



GSSI moves ahead with pilot testing its updated Global Benchmark Tool

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The Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI) is moving ahead with pilot testing its updated Global Benchmark Tool for seafood certification schemes. The Global Benchmark Tool aims to make information available across the supply chain to drive change and lower costs.

Thanks to the support of the seafood certification schemes who are participating in the pilot with GSSI and to the backing of IDH (the Sustainable Trade Initiative), who are co-funding the pilot, the updated Tool is being road-tested from March to July 2015. Results from the schemes will not be made public, but lessons from the pilot will be shared in a Report and feed into the updated GSSI Global Benchmark Tool that will be launched in autumn 2015.

GSSI has taken on board the range of comments from the 2014 public consultation and updated the Global Benchmark Tool. GSSI's updated Tool includes *GSSI Requirements*, which seafood certification schemes need to meet to be recognised by GSSI. These are grounded in the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and FAO Guidelines for Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine/Inland Capture Fisheries and FAO Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification. At the same time the Tool includes *GSSI Indicators*, which allow schemes to show their diverse approach and help stakeholders understand where differences exist. These are grounded in the CCRF and related FAO documents, ISO normative standards and ISEAL codes.

Bill DiMento, Corporate Director, Sustainability, High Liner Foods and Chair, GSSI Steering Board, comments: *"I have been involved with GSSI from the beginning. I am proud to work with leading organizations from the global seafood sector to ensure confidence in the promotion of certified seafood to consumers worldwide. I look forward to the GSSI bringing clarity to the marketplace through a benchmarking process that will identify credible certification schemes and provide insight for improvement."*

Aldin Hilbrands, Director of Aquaculture, IDH (the Sustainable Trade Initiative) notes: *"Benchmarking of certification schemes in support of transparency will help buyers to make well informed and cost efficient sourcing decisions. It also paves the way for producers to avoid unnecessary multiple certification costs. Recognition of credible certification schemes will support the way to mainstream responsible seafood production and consumption. That has always been the goal of the IDH Aquaculture program and that is why we support the GSSI activities."*

Michael Cerne, Executive Director, Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI) states: *"ASMI is excited to participate in the pilot project, is encouraged by the updated structure of the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool, and looks forward to seeing the updated requirements."*

Chris Ninnes, CEO, Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), notes: *"ASC aims to ensure seafood buyers can easily make a responsible choice when purchasing produce. The GSSI benchmarking tool has the potential to support our aim by providing a consistent mechanism to compare the environmental content of standards and related messaging about which programmes are credible. ASC has agreed to be part of this pilot to assist the further development of this tool and we look forward to the results of this testing phase."*

Paolo Bray, Founder and Director, Friend of the Sea (FOS), states: *“Friend of the Sea is the only international sustainable seafood certification program accredited by a national EU Accreditation Body. Our requirements scored best in all previous international benchmarks. We trust GSSI’s benchmark will further confirm the reliability of Friend of the Sea certification as a selective seal for sustainable seafood.”*

Peter Redmond, Director, Market Place Development, Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA-BAP), notes: *“We are confident that GSSI will provide insight to retailers and food service companies of what a truly robust 3rd party FAO based certification program looks like, which will assist them tremendously as they perfect their sustainability programs. We have always believed that the BAP program has a robust environmental platform which fully embraces FAO guidelines and we believe the coming months will validate this through the pilot process.”*

Finnur Gardarsson, Project Manager, Iceland Responsible Fisheries Foundation (IRFF), states: *“We approach our participation in the GSSI Pilot Test Programme as a learning process. We hope that our participation in the Pilot Test will help to improve the GSSI Benchmark Tool, leading to a better understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and we also see the Pilot Test as an opportunity for us to improve our certification programme. We sincerely hope that the work of GSSI will result in a fair, objective and useful tool that will level the playing field and promote order in the market for seafood.”*

Rupert Howes, Chief Executive, Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), notes: *“There is an increasing market need for a credible, independent benchmarking mechanism that provides impartial, consistent comparison of seafood certification and assurance mechanisms. A graduated comparison of different seafood certification and assurance mechanisms would enable seafood buyers to make informed choices. We welcome GSSI’s initiative and have agreed to help them to validate their requirements and indicators. We hope that, in the long term, this initiative will help to deliver transparency which contributes to real improvements to the health of marine environments.”*

Pham Anh Tuan, Deputy Director General, Directorate of Fisheries Vietnam, VietGAP notes: *“VietGAP has been built on the basis of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification since 2011. Our government wants to tell importers that aquaculture products are of good quality and traceability by applying VietGAP. Therefore, we are participating in GSSI’s Pilot Testing Program to compare and recognize each other, to review strengths and weaknesses of VietGAP and GSSI, and also we would like to have joint international recognition with GSSI through the benchmarking tool.”*

Notes to Editors:

GSSI is a global platform and partnership of seafood companies, NGOs, inter/governmental agencies and experts. The mission of GSSI is to ensure confidence in the supply and promotion of certified seafood as well as to promote improvement in seafood certification schemes. GSSI is co-financed by GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through its develoPPP.de program. GSSI has grown from 17 Funding Partner companies in 2013 to 32 in 2015 and welcomes new partners.

The seafood certification schemes participating in the pilot for the Global Benchmark Tool are:

- Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI) www.alaskaseafood.org
- Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) www.asc-aqua.org
- Friend of the Sea (FOS) www.friendofthesea.org
- Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA-BAP) www.gaalliance.org
- Iceland Responsible Fisheries Foundation (IRFF) www.responsiblefisheries.is
- Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) www.msc.org
- VietGAP www.vietgap.com

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