



FACTSHEET

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Sustainable Seafood

Towards responsibly managed fisheries: certification & eco-labelling



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Responsibly Managed Fisheries

Despite the gloomy state of world fisheries, distant water fishing nations (DWFNs) continue to shift their efforts toward the western and central Pacific Ocean, which hosts the world's last healthiest tuna stocks. Regional fisheries management strategies, to a great extent, have not always been effective given the conflicting interests from a wide range of stakeholders. In view of such a predicament, novel solutions such as fisheries certification and eco-labelling have shown to benefit both the environment and those exploiting the resource. These methods can lead the way to a more responsibly managed fishery.

Certification and Eco-labelling

Fisheries that wish to be certified as responsible and sustainable must first be thoroughly audited by an independent assessor. Before certification, a fishery is assessed against a set of criteria or standard. Once a fishery is deemed to pass the rigorous scientific and management criteria, an eco-label can accompany the fish product. The certification guarantees that a fishery is managed to the highest standard.

Third party labelling schemes are voluntary. They are established by a private initiator independent of the producers, distributors and sellers of eco-labelled products. Following certification, the fishery and companies involved are then able to show consumers that the product was obtained using the best fishing practice as advocated for by the certifier. Third party schemes are more reliable as the assessment is carried out by an independent body.

CERTIFIED FISHERIES

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What are the benefits of certified and eco-labelled products?

Benefits of these products are:

- Provide information to middle men and consumers on the environmental impacts associated with the fisheries product purchased.
- Allows consumers to express environmental/ecological concerns through purchasing behaviour (i.e. only buying sustainably caught fisheries products).
- Generate price premiums on sustainably caught seafood products.
- Create better incentives for producers to supply product that meets the eco-labelling criteria for greater monetary returns or gain better market share.
- Raise environmental standards in the production of the fishery.
- Increases support by industry and other interested parties for improved fisheries management.
- Encourages consumers to purchase tuna that come from a well-managed fishery.

Case Study: The Marine Stewardship Council

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is a voluntary certification and eco-labelling scheme for wild caught fisheries. It is a global organisation that collaborates with fisheries, seafood companies, conservation groups, scientists and the public to enhance awareness of environmentally sustainable seafood choices.

The MSC's fishery certification programme recognises fisheries, companies and groups for their compliance to sustainable fishing practices. The eco-labelling programme works to ensure that MSC-labelled seafood comes from and can be traced to a sustainable fishery. It also ensures high standards of sustainable fishing, following both the UN Food and Agriculture Organization guidelines and the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance (ISEAL) code of Good Practice. Interested fisheries are assessed against the MSC standard, which comprises 3 principles. The fishery must demonstrate through their practice that (1) a healthy target species population is maintained; (2) the integrity of the ecosystem is upheld and (3) effective management systems are implemented to achieve principles 1 and 2. The fishery is assessed by a third party to eliminate bias.

Fisheries that are part of MSC are rigorously assessed to ensure consumers can trace the seafood product from sea to table. Two fisheries from the Pacific Islands are now MSC certified. These fisheries are the Parties to the Nauru agreement (PNA) skipjack free-schooling purse-seine fishery and the Fiji Tuna Boat Owners Association (FTBOA) albacore longline fishery. MSC certification affords a competitive advantage to these groups as it gives them access to markets that demand responsibly-sourced seafood, for example, buyers in Europe and North America.



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What does eco-labelling and certification mean for the future?

Certification and the use of eco-labels give consumers a platform to support sustainable fishing practices by only purchasing product from sources considered being healthy and well-managed. Fishing and fish processing industries that wish to expand market opportunities for their products will also benefit economically due to the increasing demand for certified products. They will also be confident in the sustainability of their stock, as long as the proper scientific and fisheries management advice provided is adhered to.

For more information

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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