



GSSI, the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative

GSSI is a global partnership that has established a benchmark for seafood certification schemes. It was set up by the seafood industry, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to build confidence in certified seafood.

The Issues

Rising global demand means that by 2030 seafood production is projected to increase by 16-47 million tonnes, mostly from aquaculture¹. Even at current levels there are concerns over the substantial impacts that seafood production can have on the environment. One way of providing assurances of more sustainable practices in both aquaculture production and wild capture fisheries is the use of seafood certification schemes. But the increasing number of schemes, and competition between them, has led to confusion among producers, retailers and consumers over what is credible. This confusion is making informed decision-making more difficult, and seafood more costly, for everyone.

The Global Benchmark Tool

This is where GSSI comes in and is making a big difference. GSSI's global partnership has been working with FAO since 2013. These stakeholders have created the Global Benchmark Tool for seafood certification schemes. It's based on internationally recognized FAO documents: the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF)², the Guidelines for Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine/Inland Capture Fisheries³, and the Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification (FAO Guidelines)⁴. After exhaustive public consultations, including pilot testing with certification scheme owners, the Benchmark Tool is now accepted by FAO, large seafood buying companies and NGOs as the best way of recognising robust and credible certification schemes. Once a certification scheme is publically recognized by GSSI, the seafood sector can make use of the information to help in decision-making. It provides a level playing field that improves choice for buyers, helps to drive down costs for suppliers, and supports NGOs promoting environmental sustainability.

This is a collective, non-competitive approach to provide clarity on seafood certification, drive improvement and ensure confidence in certified seafood. Schemes that wish to be publicly recognized by GSSI, apply for the voluntary 7-step Benchmark Process. This expert-led process involves objective assessments against all GSSI Components and has been designed to be independent, impartial and transparent.

Confidence in the integrity of a certification scheme means that multiple audits can become a thing of the past; seafood businesses can choose the one scheme that best suits their needs and their budget.

GSSI results so far

The Alaska and Iceland Responsible Fisheries Management Certification Programs, as well as the Marine Stewardship Council, have already been recognised by GSSI and, as growing numbers of schemes sign up to be benchmarked, more results are due to follow. GSSI's key success factor is its established multi-stakeholder partnership with strong support from FAO. It bridges the public-private divide, harnessing both the commercial power of the market and the influence of governments and NGOs to deliver change at a global level.

Worldwide 36 companies – from harvesting, aquaculture, processing, food service, retail and brand manufacturing – are already backing GSSI as Funding Partners. GSSI also counts on the support of FAO and six non-profit Affiliated Partners. See www.ourgssi.org/partnership/partners/ for details.

Major buyers including Ahold Delhaize, Darden, Kroger, Metro Group, Morrisons, Sodexo and Walmart now recognize all GSSI-recognized schemes when sourcing certified seafood. Non-partner companies have also pledged their commitment and GSSI and others are encouraged to join this pledge.

The Future

GSSI is expanding its global reach, working to help shape solutions to complex challenges across the seafood supply chain. Now is a rewarding time to become part of this initiative. Seafish supports GSSI and contributes to its expert processes. If your company supports GSSI's mission, you might consider joining the GSSI Partnership. GSSI will also be present at a number of upcoming industry events, where there will be opportunities to connect and discuss further.

Please contact Herman Wisse, the GSSI Program Director, for more information:

secretariat@ourgssi.org or +31 6 269 35 297

www.ourgssi.org

¹ FAO (2016) The state of world fisheries and aquaculture 2016 www.fao.org/3/a-i5555e.pdf

² FAO (1995) FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries www.fao.org/fishery/code/en

³ FAO (2009) Guidelines for Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine/Inland Capture Fisheries www.fao.org/docrep/012/i1119t/i1119t.pdf

⁴ FAO (2011) Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification (FAO Guidelines) www.fao.org/3/a-ar133e.pdf