

## INTERVIEW

Herman Wisse, Project manager, GSSI (Global Sustainability Seafood Initiative)

“We need to provide clarity on the growing number of seafood schemes in the market and this is where GSSI can make a big difference”

Herman Wisse is the GSSI's Project Manager, an initiative supported by all the sector, both fishing and processing industry, NGOs, retailers and academia with the aim of evaluating if certifications schemes align with FAO criteria.

FAO, the National Fisheries Institute (USA), Seafish (UK), Marine Harvest, American Seafoods, Trident Seafoods, Sodexo, Metro, Sainsbury's and Morrisons are part of its membership.

GSSI is set to become a global reference as a guarantee of transparency and clarity on the complex and diverse sustainability scenario, eliminating redundancy and increasing affordability within the supply chain.

### **What is your evaluation of the year passed since the Global Benchmark Tool launch?**

GSSI has gone from strength to strength since the launch of the Global Benchmark Tool. Certification schemes have signed up to be benchmarked and partner and non-partner companies have committed to include the outcomes of the Tool in daily operations.

New companies have joined the GSSI partnership and NGOs are looking to join as affiliated partners. Recent GSSI



events, such as at the side-event at FAO Sub-Committee on FishTrade in Agadir highlighted the strong engagement with GSSI.

And, at the SeaWeb Summit in Malta, companies and NGOs spoke of GSSI as a potential platform to address other topics in the sector going forward.

With GSSI now incorporated as a foundation under Dutch law, we are looking forward to a busy and productive year ahead for GSSI.

**GSSI announced in March the start of the Public Consultation on the Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) program after evaluation against the criteria of the Global Benchmark Tool. The Alaska RFM program is the first certification scheme reaching this stage in the process.**

### **What is your evaluation regarding this issue?**

After our launch of the Tool just six months ago, it's an important milestone for the first scheme to reach this stage of the Benchmark Process.

It's great to see the Tool in action, which shows the process is working and is the starting point for getting more clarity on seafood certification.

The public consultation is important as it gives stakeholders an opportunity to engage in the process as part of our commitment to transparency. It's also the last step before the final recommendation is made to the GSSI Steering Board for a scheme to be GSSI-recognized. What that means in practice is that ASMI RFM has, over a period of 4 months, been benchmarked by trained Independent Experts against 234 GSSI

Components, of which 145 are essential.

Before being announced for public consultation the process already included a desktop review, an office visit and an expert review by the Benchmark Committee.

### **What other requests for evaluation has GSSI received and in which stage are they at present?**

I'm pleased to report that GSSI has received a number of requests from certification schemes to be benchmarked and several schemes have publically stated their aim to apply for GSSI recognition. Over the coming months we are looking forward to sharing more announcements including those of the first GSSI-recognized schemes.

### **Tell us about the GSSI's partners, among which there are private companies, retailers and non-profit organisations, and the expectations for new partners joining the GSSI in the near future.**

GSSI's unique partnership of global business, NGOs, experts, governmental and intergovernmental organizations, namely FAO, has been working together since 2013. GSSI's platform allows it to leverage the commercial power of the

market as well as the influence of governments worldwide to help work towards more sustainable seafood for everyone. This creates a win-win for all involved. It's already had a big impact.

With the launch of the Tool, GSSI is actively looking to grow its partnership and welcomes new companies to join and help GSSI deliver on its mission of promoting improvement and building confidence in certified seafood. To find out more and join GSSI, get in touch at [secretariat@ourgssi.org](mailto:secretariat@ourgssi.org).

**Do you consider that a certification with the GSSI's recognition will be valid and will have the recognition of the consumer when it comes to selling the product in retail, specially in North European countries?**

GSSI is working to increase the recognition of robust and credible seafood certification schemes. But GSSI is not a consumer-facing initiative and does not permit any consumer facing labelling about its recognition. It was set up to provide clarity on seafood certification and make information available across the supply chain, helping buyers to make informed and efficient decisions.

Once a seafood certification scheme is publically recognized by GSSI, GSSI will publish a statement on [www.ourgssi.org](http://www.ourgssi.org). Then it's over to the seafood sector to make use of the information to help in decision-making. In that way it will increase the confidence in the certified

seafood on offer, also for consumers.

**Metro has already announced that those products carrying environmental certifications in their shelves must have been submitted to GSSI's evaluation. Are you confident about other retailers also demanding this requirement?**

Yes, going forward being GSSI-recognized will become the norm for robust and credible certification schemes that are in alignment with the FAO Guidelines for certification and ecolabelling.

As with Metro, many GSSI partners including Ahold, Delhaize, Darden, Sodexo, and Morrissons have already signed the GSSI commitment to recognize all GSSI recognized certification schemes as acceptable when sourcing certified seafood. Non-partner companies have also pledged their commitment to do so and companies worldwide are being encouraged to join this pledge.

**What is your opinion about the present situation of certifications in the market?**

FAO estimates that we will need 20 million more tons of seafood to reach a total of 187 million tons by 2030 to meet the growing global demand. To meet this demand we need more sustainable seafood. Seafood certification is one of the tools that can help us achieve that.

However, to do so we need to provide clarity on the growing number of

seafood schemes in the market place and create a level playing field. This is where GSSI can make a big difference.

Going forward the Global Benchmark Tool can provide the basis for a level playing field that continues to improve the choice for buyers, helps to drive down costs for suppliers and supports NGOs to promote greater environmental sustainability.

**Does GSSI foresee to carry out any communication campaign for consumers to inform them about what GSSI represents as a guarantee of sustainability for seafood products?**

GSSI is not a consumer-facing initiative and does not define sustainability. Instead, GSSI is focused on driving change towards sustainability through a multi-stakeholder process and delivering recognition of certification schemes that are aligned with the FAO Guidelines.

To take the process forward and shape the seafood sector's future, GSSI is expanding its global reach, with updates planned at a series of international events throughout 2016.

GSSI is also growing its online presence at [www.ourgssi.org](http://www.ourgssi.org), through its youtube channel and twitter account. Join us at one of our upcoming events and follow us to keep up-to-date with the latest news and find out what's next for GSSI.