CHAPTER 15

Product-Related Regulation: Certification of Mariculture Products

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1 Introduction

The following paper discusses the role of NGOs in the mariculture industry, especially dealing with the important questions on how consumers of fish are and should be informed and how NGOs coexist respectively compete with the EU and its policies. Furthermore the significance of Ecolabels in Aquaculture is addressed and the necessity for legal standards is briefly considered.

2 The North Sea Foundation

2.1 Background: NSF

The North Sea Foundation (NSF) is a Dutch environmental NGO which is working towards a sustainable use of the North Sea, primarily by way of constructive dialog and cooperation with stakeholders. It sees itself as knowledge and solutions driven and—since its purpose is not to reach the media with extreme opinions—rather science based than emotional. The NSF is also a member of Seas At Risk.

2.2 Work of the NSF—The Fish Guide

The main aim of the NSF is to enlarge awareness of consumers about the state and development of mariculture, especially its sustainability, and to change the sourcing policy of companies.

Concerning their modum operandi the NSF recently shifted from a policy-push to a market-pull-strategy.

Initially they intended to change the status of fisheries in the North Sea by trying to push policy makers and fishermen into changes. Realising that fishermen, indeed, were open for and even interested in such change, but simply could not afford it, the NSF adopted a market-pull-strategy, intending to enlarge the market for sustainable seafood products (aquaculture and fisheries) and

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make the change possible within fisheries and producers. The idea and target was to promote independent certified products and thereby protect the ocean. This was supposed to be generally achieved by supporting front runners and marketing companies.

2.2.1 The ‘Joint Methodology’
In 2004 the ‘Joint Methodology’, a seafood choices alliance consisting of the WWF, Greenpeace, De Noordzee (NSF) and the MCS (Marine conservation society), started. In view of a model perceived in the US they decided to create a pocket guide on fish that consumers could easily take with them to the supermarket to be informed about the products on the shelves. By promoting sustainable fish in the market as ‘the fish to buy’ a wider market for sustainable fish was meant to be created.

For that matter two questionnaires were issued, one on aquaculture, one on fisheries, each looking at production methods, environmental effects, feed and management.

With the results consumers guides which give easy reference on the sustainability of the fish ranking them from red (bad) to green (good) were invented.

While Greenpeace mainly focuses on red-listed (i.e. rather unsustainable) species, the WWF, NSF and MCS focus more on the green listed species (‘the green message’) and ecolabels.

2.2.2 Labels
The two independent ecolabels supported by NSF are MSC (for fish) and ASC (for aquaculture) are deemed a valuable standard for sustainability. There are also other Aquaculture labels which, however, do not as yet have a certainty concerning sustainability as MSC and ASC.

The Aquaculture Stewardship council for example is a multi-stakeholder process which gives information on the most responsible practise for the top 15% companies per species. It has already created such information for pangasius and tilapia and it is planned to be done for salmon, trout and cobia soon. All in all it can only be considered a rather species oriented label than an overall guide on sustainability so far.

Business to Business labels such as GlobalGap and AAC/BAP started out as food security labels. They admittedly are tending to adopt more and more sustainability issues, but it cannot be ignored that they tend to be hardly feasible for consumers.

2.3 The Fish Guide
The fish guide is quite successful and therefore has been widely adopted within and even beyond the EU—several WWF offices in Europe, Singapore,