

Building confidence in certified seafood: the GSSI

Landing in Ca Mau in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, among its patchwork of ponds that range from large-scale intensive to small extensive farms, you find yourself in one of the world's most important aquaculture producer regions. It is part of the trend towards a global increase in seafood production that is responding to a growing demand. Per capita fish consumption has more than doubled since 1961, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that by 2030, world fish production will have to increase by more than 20 million tons. In terms of helping to minimise the overall environmental impact of how we catch, grow and deliver seafood to meet this growing demand, certification is becoming increasingly important.

In many regions like Ca Mau, the story of seafood certification plays out daily in the lives of local businesses. Here, producers accessing different markets often have to bear multiple audit costs for different seafood certification schemes to satisfy buyers' demands. For smallholders, the costs involved are too high, and even as co-operatives, they can be dependent on a specific market and its fluctuations. At the other end of the supply chain, the increase in certification schemes has been leading to confusion, making decision-making more difficult. Retailers face dozens of certification schemes to choose from, and identifying the credible ones is a challenge as is trying to make sense of it for consumers. In the end, it is making seafood more costly for everyone.

Here, the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI) offers a remedy. In 2013, seafood companies, NGOs, experts, governmental and intergovernmental organisations joined forces in the global platform and partnership to build confidence in certified seafood matters across the supply chain. Thirty-two companies are currently backing GSSI as funding partners, together with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

and the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative, IDH. GSSI also counts on the support of five non-profit affiliated partners including FAO and WWF.

■ Transparent, cost-cutting and environmentally friendly

In autumn 2015 GSSI will launch its Global Benchmark Tool for seafood certification schemes. It is the result of an extensive multi-stakeholder discussion focusing on three reference documents: the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the FAO Guidelines for Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine/ Inland Capture Fisheries and the FAO Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification.

This tool is to make the certification landscape more straightforward as schemes sign up to be benchmarked and achieve GSSI recognition. GSSI's Expert Working Groups are currently working to finalise the tool based on feedback from a pilot test with eight schemes that participated world-wide (see box) and a second public consultation. GSSI's Global Benchmark Tool will be used to make information available across the supply chain to drive change and lower costs. Producers will have more options to choose the scheme that is right for them and reduce the need for multiple audits. Seafood buyers worldwide will then have simpler, more consistent data to guide their purchasing decisions. The

Seafood certification schemes participating in GSSI's Global Benchmark Tool pilot

- Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute
- Aquaculture Stewardship Council
- Global Aquaculture Alliance
- Iceland Responsible Fisheries Foundation
- IndoGAP
- Marine Stewardship Council
- Thai National Shrimp Standard
- VietGAP



It is difficult for retailers to find the right certification scheme and inform the consumers why they should buy these goods.

Photo: J.C. Alexandre

tool will also work towards minimising the environmental impact of seafood production to meet a growing demand. Open and checked information helps promote environmental sustainability.

■ Shaping the seafood sector's future

GSSI is inviting seafood certification schemes to go through the benchmarking process and get GSSI recognised. We aim that by 2020, 30 per cent of seafood production will be certified in accordance with a recognised scheme. Going forward, the post-2015 business model and future strategy are currently being developed. New partners are invited to join this global public-private partnership, and have the opportunity to work on a leading knowledge-exchange initiative and collaborate on topics shaping the seafood sector's future.

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In the second half of 2015, GSSI, with FAO, is holding a series of regional workshops on certification. For more information, including a list of partners, see: www.ourgssi.org.