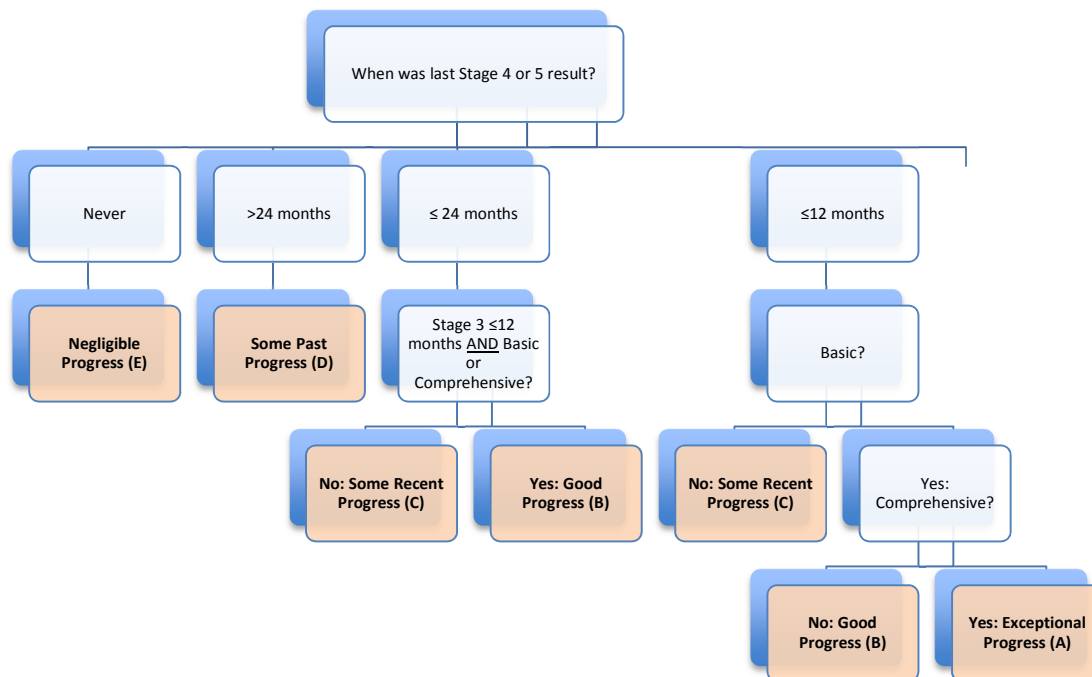
The updated progress rating tool does not rely on establishing causality to link a particular FIP action to a particular improvement. This means that from the view of this tool, a FIP may earn a Stage 4 or 5 result even if the improvement was brought about by the work of others. Hence, this methodology does not address key questions of causality and the levels of credit a FIP or FIP participants can take for certain results.

SFP views a FIP as completed (or graduated) when the fishery has achieved the level of an unconditional pass against the MSC standard (i.e., estimated scores of 80 or above across all 31 criteria). We will continue to evaluate FIPs (including MSC-certified fisheries with outstanding conditions) until they reach that level.

Methodology

The current methodology uses the same stages described previously. Time thresholds are now added to determine how effective the FIP has been at any given time and how frequently improvements are happening. Whether a FIP of interest is "basic" or "comprehensive" are other important factors to determine how much progress a project has made and to provide assurances that the project has a clear path forward. See Figure 1, below, for the conditions required to receive one of the five progress ratings.

Figure 1: Decision tree to determine the rating for FIPs > 1 year old



What this decision tree indicates is that for FIPs > 1 year old, some of the rules to determine progress ratings are:

- Negligible Progress (E): Has never generated a publicly reported Stage 4/5 result
- Some Past Progress (D): The most recent publicly reported Stage 4 or 5 result is over 2 years old
- Some Recent Progress (C): Stage 4 or 5 result within the last 2 years
- Good Progress (B): Basic AND either
 - Delivered FIP Stage 4 or 5 in last year, OR
 - Delivered a Stage 4 or 5 in last 2 years AND Stage 3 in last year
- Exceptional Progress (A): Comprehensive AND it must have a Stage 4 or 5 result within the last 12 months
- The highest rating a “minimum” FIP > 1 year old can receive is *some recent progress*.

Measures for evaluating young FIPs (one year old or less)

It takes time to get a FIP going and fully up to speed and seems unfair to run young FIPs through the same decision tree as established FIPs. The evaluation in Figure 2 gives the highest ratings to young FIPs that have achieved Stage 4 or 5 improvements. In contrast to the decision tree for FIPs older than 1 year, the decision tree in Figure 2 gives a somewhat favorable rating for FIPs with no Stage 4 or 5 improvements but with Stage 3 activity within its first 12 months.

The principle “best practice” for young FIPs recommended by SFP is to secure a Stage 4 result—any will do—as early as possible. By using a one-year cut-off, SFP intends to sharpen minds and focus young FIPs on this most critical best practice, demonstrating the FIP can deliver real impact.

For young FIPs, the decision tree indicates progress ratings as follows:

- Negligible Progress (E): Applies to all lower levels of progress
- Some Recent Progress (C): Need to have some Stage 3 activity in last 12 months
- Good Progress (B): Two options:
 - Just needs a Stage 4 or 5 result in the last year (for older FIPs it would need to be basic as well), OR
 - If no Stage 4 or 5 result, then can get “good progress,” but only if they have Stage 3 in last year and are basic (which means have done Stages 1 and 2) and are comprehensive
- Exceptional Progress (A): Same as for older FIPs – must be comprehensive AND have Stage 4 or 5 result in last year.

This rating system stresses the importance of trying to influence management and catch sector as soon as possible (i.e., Stage 3 activities), and not waiting to do so while building the FIP participation up (through Stage 1 and 2 activities). This is consistent with SFP’s best practice of trying to deliver a Stage 4 result as soon as possible.

Figure 2: Decision tree to determine the rating for FIPs ≤ 1 year old

