COMMUNITY CATCH EVALUATION PROCESS

Version 1.1

Publish Date: 26 May, 2026

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Responsibility for this Standard:

Community Catch is the owner of this Standard and associated requirements. Community Catch is a registered charity; the Trustees of Community Catch and designated committees are responsible for this Standard and its ongoing review and development.

Amendment Record:

Version No.	Date of Release	Amendment to previous
Draft for First Consultation	27 June, 2024	
Draft for Second Consultation	22 January, 2025	Responses to first consultation addressed and incorporated.
Final Version 1.0	7 May, 2025	Responses to second consultation addressed and incorporated. Final Version 1.0 approved.
Final Version 1.1	26 May, 2026	Updated Version of the Evaluation Process. Introduction of a mandatory on-site audit requirement for initial evaluations.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Community Catch Initiative is designed to provide pathways for market access and, where necessary, improvement of sustainable small-scale fisheries. This initiative is founded on maintaining a high level of rigour in our evaluation processes but combined with an ease of access and affordability that makes participation achievable for small-scale fisheries.

1.2 This document outlines the process to be followed in carrying out an evaluation of a small-scale fishery. Small-scale fisheries that are in scope are defined in Section 3.1 below. An accompanying document details the Community Catch Standard - the social and environmental requirements a small-scale fishery must meet in order to claim to be sustainable. These documents provide definitive descriptions of the Community Catch Evaluation Process and Standard.

1.3 The Community Catch Standard for sustainable small-scale fisheries contains Minimum and Target Requirements. A Fishery Client[1]/Fisher Group[2] ('a Fishery') will be Certified only if all scope, Minimum and Target Requirements are met. A fishery which is in scope and meets all Minimum Requirements will be 'Recognised'[3] within the Community Catch Initiative under a Community Catch Fishery Improvement Project (CCFIP), as long as ongoing improvements are demonstrated.

1.4 Fishery Clients will access Community Catch through an open access[4] website (See 4.1 for more details). This will provide information, guidance and assistance on the Community Catch Initiative.

2. Release Date and Implementation Timeframe

2.1 The release date of Version 1.1 of the Community Catch Evaluation Process is 26 May, 2026.

2.2 From the release date of this document, Fishery Clients and CABs may voluntarily adopt Version 1.1 of the Community Catch Evaluation Process, including the requirement for mandatory on-site audits during initial evaluations.

2.3 Version 1.1 of the Community Catch Evaluation Process shall become mandatory for all new evaluations from 26 November, 2026.

[1]The Fishery Client may be a Fisher, a group of Fishers, a Fishers Organisation (Producers Organisations, Fisher's Associations), a Processor, Merchant, NGO, Management Body etc.
[2]Fisher Groups may be identified by vessel skippers, license/right holders (e.g. quota owners) and/or vessels/vessel owners. All Fishers working within the Fisher Group would be included.
[3]Being Community Catch 'Recognised' means that a fishery which is Certified or in a CCFIP will be identified as such on their profile on the Community Catch website.
[4]Community Catch is committed to transparency in its Evaluation Process but acknowledges the balance between data protection and access. While the decision of evaluations and yearly audits, and other information like the Client Action Plan are made public on the profiles, however, confidential evidence, such as documents that could reveal the identity of fishers or exact fishing locations, will remain between the Fishery Client and the Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) during the Evaluation Process.

3. Scope Requirements: Who is eligible to join the Community Catch Initiative?

3.1 Small-Scale Fisheries

3.1.1 A small-scale fishery is defined as either:

1. Fisher Groups with all vessels less than or equal to 24m (equivalent gross tonnage of 300 mt, or Length Overall (LOA) of 26.5m or 79 feet or no vessels[5]) AND using Labour Intensive or Passive Gear[6]; or

2. Fisher Groups with some or all vessels over 24m[7] AND/OR vessels using Active Gear, which achieve a score of 20 or less in the Community Catch Small-Scale Definition Matrix (SSF Matrix).

3.2 Other Scope Requirements

3.2.1 Species included within the Community Catch Initiative are fish, invertebrates, algae and aquatic plants only.

3.2.2 All gear types are allowable (excluding poisons and explosives), subject to meeting the Minimum Requirements.

3.2.3 Marine and freshwater fisheries are included equally.

3.2.4 The Community Catch Initiative is intended for wild harvest operations only. Other certification options already exist for aquaculture operations, and it is not intended that these be replicated. However, many small-scale fishing operations entail some habitat alteration or stock enhancement. Excluded aquaculture operations would be those entailing active husbandry of animals or plants from juvenile stages to harvest[8].

3.2.5 Introduced species are allowed within the Initiative unless the fishery is based on continuing introductions of non-native species (at the point of entering the Community Catch Initiative, the species should be entirely self-sustaining in its fished location).

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[5]In cases of hand-gathering, diving etc where deployment of fishing gear from the vessel is not part of the fishing operation.
[6]Classification of main gear types is in Appendix A.
[7]In a Fisher Group of mixed vessel sizes, the largest vessel included shall be used to determine whether or not to use the SSF Matrix.
[8]Operations which would be within scope include bivalves or algae living on natural substrates (including those with some enhancement of substrate conditions, including use of Fish Aggregating Devices) and animals released from external sources which complete part of their life cycle in the wild – termed 'Enhanced Fisheries'. Operations outside of scope include bivalves or algae growing on wholly artificial substrates such as ropes or other suspended substrates and animals grown in ponds etc which rely on the addition of food, pharmaceuticals etc. In addition, the use of wild-captured seed (e.g., mussel spat) for aquaculture operations is considered out of scope unless the collection activity itself qualifies as a wild-capture fishery under the Community Catch Standard.

3.3 The Unit of Evaluation: Fishery Client and Fisher Group

3.3.1 A Fishery Client[1] is the individual or organisation responsible for providing information, actioning any improvements necessary and meeting the costs of being within the Community Catch Initiative. The Fishery Client will register an evaluation with Community Catch and identify the vessels/fishers included within the evaluation – the Fisher Group[2].

3.3.2 Anyone can be a Fishery Client as long as they have agreement of the fishers included in the Fisher Group. If the Fishery Client is not a Fisher or Fisher Organisation, then a Fisher Representative shall be identified to assist the Fishery Client through the Evaluation Process.

3.3.3 The Fishery Client holds the authority to control the identification of product as originating from a specific Community Catch registration. This recognises the commitment made by the Fishery Client, but membership of a Fisher Group shall always be a voluntary action by the Fisher(s) involved.

3.3.4 The Fisher Group are the vessel skippers, license/right holders (e.g. quota owners) and/or vessels/vessel owners that are entering the Community Catch Initiative under a single Fishery Client.

3.3.5 There is no upper or lower limit on the number of vessels/fishers in a Fisher Group. There is no limit on the number of Fisher Groups that may be represented by a Fishery Client.

3.3.6 A Fisher Group is defined by:

1. The vessels/fishers forming the group – this is the basis of the Fisher Group.

2. The fishing gears used within the group. It is recognised that many small-scale fishers use multiple gear types – we encourage inclusion of any and all gears used (excluding poisons and explosives). Different gear types, with different target species and/or ecological effects will need to be evaluated separately. This will be advised by the CAB[9].

3. The commercial species taken with each gear used. It is recognised that many small-scale fisheries target multiple species and so inclusion of these multi-species fisheries is an integral part of Community Catch.

4. The geographical area within which the Fisher Group operates. This would normally be a part or whole of the distribution of the managed (i.e., target) stock.

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[9]In cases where the Fisher Group uses multiple gear types or targets multiple species, the CAB may determine whether these should be assessed jointly or separately. This decision should reflect the environmental and social characteristics of the fishery.

4. Entering the Community Catch Initiative – Self-Assessment

4.1 The Community Catch Self-Assessment tool[10] is available online via the Community Catch website and is free to use. Anyone is welcome to use the Community Catch Self-Assessment and any associated improvement resources without obligation, but recognition within the Community Catch Initiative requires formal registration and successful evaluation.

4.2 To begin the process of recognition within the Community Catch Initiative, the Fishery Client, or an agent acting on their behalf, shall complete the Self-Assessment:

1. Access the Self-Assessment via the Community Catch website at www.communitycatch.org.
2. Provide the necessary information on the Fisher Group by answering the questions in the Self-Assessment[10]. Guidance and assistance will be available throughout the Self-Assessment and on the website.
3. Provide evidence to support the answers provided in the Self-Assessment. Tools, guidance and other assistance will again be available.

4.3 Based on the results of the Self-Assessment, the Fishery Client can choose whether or not to proceed to the full Independent Evaluation Process, outlined below in Section 5. If the Fishery Client wishes to proceed, they shall complete the registration form on the Community Catch website. Guidance and assistance will be available.

5. Independent Evaluation Process

5.1 The full Independent Evaluation will be carried out by an accredited independent third-party Conformity Assessment Body (CAB).

5.2 On choosing to proceed to the full Independent Evaluation Process, the Fishery Client will choose an accredited CAB. Information on accredited CABs will be made available on the Community Catch website.

5.3 Independent Evaluation activities shall include an on-site audit conducted by the CAB as part of the initial evaluation. The on-site audit shall be carried out by a Lead Auditor and/or audit team member(s). The evaluation will be based on information provided in the Self-Assessment, supplemented by the on-site audit and other relevant information known by or provided to the CAB. Remote assessment methods may be used to complement the on-site audit.

[10]The Self-Assessment tool asks those questions, relevant to the Fisher Group, which are part of the Community Catch Standard. It also includes optional supporting information such as risk assessments and fisher worker surveys. The Self-Assessment includes guidance throughout.

5.4 The CAB will initially confirm that:
   a) the Fisher Group is within scope
   b) the Self-Assessment has been completed

CAB evaluation reports will be completed using templates on the Community Catch website.

5.5 If these points are all confirmed, the CAB will announce the Fishery Client and Fisher Group evaluation to identified individuals or organisations with an interest in the Fisher Group evaluation (hereafter called 'Stakeholders')[11]. The announcement will contain a link to the Self-Assessment.

5.6 There will be a period of 30 days during which Stakeholders may register comments in relation to any items in the Self-Assessment. Stakeholder comments will be submitted to the CAB using a proforma document. Stakeholder comments will be made public with the evaluation report unless the Stakeholder requests, and/or the CAB wishes to maintain confidentiality. Confidentiality should provide protection to individuals reporting issues including, but not limited to, criminality, risks to health and safety or risks to the environment and should protect financial information not relevant to an evaluation. Confidentiality does not reduce requirements for Stakeholders to provide evidence to the CAB to support their comments.

5.7 The information of the Self-Assessment will be verified by the CAB using information from the Self-Assessment and/or on-site audit. This verification will include a review of, and response to, issues and questions raised by Stakeholders. The CAB determination in relation to each clause of the Community Catch Standard will be included in the CAB evaluation report.

5.8 The Fishery Client will confirm acceptance of the CAB report. The CAB may first revert to the Fishery Client on any questions raised in the Independent Evaluation Process. Questions not addressed by the Fishery Client will be carried into the Client Action Plan (Section 7).

5.9 The CAB shall assign at least one person to review all information and results related to the evaluation. The review shall be carried out by person(s) who have not been involved in the Evaluation Process.

5.10 The CAB shall assign at least one person to make the certification decision based on all information related to the evaluation, its review, and any other relevant information. The certification decision shall be carried out by a person or group of persons [e.g. a committee] that has not been involved in the Evaluation Process.

[11]The announcement notice will be posted on the Community Catch website; and direct notification will be sent to Stakeholders who registered on the Community Catch website. Fishery Clients and CABs are encouraged to disseminate announcements locally using accessible means.

5.11 The outcome of the CAB verification will be confirmation of one of the following three outcomes for the Fisher Group:

1. All scope, Minimum and Target Requirements of the Standard are met, and the Fisher Group is Certified. [The Certificate will be valid for five (5) years].

2. All scope and Minimum Requirements are met, but not all Target Requirements of the Standard are met. The Fishery Group is not Certified but is Recognised under a Community Catch Fishery Improvement Project. Support and tools are available on the Community Catch website to assist in making the necessary improvements.

3. All scope and Minimum Requirements are not met. The Fisher Group is not Recognised within the Community Catch Initiative, but the Self-Assessment and support tools are still available to assist in making necessary improvement(s). Further requirements of this Evaluation Process would not be applicable. The Fishery Client/Fisher Group could reapply for evaluation at any time.

6. Certification Decision

6.1 If, as a result of the Independent Evaluation, the CAB decides to award certification, the CAB shall be responsible for, and shall retain authority for, its decisions relating to certification.

6.2 On completion of the Evaluation Process, the Self-Assessment and evaluation report will be made publicly available via the Community Catch website, together with the Certificate (if issued). Recognition of the Fisher Group within the Community Catch Initiative will commence from the date of publication.

7. Client Action Plan and Timelines

7.1 If the Fisher Group meets all scope and Minimum Requirements, but not all Target Requirements of the Standard, the Fishery Group is Recognised within the Community Catch Initiative under a ‘Community Catch Fishery Improvement Project’ (CCFIP).

7.2 Proformas, information, tools and other resources will be made available to the Fishery Client, by Community Catch and partners, in order to assist in the preparation and execution of a Client Action Plan. The Client Action Plan will be set out in the relevant Community Catch Client Action Plan proforma. The CAB will populate the Client Action Plan proforma to identify those Requirements of the Community Catch Standard which are not met, and the Fishery Client will identify clear actions to be taken to address these. This information will be included on the CCFIP profile.

7.3 Community Catch recognises the resource challenges facing many small-scale fisheries in addressing management issues. While populating the Client Action Plan proforma, the CAB will identify those parts of the Standard which are within the control of the fishery client/fisher group and those (environmental or political) which are beyond the control of small-scale fishers and require the intervention of external parties.
The CAB will determine the timescale for completion of the Client Action Plan.

The maximum timescale would normally be 15 years[12]. For Fisher Groups with few (<3%) non-conformances and where these are entirely within the control of the fishery client/fisher group, improvements would normally be expected to be completed within 5 years. For Fisher Groups with some (<9%) non-conformances and where these are entirely within the control of the fishery client/fisher group, improvements would normally be expected to be completed within 10 years. For Fisher Groups with many (>9%) non-conformances, or issues that are beyond the control of small-scale fishers and require the intervention of external parties, improvements would normally be expected to be completed within 15 years.

7.4 The CAB will ensure that a Client Action Plan is in place which addresses all Requirements which have not been met. If time taken in preparing the Client Action Plan exceeds 12 months from the completion of the CAB evaluation, the CAB may require a surveillance audit prior to acceptance of the Action Plan.

7.5 Progress against the Client Action Plan shall be considered by the CAB at annual surveillance audits within each 5-year period. CABs shall confirm the status of each action in the Client Action Plan and make results available via the Community Catch website.

7.6 When an action has been completed, the CAB is in a position to re-evaluate the relevant Requirement. This would normally take place as part of the 5-yearly re-evaluation (see Section 10 below). Evaluations may also take place at an annual surveillance audit but may entail additional costs – this should be agreed between the Fishery Client and CAB.

8. Changes to the Fisher Group

8.1 Fishery Clients may wish to change or extend the scope of the Fisher Group; this may involve removing or adding members of the Fisher Group, removing or adding gear used, removing or adding the Community Catch 'recognised species', or modifying the geographical area in which the fishery operates. Community Catch wishes to encourage such flexibility. Any modification of the Fisher Group must be done with the consent of the Fishery Client.

8.2 Proposed changes to the Fisher Group will be notified to the CAB. Fishery Clients must report any material changes to vessel characteristics (e.g., size, engine capacity) or fishing practices (e.g., expansion offshore) to their CAB. The CAB will assess whether such changes affect the Fishery Group's eligibility under the SSF Matrix.

8.3 Vessels/fishers may be removed from the Fisher Group, including on the basis of non-compliance with group requirements.

[12]An additional 5-year extension may be allowed (to the determined 5-, 10- or 15-year timescale) if the Fishery Client has made good faith efforts to complete the Client Action Plan, substantial improvements have already been made, and the Fishery Client can reasonably claim that remaining issues can be completed within a further 5 years.

8.4 If the same Fisher Group wishes to include additional gear and/or species under Community Catch, then a new Fishery Client/Fisher Group registration should be begun. Those parts of the original Self-Assessment unaffected by the change shall, with CAB approval, be replicated in the new Self-Assessment and their original CAB evaluation also replicated in a new evaluation (but considering any findings from subsequent surveillance audits).

8.5 If additional fishers/vessels are added to the Fisher Group, then the Fishery Client shall inform the CAB of changes together with any necessary additions to the Client Action Plan. This additional information will be evaluated by the CAB: this will involve all stages of the Independent Evaluation Process, including making sure that the fishery is still in scope. Original timescales for re-evaluation shall not be affected by further Independent Evaluations in response to changes to the Fisher Group.

9. Surveillance Activities

9.1 Fishery Clients and Fisher Groups which are Certified shall undergo at least one surveillance audit per (5-year) certification cycle.

9.2 Fishery Client and Fisher Groups which are undertaking a Community Catch Fishery Improvement Project (CCFIP) shall undergo surveillance audits on an annual basis. Prior to each surveillance audit, Fishery Clients which are taking part in a CCFIP shall record actions taken in achieving the Client Action Plan.

9.3 Surveillance audits will be carried out by a CAB. Surveillance audits will normally be carried out remotely. On-site audits may be carried out by mutual agreement of the Fishery Client and CAB if this is seen as necessary and/or the most effective means of demonstrating compliance.

9.4 Surveillance audits shall confirm:

a) Any changes in the operation or circumstances of the Fisher Group that mean the Minimum Requirements of the Community Catch Standard are no longer met. If any Minimum Requirements are not met, the fishery will be suspended as set out in Section 11.

b) Any changes that have occurred in the operation or environmental sustainability of the Fisher Group that mean that Target Requirements of the Community Catch Standard are no longer met. If the Target Requirements are no longer met, but Minimum Requirements continue to be met, then the Fisher Group will continue to be recognised as Improving within the Community Catch Initiative and a Client Action Plan will be prepared or amended. Timescales for additional actions will begin from the time of the surveillance audit.

c) For Fisher Groups undertaking CCFIPs, that actions taken in meeting the Client Action Plan are being completed on schedule. Delays may occur due to factors outside of the control of the Fishery Client and Fisher Group; these shall be accommodated as long as the Fishery Client makes 'good faith efforts'[13] to achieve the outcomes set out in the Client Action Plan. Failure to implement actions within the Client Action Plan for two consecutive years without clear and reasonable explanation, will result in suspension (Section 11).

9.5 The results of the CAB surveillance audit will be recorded in a Surveillance report and this added to the Community Catch website.

9.6 All required surveillance audits must take place. These shall take place at a suitable time at the mutual agreement of the Fishery Client and CAB, where practicable this should be within 3 months before or after the anniversary of publication of the evaluation report. A failure by the Fishery Client to take part in surveillance audits will lead to suspension (Section 11).

9.7 If there have been changes in the Fisher Group requiring a further Independent Evaluation Process, then this shall remove the requirement for the next scheduled surveillance audit.

10. Re-Evaluation

10.1 To ensure continuity of inclusion within the Community Catch Initiative, the re-evaluation process should be completed before the 5-year anniversary of publication of the previous evaluation report.

10.2 Prior to re-evaluation, all Fishery Clients shall ensure the Self-Assessment is updated, including the effects of any actions undertaken in line with the Client Action Plan (if applicable).

10.3 The updated Self-Assessment will be verified by the CAB: this will involve all stages of the Independent Evaluation Process outlined in Section 5, and including Stakeholders consultation.

10.4 Fishery Clients in a CCFIP must record actions completed, as specified in their Client Action Plan. Delays may occur due to factors outside of the control of the Fishery Client and Fisher Group; these shall be accommodated as long as the Fishery Client makes good faith efforts to achieve the outcomes set out in the Client Action Plan. Fishery Clients not making good faith efforts to achieve the outcomes set out in the Client Action Plan shall proceed to the Suspension process (Section 11).

[13]'Good faith efforts' refer to documented, verifiable actions taken by the Fishery Client or Fisher Group to address the applicable Minimum or Target Requirements. For requirements requiring demonstrable outcomes, good faith efforts involve tangible steps toward implementing necessary practices or changes. For requirements focused on baseline information gathering, good faith efforts involve initiating credible efforts to collect and organize relevant data. CABs must assess good faith efforts accordingly based on the requirement type and evidence provided. Further detailed guidance and illustrative examples will be provided separately in a Guidance document on the website.

10.5 If the CAB determines that actions specified in the Client Action Plan are not expected to lead to the Fishery Group meeting the Community Catch Standard requirements, the Client Action Plan will be amended to address any deficiencies. Improvement timescales may be extended as a result, but additional time allocations should be restricted to an additional 5-year cycle.

10.6 Changes in the Community Catch Standard may extend improvement timescales. This shall be accommodated as long as the Fishery Client makes good faith efforts to achieve the outcomes set out in the existing Client Action Plan.

10.7 The outcome of the CAB evaluation will reflect the updated status of the Fisher Group. This should lead to eventual certification.

11. Suspension and Withdrawal

11.1 Community Catch is a voluntary scheme and Fishery Clients may voluntarily withdraw at any time by notifying the CAB. This does not affect any contractual liability between the Fishery Client and CAB.

11.2 Fisher Groups shall be suspended by the CAB if one or more of the following is determined to apply, either at a surveillance audit or re-evaluation:

a) The Fisher Group no longer meets the Community Catch Minimum Requirements.

b) It has not achieved, or made good faith efforts to achieve, actions specified in the Client Action Plan for two consecutive years.

c) It fails to provide information required by the CAB to undertake its proper functions within the Community Catch Evaluation Process.

d) It fails to meet contractual obligations to the CAB.

11.3 Fisher Groups which are suspended shall be identified as such on the Community Catch website for the duration of the suspension. The reason for the suspension will be set out in the appropriate audit report.

11.4 Fishery Clients and Fisher Groups shall follow a separate process to address the causes of the suspension and re-enter the Community Catch Initiative:

a) Fisher Groups re-entering within 12 months of suspension occurring shall provide the information required by the CAB and undergo a surveillance audit.

b) Fisher Groups re-entering after 12 months of suspension occurring shall provide the information required by the CAB and shall proceed through the full Independent Evaluation Process.

When the suspension is lifted, Fisher Groups would be expected to address all remaining issues in accordance with their original Client Action Plan (i.e., addressing issues over subsequent 5-yearly cycle(s)).

Appendix A. Classification of Main Gear Types

Gear	Classification
Hand lines and pole lines	Labour Intensive
Pots	Labour Intensive
Beach seines	Labour Intensive
Hand-gathered	Labour Intensive
Trammel nets	Passive
Set gillnets	Passive
Encircling gillnets	Passive
Combined trammel and gillnets	Passive
Driftnets	Passive
Lampara nets	Passive
Trap	Passive
Longlines	Passive
Set longlines	Passive
Troll lines	Passive
Danish seines	Active
Scottish seines	Active
Boat operated lift nets	Active
Purse seines	Active
Beam trawls	Active
Bottom otter trawls	Active
Bottom pair trawls	Active
Midwater otter trawls	Active
Otter twin trawls	Active
Pelagic pair trawls	Active