

Certified Sustainable Fisheries

Since the original passage of the Law of the Seas International Treaty in 1982, and its various follow-on Conventions, there have been multiple conservation organizations and industry groups which have become concerned with promoting a sustainable fishing industry to assure the survival of fishing stocks around the world. Although substantial progress has been made, nevertheless the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has observed that less than 20% of the world's fish catch is presently governed by certified sustainable fishing standards and ecolabeling and that it is a continuing challenge to gain the participation of many developing countries, where up to 80% of exports may be accounted for in fish products.

Perhaps the most noteworthy program to attain sustainable fisheries certification comes from the Marine Stewardship Council. A detailed set of standards for sustainable fishing covers specific species, methods of fishing and specific geographic locations in many fisheries around the world. Equally important, standards have been developed for seafood traceability and chain of custody to ensure the integrity of the fish supply. Adherence to these standards is then verified and audited for specific fishing companies by a number of independent certifiers.

Possibly most important of all, to provide a demand for certified fish products and help provide a market-based solution for sustainable fisheries, the Marine Stewardship Council has developed a consumer program which includes (1) its signature blue ecolabel certification on packages and (2) a convenient search tool on its website to help consumers identify certified brand names and fish products and the retail locations where they can be purchased.