

SSI Review: Standards and Blue Economy

Press release

Sustainable seafood market is surging, study finds

- **Certified seafood accounts for 14 per cent of global production, up from 0.5 per cent in 2005**
- **Good news for the environment and fish stocks**
- **The majority of certified seafood does not offer comprehensive protection of worker's rights**
- **The majority of certified seafood sold in retail markets comes from developed countries**
- **Targeted investment in developing country certification is needed to facilitate transformative change on a global scale**

GENEVA -- May 11, 2016 -- The sustainable seafood market is surging. In 2015, demand from big retailers and restaurant chains pushed suppliers to certify a catch valued at \$11.5 billion USD, a study published Wednesday found.

Sustainable seafood now accounts for 14 per cent of global production, a dramatic rise from just 0.5 per cent in 2005, according to *The State of Sustainability Initiatives (SSI) Review: Standards and the Blue Economy*, which was produced by an alliance of international organizations.

In one of the first studies of its kind, SSI researchers took a deep dive into the market and performance trends of the nine most prevalent seafood certification schemes, including the Marine Stewardship Council, GLOBAL G.A.P. and Friend of the Sea.

The SSI Review documents that, globally, certified seafood production grew 35 per cent per annum over the last decade, nearly 10 times faster than conventional seafood production over the same period.

“The rapid expansion of sustainable seafood practices is helping to address decades of mismanagement, which has led to the collapse of fisheries and destruction of fragile marine ecosystems,” said lead author Jason Potts, a senior associate at the International Institute for Sustainable Development.

“By giving fishermen an economic incentive to protect the environment, these initiatives have the potential to help link sustainable livelihoods to sustainable production practices.”

\$140 USD BILLION SEAFOOD INDUSTRY IS ENVIRONMENTALLY BANKRUPT

The seafood industry represents a critical source of both protein and employment globally. The overall trade value of the seafood sector was estimated at US\$140 billion in 2014, making it one of the most valuable non-petroleum products traded internationally.

Growing global demand for seafood products has continued to put pressure on global fish stocks, with an estimated 88 per cent of natural fish stocks being either fully exploited or overexploited.

While farmed fish has the potential to relieve the burden on wild fish stocks, it too faces a number of sustainability challenges, like ecosystem destruction associated with the use of synthetic inputs, feed and waste management.

The SSI Review maps the requirements of major seafood standards across environmental issues such as biodiversity, ecosystems, waste, greenhouse gas, energy, water, synthetic inputs and GMO prohibition. The review concludes that, while voluntary standards have established a strong foundation for enabling a transition to sustainable production practices across the global seafood industry, full integration of such practices will require the involvement of governments.

“While voluntary standards can certainly help, they can’t be expected to solve all of the problems facing our oceans, which inevitably require intergovernmental action,” Potts cautioned. “Even the successful implementation of voluntary standards on a wide scale will require significant investment from governments on issues like improved stock assessments and economic incentives for switching to sustainable production methods.”

NEED FOR LABOUR RIGHTS AND WORKER PROTECTION

The report found that the majority of certified seafood is not required to demonstrate compliance with universally accepted core ILO labour conventions. Nor do they ensure that fishermen get paid a living wage for their catch.

The recent controversy over slavery-like conditions in the Thai shrimp industry – and the resulting call for change from consumers and retailers – highlights the importance of worker protection in the global seafood supply chain.

“Labour rights and improved access to certification are becoming increasingly important as certification schemes seek to provide meaningful benefits for poorer stakeholders in the seafood supply chain,” said Ann Wilkings, a researcher with IISD and co-author of the report.

STANDARDS COULD SPUR MUCH-NEEDED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BUT NOT ALONE

An estimated 3 billion people depend on seafood as their primary source of protein, while an estimated 10–12 per cent of the world’s population is either directly or indirectly dependent on seafood for their livelihoods. An estimated 80 per cent of fishermen are located in the developing world.

But Asia – which accounts for 69 per cent of global seafood production and is associated with some of the most important environmental impacts from fishing – only accounts for 11 per cent of certified production. Meanwhile, the five countries that account for 64 per cent of global certified production only account for 14 per cent of global seafood production. Those countries are: Peru (26 per cent of sustainable production), the United States (15 per cent), Norway (10 per cent), Chile (8 per cent) and Russia (5 per cent). Notably, North America and Europe account for more than 60 per cent of certified production destined for retail markets.

The concentration of production suggests that the benefits of certification are distributed unevenly across the world’s oceans and peoples. Adoption of certification by Asia and Africa is complicated by underdeveloped infrastructure and will require significant investment if certified production is to grow in these regions.

“Seafood standards can provide transparency to economic relations and thereby facilitate investment. To date, as indicated in the report, actual premiums associated with certified seafood have been either low or non-existent, pointing to the need for external investment and finance to help the transition among developing economies,” said Noemi Perez, of Finance Alliance for Sustainable Trade, a co-publisher of the report.

“Our research found little in the way of targeted funds linking investment to the adoption of sustainable practices, suggesting a potential opportunity for development banks, donor agencies and buyers.”

Overall, *The SSI Review* concludes that the opportunities for voluntary standards to enable positive transformational change in seafood markets are now well established and continue to grow within developed country markets.

Securing transformative change in global production, however, will require a simultaneous and concerted movement towards the integration of certification within national policy and investment decision-making, particularly as these apply to developing country producers.

The SSI Review is a collaborative effort by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the Finance Alliance for Sustainable Trade (FAST). The SSI Review was made possible with the support of the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs.

About IISD:

The International Institute for Sustainable Development is an independent, non-profit organization that provides practical solutions to the challenge of integrating environmental and social priorities with economic development. We report on international negotiations, conduct rigorous research, and engage citizens, businesses and policy-makers on the shared goal of developing sustainably.

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