



Communicating Fishery Improvement Projects – Guidance from Sustainable Fisheries Partnership

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Many companies within the seafood supply chain are now actively developing and leading Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) and it is widely anticipated that there will be literally hundreds of such FIPs in place within the next 2 years. This new momentum towards improvement is to be welcomed and is clear evidence that the seafood industry itself has become a primary force in promoting sustainable fisheries.

FIPs themselves require a range of tasks to be successful including creating workplans, coordinating meetings, raising funds, and so on. However, in addition to the practical tasks required to make sure that change is really happening is the requirement to effectively communicate the FIP to a wide range of interested audiences. This communication falls into two categories (although with considerable overlap):

- Reporting on FIPs for the purpose of transparency and credibility
- Promoting FIPs for the purpose of achieving positive publicity

The rest of this note examines what's required for both these activities.

FIP reporting for the purpose of transparency and credibility

FIPs are only credible if they are transparently operated and this requires some discipline in reporting. SFP recommends that all FIPs have either a dedicated website or a designated section on the website of a FIP participant where all relevant information is collected and displayed. The SFP FIP toolkit contains detailed guidance on how to provide FIP reports and can be found at:

<http://www.sustainablefish.org/fisheries-improvement/fip-toolkit/fip-toolkit-overview>

In general, a website should show the following information:

- Name of FIP
- Name of Species – common and Latin name of the species
- FIP Scope/Scale – identify whether the FIP is at stock or fishery level
- Fishery(ies) Location – range/distribution of the fishery (can be drawn on a map)
- FIP Contact – an email address and/or phone number that allows enquirers to contact the FIP
- FIP Participants – the names of the FIP participants along with web links

- FIP Stakeholders -the names of other stakeholders that interact with the FIP (for instance, scientific institutions and government bodies)
- Sustainability Information – this can be achieved through web links to relevant sources such as FishSource.com, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Blue Ocean Institute, Marine Stewardship Council, and other sources
- Date Publicly Announced – the date the FIP was launched
- FIP Stage – criteria for the various FIP stages can be found in the FIP toolkit
- Background – a short narrative that talks about the problems/issues in the fishery, the markets for the fishery, and the goals and objectives of the FIP
- Current Improvement Recommendation – list perhaps 3 or 4 priority improvement recommendations
- A workplan and timeline that outlines the activities that will be undertaken to make the identified improvements
- Progress Update – the recommended format for progress updates is contained within the SFP FIP toolkit
- Additional Resources – for instance, web links to documents about the fishery.

Assuming that all of the elements above have been achieved, the most important task is to keep the information updated. The core purpose of FIP reporting is to demonstrate progress against a workplan and convey objective, relevant, factual information in a timely fashion to the audiences that need it. This must be done regularly – at least quarterly.

Although this data is essential, it also has the potential to be unexciting, so FIP participants are very much encouraged to enhance their web presence with pictures, video, additional narrative about the fishery and any other information resources that increases the quality of the visitor experience.

For examples of good practice in how to report FIPs, visit the SFP website at:

<http://www.sustainablefish.org/fisheries-improvement/fishery-improvement-projects>

Promoting FIPs for publicity purposes

Seafood companies that engage with FIPs are in the vanguard of making fisheries sustainable and deserve to be given credit for their achievements. Corporate communications about improvements also help to educate others about the value of this approach and create a climate of opinion that will support further improvement activity. Consequently, SFP encourages all companies that are active participants in FIP to publicize their work as widely as possible.

Publicizing FIPs can sometimes be a challenging undertaking. FIPs can be complex arrangements between participants with different sensitivities, consumers may be easily confused (especially given prior exposure to NGO messages about “red” or “green” list fish) and FIPs can raise awkward issues that were previously little known (e.g., turtle bycatch). Consequently, companies are advised to proceed with caution when communicating FIPs for publicity and to consider the following guidelines:

Defining a FIP – a new project should only be called a “FIP” when all three of the following exist:

- a) A public statement that the FIP has begun and the participants are named.
- b) An assessment of the problems in the fishery and the findings are public.
- c) A public workplan for how to fix at least some of the problems identified by the assessment.

Be sure that statements about the FIP are factually accurate and reference the website where the FIP full report can be accessed. Do not imply progress unless there is publicly available evidence to support such a claim.

Do not claim association with a FIP unless you are either:

- i) A publicly acknowledged participant in that FIP by virtue of having signed an agreement with other participants or equivalent or
- ii) You, or the vessels/companies you buy fish from, are responsible for some activity that advances the goals of the FIP AND you have a policy that actively prefers sourcing from improvement projects. It's very important that there is publicly available documentation from suppliers (that meet the requirements identified above) before publicizing an activity as a FIP. Avoid using terms that have no accepted meaning such as "eco-fishery" or "green fishery." It is better not to use the term "sustainability" unless it is in the context of a FIP that is directly working toward a certification that can support such a public claim. [At time of writing, SFP recognizes only MSC certification as supporting a public claim of sustainability].

Do not make claims of association – for instance, by using web links or logos – with organizations that have not granted their permission for such an arrangement. For example, to link to a FIP web page on the SFP site, you must first obtain permission from SFP.

Retailers and other major buyers of seafood who have made commitments to the improvement approach will increasingly seek out information on FIPs to meet their public sustainability commitments. Buyers should also use these guidelines to help determine the validity of FIP claims. SFP and others in the NGO community are also working to develop tools to measure the performance of FIPs against workplans and improvement goals.

Conclusion

Although this note makes a distinction between FIP "reporting" and "promoting," it will often be the case that both these activities occur simultaneously. Creating a FIP reporting platform that meets all of the data requirements and also communicates effectively with a wide range of audiences (including consumers) is probably an ideal situation, but admittedly one that is not easily achieved. Whatever the specific arrangements, FIP participants that are entrusted to communicate the project should always aim to describe the work as comprehensively as possible while using publicly available data. These reports should be frequently updated. Additional communications elements are very welcome but, given a choice between style and substance, it is better to choose substance. SFP provides several support services for those with responsibility for reporting and promoting FIPs, including training (both in groups and one to one), guidance materials (such as the FIP toolkit), and direct advice when requested (via info@sustainablefish.org).