

# Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Outline

## Section 1: Introduction

The MarinTrust Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system was implemented in 2017 following internal and external consultation and workshops in order to facilitate a clearer prospective of the company, its processes, where improvements need to be considered and where success can be measured. Since then, the system has been reviewed on an annual basis with input from the MarinTrust Secretariat and the Governing Body Committee (GBC) to ensure it remains fit for purpose and feeds into MarinTrust development and strategy.

This MEL outline document aims to provide stakeholders and other interested parties with an easily digestible and comprehensive explanation of what the MarinTrust MEL system entails, its importance and the meaning of the terminology used within MEL documentation. This system is not purely for monitoring the inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts the MarinTrust programme has on the global sourcing and production of Marine Ingredients, but most importantly, it should also learn from those findings in order to ensure continual development and that the desired impacts are achieved.

The MarinTrust MEL system is based on a Theory of Change developed from the overarching objective or Statement of Change to ***‘Improve the global responsibility of the sourcing (incl. fisheries) and production of marine ingredients’*** and takes into consideration the assumptions associated and possible negative and unintended outcomes.

The MEL system includes a comprehensive MEL Plan that clearly sets out the indicators, baselines, targets, responsibilities and schedules, as well as the production of annual reports (both internal and public) and subsequent stakeholder reviews.

### 1.1 Benefits of a Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning System

Monitoring and evaluation systems are an important and useful tool that can be used to demonstrate MarinTrust’s impacts within the global sourcing and production of marine ingredients. This is done through data collection, analysis and evaluation reports whilst at the same time showing complete transparency in its findings. Furthermore, the MEL system allows MarinTrust to learn, adapt and improve as it assists in the recognition of areas in which there are deficiencies or short falls in its organisational activities, and to effectively adjust in advance in order to achieve its objectives.

By complying to the Impacts Code guidance as outlined by ISEAL, with the aim of maintaining full membership, this allows MarinTrust to demonstrate commitment and credibility allowing greater recognition by other schemes and international markets.

### 1.2 Objectives

The principal objectives of the MEL are as follows;

- **Traceability** – To demonstrate credibility and transparency to stakeholders and interested parties, including;
  - Ensuring ongoing compliance with ISEAL’s Impacts Code.
  - Enhancing MarinTrust’s credibility as the leading responsible Marine Ingredient Standard.
  - Increasing transparency of the success of the schemes approach and impacts.

- **Engagement** – To seek engagement from stakeholders and other interested parties.
- **Performance** – To track performance of MEL activities.
- **Improvement** – To facilitate development and improvement for particular indicators of concern.
- **Communication** – To communicate the findings of data collection, analysis and evaluation findings.

### 1.3 Scope and Boundaries

- The MarinTrust MEL system is intended to span:
  - All MarinTrust activities that are identified in the Theory of Change as important to delivering the change that MarinTrust seeks to bring about: ***‘Improved global responsibility of the sourcing (incl. fisheries) and production of marine ingredients’***.
  - All the critical assumptions on which the Theory of Change is based.
  - Any potential negative and unintended effects wherever practicable.
- The full scope and boundaries, along with possible negative and unintended effects, are detailed in the MEL Plan available in the downloads section of the MarinTrust MEL [click here](#).
- The strategies, and intended outcomes and impacts (detailed in the Theory of Change [here](#))
- In line with the global geographic scope of the MarinTrust programme, the geographic scope of the MEL system is also global.
- Time boundaries for the activities of MarinTrust’s MEL system are aligned with those of MarinTrust. A full-time Impacts Manager and Data Officer have been recruited to accelerate progress, and to facilitate monitoring and evaluation of intended and unintended effects.
- The MEL Plan illustrates how each of the most significant effects are covered in the MEL system - by performance monitoring or through Outcome and Impact evaluations.

## Section 2: Statement & Theory of Change

The MarinTrust Statement of Change is; **‘Improve the global responsibility of the sourcing (incl. fisheries) and production of marine ingredients’**. This statement communicates the desired change that MarinTrust endeavours to bring about through its standard programme, which consists of; The MarinTrust Global Standard for Responsible Supply (MarinTrust), the MarinTrust Chain of Custody for Responsible Supply (MarinTrust CoC), and the MarinTrust Improver Programme (MarinTrust IP).

Combined with this, the Theory of Change (available [here](#)) is then used as a tool to illustrate the process of change i.e. how it is MarinTrust intends to achieve the change it aims to drive.

### 2.1 Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes & Impacts

Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts are the processes through which MarinTrust will achieve the objectives of the Statement of Change and Theory of Change. The process of following the Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes and/or Impacts up the Theory of Change can be described as a ‘results chain’ and for the purpose of this outline document they will be referred to as such.

- **Outputs / Inputs:** The Inputs are the activities the organisation carries out as part of its day-to-day operations.
- **Outcomes:** The Outcomes are direct, short and medium-term consequences of the Outputs/Inputs as part of the services provided by the organisation.
- **Impacts:** The Impacts are the longer-term desired change that MarinTrust aspires to achieve.

Below you can find a detailed breakdown of the MarinTrust Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts;

#### Long-term Impacts;

1. **Improved global responsibility of the sourcing (incl. fisheries) and production of marine ingredients’** (MarinTrust Statement of Change)
2. More marine ingredient factories reduce the effects on the environment to an acceptable\* level
3. More Marine Ingredient Factories become socially responsible\*
4. More fisheries used as sources of marine ingredients, reduce effects on the environment to an acceptable\* level
5. More fisheries used as sources of marine ingredients become socially responsible\*

\*an acceptable level here refers to being compliant or aligned to the MarinTrust Standard requirements

#### Medium-term Outcomes;

1. Increase the proportion of marine ingredients which are sourced from responsibly managed Fisheries.
2. Reduce the proportion of marine ingredients which are produced using IUU raw material.

3. Increase the proportion of fish processors with an implemented and effective recognised Quality Management System.
4. Demonstrate to stakeholders that fishmeal and fish oil products have been responsibly sourced and processed under a recognised Quality Management System.

#### **Short-term Outcomes;**

1. Provide globally relevant and credible MarinTrust Standards
2. Provide a credible Assurance System
3. Provide accessibility to the MarinTrust Standards

#### **Outputs/Inputs (Organisational activities);**

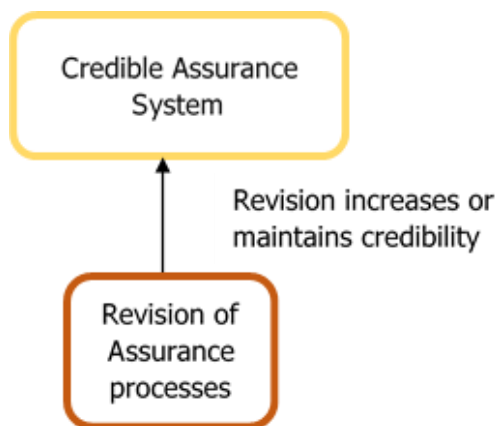
The above long, medium and short-term Outcome and Impacts will be achieved through the Outputs outlined in the MarinTrust Theory of Change and MEL Plan. Below is a complete list of the MarinTrust' Outputs;

- Stakeholder engagement
- Research and information
- Training
- Advocacy and awareness in industry
- Advocacy and awareness in government
- Support and advice
- Standard revision
- Monitoring, Evaluation & learning
- Revision of assurance processes
- Improver Programme

## Section 3: Assumptions

### 3.1 What is an assumption and how do they link with the Theory of Change?

An ‘assumption’ in relation to the Theory of Change is the way in which MarinTrust ‘assumes’ it will get from A to B. What we mean by this is if A happens, i.e. ‘**Revision of Assurance Systems**’ then B, i.e. ‘**A Credible Assurance System**’ will be the Outcome. Therefore, an assumption that has been made to get from X to Y is that ‘Revision increases or maintains credibility’.



Within the Theory of Change you will see that each Input, Output, Outcome and Impact has an arrow leading up the results chain. These arrows all carry at least one assumption and some may carry more than others. The full list of assumptions are outlined in the Assumption document [here](#).

### 3.2 What is the importance of assumptions?

Assumptions within the Theory of Change play an important role in the assurance that the results chains are successful. As already highlighted, assumptions are what MarinTrust as an organisation expects to be true and in order to ensure that this is the case these assumptions must be tested.

The testing of whether these assumptions are accurate is invaluable as it allows MarinTrust to not only identify areas in the Theory of Change that remain relevant, work successfully and efficiently but also aids in the identification of weak, incorrect or ineffective assumptions before an issue arises. As a result, MarinTrust will be able to adapt and rework appropriately to ensure the safeguarding of the Impacts it aims to bring about.

Furthermore, each assumption has been allocated an importance or ‘priority’ level, either high, medium or low by considering the aforementioned risks as well as the practicalities of testing each assumption.

### 3.3 Assumptions in practice

The most significant assumptions are included directly in the Theory of Change. These have been defined as significant due to the weight of importance they hold on MarinTrust accomplishing its goals. Major assumptions are considered highly pivotal for the reason that should one of the major assumptions prove to be incorrect it severely hinders the desired Outcome or Impact, and therefore carries the potential risk not only to the overall success of the Theory of Change but also the possibility of achieving the Statement of Change.

The ‘Enabling Environment’ i.e. big picture assumptions, are the business structures MarinTrust requires to function as an organisation and ‘assumes’ are in place to facilitate the Theory of Change.

These assumptions cannot be associated with a specific arrow as is seen with each individual Input, Output, Outcome and Impact. Instead, each of these elements (Good Governance, Funding, Financial management, Human resources & management) all need to be in place throughout the results chains at each level to allow the Theory of Change to function in its entirety.

Whilst the bigger picture and enabling environment assumptions are incorporated in the Theory of Change, as there are so many assumptions associated, a separate document with a complete list of all of the assumptions has been created, (click [here](#)). These assumptions have been colour coordinated in order to clearly link with the Theory of Change and numbered accordingly so as to also clearly correlate with the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan (MEL Plan), which is explained in detail in Section 4.

Following the 2020 Annual MEL report where enough data and information had been collected via the MEL system to start assessing the validity of the allocated assumptions it was confirmed that around 50% of the originally considered assumptions could be evidenced as still being valid. The other assumptions will be continue to be monitored, however there was not enough evidence to make a determination on validity. The major assumptions were also reviewed and identified as still valid and should be continuously monitored as part of the MEL process. The full findings can be found in the 2020 MEL report (available on request from MarinTrust).

## Section 4: Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Plan

Developed from the Statement and Theory of Change, the MEL Plan (available [here](#)) is a fundamental tool that illustrates exactly how MarinTrust intends to achieve the organisations targeted Impacts by specifically outlaying the following key areas;

- The means/methods and metrics (indicators) of data collection
- The frequency of data collection
- Who collects the data
- Baseline data and annual targets
- The priority level of each indicator
- The assumptions (if) associated to be tested using particular indicators
- Links to Risk Mitigations as outlined in the MarinTrust Threat and Risk Register

Not only is the MEL plan illustrative of how MarinTrust intends to achieve the organisations targeted impacts but it is actively implemented in order to carry out the necessary research and analysis for the purpose of performance monitoring.

### 4.1 Indicators

An indicator is the quantitative and/or qualitative data that are collected and analysed in order to either test assumptions or to be presented in MEL and evaluation reports to evaluate whether certain elements within the results chains are successful.

When looking at indicators within the MarinTrust MEL Plan the following considerations were made; that the indicators were specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. When attributing indicators it is key to ensure that the important indicators are made measurable and that the easily measurable indicators were not made important or unnecessarily scrutinised. Focussing on the easily measurable indicators rather than the important, but often more challenging to measure, runs the risk that the data collected and subsequent analysis would not provide the level of value towards the evaluation required, therefore hindering potential learning and development.

In addition, indicators clearly relate to at least one element of the Theory of Change and an appropriate balance of effort is invested across the results chains.

### 4.2 Negative and Positive Unintended Effects

The unintended effects included within the MEL plan refer to Outcomes or Impacts not directly defined within MarinTrust's Theory of Change and can be negative, positive or neutral in nature. This is because, as the title suggests, these are not part of the 'intended path' that MarinTrust wishes to take in order to achieve the desired Impacts. It is important to acknowledge and consider the possible negative and positive unintended effects MarinTrust as an organisation may have outside of the Theory the Change in order to advance the positive and mitigate the negative. In some cases this will involve specific projects or analysis to more clearly understand how these unintended factors have been caused, the impact they are having on stakeholder and, if possible, how best to mitigate them.

### 4.2 How the MEL Plan links to the Theory of Change

As previously mentioned, the MEL Plan was developed from the Statement of Change and Theory of Change and as a result is inextricably linked to these. In the Theory of Change itself, each Output, Input,

Outcome and Impact is assigned a colour, likewise to the way in which the list of assumptions is linked with the MEL plan, these same colours are carried over to the MEL Plan.

Taking the example **Standard Revision** from the Theory of Change, this Output/Input has been attributed with the colour orange. This colour orange then transfers into the MEL Plan where the indicators, baselines, frequency responsibilities, targets, priority and test assumption(s) are clearly set out.

### 4.3 The MEL Plan in use

The Impacts Manager is the principal person responsible for the MEL system and will also have specific outlined responsibilities for the collection of data as depicted in the MEL plan. Each member of MarinTrust staff participating in the MEL system may identify the specific indicators they have been made the responsible person for by utilising the pivot table created within the MEL plan.

Baseline data collection was carried out during the implementation of the MEL system in 2017 and the full report outlining these results is available [here](#). Subsequently, annual MEL reports have been produced following the review on the previous years results against the allocated targets for each indicator. Summaries of these reports have been included in the MarinTrust Annual Reports (which can be found [here](#)) and the full reports are made available on request. These results are then used to inform MarinTrust Governance and facilitate discussions on development and strategy.

As a result of the data collected from the MEL Plan and in line with the ToC, Outcome and Impact evaluations will be commissioned to cover, social and environmental impacts at the factory and fishery (in the future) level. Current work is ongoing to incorporate social and environmental measurements within the MarinTrust standard to facilitate such impacts research.

In addition, the MEL plan will undergo an annual review preceding an annual MEL Report that will include, where appropriate, reference to progress on refinements from previous MEL Plan reviews. The aim of each annual report is to not only to consider refinements or changes to MarinTrust's work but also modifications to MarinTrust's Theory of Change and MEL Plan itself. Each annual MEL Report shall report on progress regarding previous year's changes and refinements, in a process of continuous improvement.

### Closing Paragraph

MarinTrust wholeheartedly embraces the value of MEL to facilitate the achievement of its objectives, to demonstrate its Impacts, and to aid wise and timely use of data. This is a long journey, and we have much to learn. MarinTrust has developed the framework for a robust but flexible system, and with the help of partners, stakeholders, and ISEAL we are committed to making good progress.