

Ecolabelling for Fisheries Sustainability



INTRODUCTION

Fish and fish products are increasingly globalized. More and more fish are caught in one part of the world, transported to another for processing and then finally consumed in yet another country.

In an increasingly competitive market, large food companies search for ways to distinguish their products, brands or firm from their competitors. “Corporate social responsibility” policies are about building reputation and gaining market share.

Strategies relating to environmental concerns include well-publicized ethical procurement policies. In terms of publicizing a sustainability element in procurement, many firms have linked themselves to existing eco-labels; some (albeit fewer) have created their own ecolabels.

The most well-known ecolabel, that of the Marine Stewardship Council, was the product of co-operation between Unilever and WWF.

WHAT IS ECOLABELLING

- Ecolabelling is a tool to promote products with less negative environmental impact than comparable products.
- Ecolabelling is voluntary. The systems are transparent and should be open for every country and aiming at promoting free trade. Environmental criteria must be relevant and possible to monitor and audit. LCA perspective (life cycle assessment) is a guiding principle.

The first ecolabelling initiatives appeared in the early 1990s and were largely concerned with incidental catch (by-catch) issues. For example, the 'Dolphin Safe' label was based on standards developed by the United States' NGO Earth Island Institute and is focused on dolphin by-catch in the tuna industry.

ECOLABELLING AND CERTIFICATION SCHEMES



MSC ecolabel is an attempt to reward producers using responsible fisheries practices, by encouraging retailers to procure those products and consumers to buy them.

Dolphin Safe, developed by the NGO Earth Island Institute, is concerned mainly with Dolphin by-catch.



Marine Eco-Label Japan (MEL Japan) is a system to support fisheries that work to conserve marine resources and the oceans.

ECOLABELLING AND CERTIFICATION SCHEMES



Friend of the Sea covers both wild and farmed fish and its criteria also include requirements related to carbon footprint and “social accountability”.



Krav, a Swedish NGO which specializes in organic farming but has recently co-ordinated standards for ecolabelling wild capture fish.



Naturland in Germany also with a background in certifying organic farmed seafood but developing a wildfish standard.

ECOLABELLING AND CERTIFICATION SCHEMES

Very few *retailers* have developed their own ecolabel, preferring to align themselves to some existing scheme. For example,

- In 2006, **Wal-Mart** set a goal to procure all its wild caught seafood for North America from MSC certified fisheries within the next three to five years.
- **Asda** (part of the Wal-Mart Group) in the United Kingdom has also pledged support to the MSC and has a target of buying wild caught fish only from MSC certified sources by 2010.
- The United Kingdom's **Marks and Spence** also has a target of 100% MSC certified fish, by 2012.
- An exception to this trend is the large French retail chain **Carrefour** that has set up its own ecolabel, "Peche responsable".



ECOLABELLING AND CERTIFICATION SCHEMES

*Certification schemes have also been developed by **national and regional industry bodies**. These are not ecolabelling schemes in the strictest sense but rather provide certification of good fishing practices. For example,*

- **Canadian fishing industry** launched a voluntary scheme covering all commercially harvested marine and freshwater species that certifies the good practices used on board fishing vessels.
- **The Seafish Industry Authority**, in the United Kingdom, launched a scheme covering all aspects of vessel operations, including environmental considerations and traceability.
- In Iceland, **Fiskifelag**, an umbrella body for the Icelandic fishing industry has plans a programme to promote or market the sustainability of Icelandic fisheries generally.
- The Spanish group **Pescanova** has created a logo that appears on a limited range of its packaged products. The logo states that the fish concerned has been caught in a way that preserves the aquatic and marine ecosystem.

Ecolabelling of fish and fishery products has the potential to create a market incentive to manage fisheries and aquaculture farms sustainably. Several benefits can accrue to the world community if this potential is realized:



There will be environmental improvement in the aquatic ecosystems, reducing societal costs of the reduction in global biodiversity.



Consumers will benefit as they receive more information concerning the products they purchase, are able to choose from more products of varying environmental qualities and are able to make informed choices regarding the purchase of those seafood products.



Producers of ecolabelled seafood benefit from being able to extract that additional willingness to pay from consumers that they would not ordinarily be able to do in an undifferentiated market.



The fisheries industry will benefit as the move from an unsustainable fishery to a sustainable fishery preserves production and jobs over the long run.

REFERENCE

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