Chapter 1
Ecolabelling of Seafood: The Basic Concepts

Trevor J. Ward and Bruce Phillips

1.1 Introduction

Ecolabelling provides consumers with the opportunity to make informed choices about the seafood they purchase, at the fresh fish bar, in supermarkets, cafes and restaurants. This chapter introduces the concept of ecolabelling of seafood, and discusses the basic elements of a successful seafood ecolabelling programme. The concepts are introduced through a series of topics that provide the background and expose some of the complexities and subtleties. Later chapters in the book provide more detail and perspectives from a broad range of the practitioners and scientists involved with the many aspects of seafood ecolabelling. This chapter also provides a selection of the various forms of seafood ecolabelling that currently appear in the marketplace, as a resource for consumers, researchers and students to explore the issues and questions in more detail.

An earlier book – *Ecolabelling in Fisheries: What Is It All About?* – was published in 2003 (Phillips *et al*. 2003), with two of the contributors here, B. Phillips and T. Ward, as the editors. It included a detailed description of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) process, case studies including Australia's Western Rock Lobster Fishery, Alaska salmon fishery, the Thames Herring Drift-Net Fishery, New Zealand hoki fishery, and a number of perspectives from those with experience of the process of ecolabelling and the reactions to the ecolabelling concept of stakeholders in fisheries worldwide. It also included perspectives from fishery managers and those in the seafood industry about the early implementation of ecolabelling and its impacts. In preparing this new book we asked the contributors to concentrate on the developments since the publication of the first book in 2003. This book deals with seafood, both farmed and wild capture, and the content includes various forms of consumer programmes such as ecolabelling, guides and rating systems, with a worldwide focus.

The contributors to this book have been invited to 'tell their own story', and so the following chapters represent a perspective from each author that relates to their own experience with seafood ecolabelling. While there is more than a decade of

Chapter 4

The Marine Stewardship Council Programme

Rupert Howes

4.1 Introduction

The plight of the world's fish stocks is increasingly in the headlines. Hardly a day goes by without some reference to collapsing stocks, threatened livelihoods and the negative impacts of modern fishing practices on the marine environment. A recent and, for some, a controversial report in the journal *Science* suggested that a 'business as usual approach' to the global fishing industry could precipitate the collapse of the remaining commercial stocks by as early as 2048, as ecosystems around the world became impoverished, depleted and damaged from overfishing (Worm *et al*. 2006). Top predators such as marlin, swordfish and tuna are considered to be under particular threat (Worm *et al*. 2005).

This growing media attention and interest is not surprising, given the scale and increasingly visible nature of the global fishing effort. Commercial fishing is the last major industry that harvests a wild and renewable resource for food. Its export value is over $70 billion annually (FAO 2006), sustaining over 200 million livelihoods around the world. It also provides the main source of animal protein for millions of people, particularly in developing countries. Hence, in one way or another, the world's commercial fishing industry touches all of us.

Global catches of fish and invertebrates have increased significantly this century from just 19 million tonnes a year in the 1950s to around 100 million tonnes a year now. However, catch rates have reached a plateau, and with 50% of the world's fish stocks now classified as fully exploited and a further 25% considered to be overfished, depleted or in a fragile state of recovery (FAO 2006), it is hard to see how we can meet the growing demand for seafood around the world for today's population let alone meet the basic needs and requirements for a global population that could grow from 6 to 9 billion people by the end of this century (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 1999). Whilst aquaculture or fish farming offers some potential to fill this gap, it is not a panacea. Fish farming has its own set of sustainability challenges not least the underlying sustainability of the feed, largely derived from wild-capture fisheries, used in the production systems

Chapter 13

Case Study 3: MSC Certification of the Alaska Pollock Fishery

Jim Gilmore

13.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the experiences of the US Alaska pollock industry in seeking certification of the world's largest whitefish fishery under the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) programme. The MSC initiative is an ambitious undertaking that intends to provide a single international sustainability standard against which any wild capture fishery, if it is inclined, can be assessed. The global diversity of fish species, fishing methods and management systems, presents an enormous challenge to the MSC as it strives to provide a programme that is practical, consistent and affordable to the range of interested participating fisheries.

Although the MSC was formed in 1997, the robustness of the fishery assessment process was not truly tested until early 2001 when environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) objected to the positive certification determination for New Zealand hoki and petitioned the MSC not to allow assessments of the Alaska pollock and South Georgian toothfish fisheries to proceed. Notwithstanding these early efforts by certain NGOs to preclude an Alaska pollock assessment by the MSC programme, the fishery assessment proceeded. The 4-year long Alaska pollock assessment process brought to light more deficiencies in the MSC programme than in the fishery, and the At-sea Processors Association (APA) considers that each of these problem areas needs to be corrected before the Alaska pollock industry can confidently submit the fishery for reassessment in 2010.

This chapter identifies and discusses three principal areas of concern that have arisen out of the experience of the Alaska pollock industry with the MSC programme during the extended assessment process. First, the MSC programme cannot achieve reasonable assessment timelines and costs until an adequate number of certification bodies are recruited into the programme. Second, the scoring of fisheries under assessment must be consistent across candidate fisheries and reflect the performance of the fishery against a clear and stable sustainability standard. Third, the MSC must strike a balance between refining its programme through practical experience as opposed to changing its policies and procedures in an effort to enhance its

Chapter 14

The Marine Stewardship Council and Developing Countries

Stefano Ponte

14.1 Introduction

In the last couple of decades, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and conservation groups have repeatedly highlighted the plight of over-exploitation of fish stocks around the world and the impact of intensive fishing efforts on the overall aquatic environment. To address these challenges, several fishery management responses have been devised, such as (1) legal instruments, including global conventions and national/local fisheries laws; (2) soft instruments, such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries; and (3) market and civil society initiatives – including ecolabels, single-attribute certification, report cards and information disclosure on hazard warnings (Allison 2001, Wessells *et al*. 2001).

Ecolabels are seals of approval that transmit environmental information to consumers. They are devised to determine the environmental impact of a product or service from point of production to point of consumption or disposal. Ecolabels are awarded to products that are deemed to have less impact on the environment than 'functionally equivalent or competitively similar products' (Wessells *et al*. 2001, Gardiner and Viswanathan 2004). Fisheries ecolabels can be categorised in three broad groups: (1) *first-party labels*, developed by individual companies on the basis of their own standards and consisting of a 'self-declared' label; (2) *second-party labels*, developed by industry associations (sometimes with inputs from conservation and consumer groups), applicable to the members' products, and verified internally or through an external auditor or certifier; and (3) *third-party labels*, developed by public, private or public–private initiatives, with third-party certification systems in place (Wessells *et al*. 2001; see Chapter 1).

Ecolabelled fishery products are a growing segment of the seafood industry. Their rise relates not only to increased concern with environmental issues, but also to increased competition in the retail sector, prompting a search for additional properties in products that may be able to add profitability and/or market share. The history of voluntary seafood labels before the advent of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) initiative was limited to two single-issue labels, aimed at reducing