

# **SOUTHEASTERN FISHERIES ASSOCIATION INC.**

1118-B Thomasville Road

Tallahassee, Florida 32303

## **STATEMENT ON ECO-LABEL CERTIFICATION OF FISHERY PRODUCTS**

There are numerous Environmental Non-Government Organizations (ENGO's) certifying domestic fisheries based on their organization's criteria and rules. Most claim they offer expensive Eco-labels as stewards of the environment. This could be partially true and certainly is a strong selling point to attract major retailers to support their Eco-label. Who doesn't want sustainable fisheries as their goal in the United States?

Some Eco-label groups are said to coerce national retailers into supporting their particular definition of sustainability. The retailers then issue an announcement that they will not buy from a vendor unless the vendor is certified by a specific Eco-label organization who assures sustainability of their seafood products. This is how the environmental movement reduces the harvest of seafood and makes it more expensive.

Southeastern Fisheries Association (SFA) strongly believes the determination of sustainability for domestic fisheries must be made by the government agency that analyzes scientific data for each specific fishery.

The United States Government is obligated to manage domestic fisheries at sustainable levels. We can argue over what a sustainable level might be and how lack of empirical data often makes federal science a guessing game, but the bottom line is the determination of sustainability of U.S. fish resources in federal waters must be made by the federal government, not an environmental group.

If Eco-label groups wish to prohibit certain fishing gear in order to earn their particular eco-label, which they do, that's their right. If Eco-label groups wish to require seafood quality from the boat to the throat to earn an Eco-label that is also their right. They do not have the expertise to determine biological sustainability.

Recently I read a large number of Alaskan salmon companies opted for accreditation under the criteria of the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) instead of staying with the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC).

FAO has a *Certification of Responsible Fisheries Management Program* encompassing independence, transparency and credibility. It is a well established program, assuring customers of the highest quality and regulatory observance by participating companies. It relies on government to determine the biological sustainability of fisheries being considered for accreditation.

I read an article in SeaFood Business written by James Wright, "MSC: Alternative scheme not equivalent". In the article MSC comes out strong against the Alaskan salmon industry for leaving the MSC program knowing that the U.S. salmon industry provides some of the best seafood in the world.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) also weighed in against Alaska. WWF has their own expensive Eco-label they sell.

The Alaskan salmon fishery is well managed by the state working closely with the fishermen. Alaskan salmon stocks are also protected under federal law throughout their migratory range and salmon biological science is always current thanks to adequate federal and state funding.

The MSC wrote the Alaskan program was developed “without broad consultation and stakeholder engagement, which shows a lack of transparency.” The Alaskans offer a different point of view and we in the southeast agree with the Alaska salmon industry.

Alaska produces the largest volume of domestic seafood because of their multi-billion pound Pollock fishery. They deserve praise for providing so much healthy seafood.

On the other hand the domestic harvest of seafood in southern states since 1976 has declined because of NOAA/ENGO politics and the growing power of Agenda 21 and its concept of sustainability. The Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD) has been implemented in all executive agencies under the provisions of Presidential Executive Orders signed by the last four presidents. The CBD might be the only bipartisan initiative enacted within the executive branch of our government over the last twenty years. Congress has had no say in the implementation of a sustainable United States under the United Nations CBD manifesto. This is all part of the sustainability movement.

SFA represents fishing companies harvesting or processing 95% of Florida produced shrimp on the east coast of the state and 90% of the Key West pink shrimp on the west coast. SFA members deal in spiny lobster processing, coastal migratory pelagic, stone crabs, oysters and all other domestic fisheries in the southeast. SFA was never asked by MSC to comment as a stakeholder on their certification program, leading us to believe they don't care what the producers, dealers and processors have to offer.

I talked to several seafood companies who feel they were coerced into joining MSC because several of their major retail customers demanded MSC certification. The seafood companies were producing sustainable products before they were forced to pay thousands of dollars for an MSC Eco-seal. Nothing changed after MSC certification except the fish became more expensive to the consumer.

Kudos to Alaska for making Eco-label certification less political. It's all about fishing for generations to come. What we have is a culture worth saving.

Bob Jones, Executive Director  
Southeastern Fisheries Association  
<http://www.seafoodsustainability.us>  
January 28, 2012