

Eco-labelling of fish and fish products



Eco-labelling of fish and fish products encourages consumers (mostly in developed countries) to buy sustainably managed fish. Eco-labelling can also help fishers' access new markets.

Current strategies:

- *Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification*: label awarded if fisheries management meets management and sustainability criteria. Limited uptake in developing countries.
- *Fisheries Improvement Projects (FIPs)*: focus on developing countries and certify that the fishery is working towards improvements. Can lead to MSC certification.
- *Fair Trade Capture Fisheries Standard*: Certification to demonstrate that the product is sourced and produced in an ethical, fair and sustainable manner. One pilot case in Indonesia.

Assumptions for resilience: Consumers reduce the demand for, and consequently, pressure on overfished stocks. Sustainably managed fish stocks support improved catch and income for fishers.

Ecological impacts

Positive

- Evidence indicates that eco-labelling projects:
- Can encourage sustainable management of fisheries and reduce overfishing.
- Can improve data collection for fisheries and monitoring.

It has been suggested that eco-labelling projects:

- May provide protection for marine life through improved fisheries management.

Negative

Evidence indicates that:

- MSC certification is not improving fish stocks in all cases.
- Not all eco-labelling schemes do address ecosystem effects of fishing, although MSC now does.
- Fishers do not always share long-term sustainability vision of certification schemes.

It has been suggested that eco-labelling can:

- Encourage by-catch due to a single species focus, although MSC now takes this into consideration.
- Encourage fishers to expand effort as a result of higher prices.
- Despite assessments to keep the standard, reduce incentives for continual improvement once standards for certification schemes met.

Implications for ecological resilience

It is suggested that eco-labelling projects should:

- Improve fisheries management in the long-term, but
- Improved incomes may lead to greater fishing pressure as fishers have more resources to invest.

Social impacts

Positive

Evidence indicates that:

- Certification schemes can support fishers' access to new markets which may offer a premium on labelled fish.
- MSC certification can give fishers prestige and access to additional government support.
- FIPs have flexibility to capitalise on existing local governance/ stakeholder engagement.
- Fair trade scheme delivers community benefits.

Negative

Evidence indicates that:

- MSC favours large-scale industrial fisheries.
- Certification costs/data needs can be prohibitive for small-scale fishers.
- Certification schemes need to control access to fisheries, which can be problematic in poor fishing communities.
- Benefits mostly go to individuals and there is limited evidence of overall community benefits from such schemes.

Implications for social resilience

Evidence indicates that:

- Consumers need to be better informed about MSC/FIPs (currently little recognition).
- Premium prices (when available) provide better incomes.
- Premium may be insignificant compared to certification costs.

Spatial scale: At the scale of the fishery (single species).

Temporal scale: MSC certification and FIPs can take many years depending upon state of the fishery; Fair Trade: 6 years.

Case study: Madagascar's reef octopus Fisheries Improvement Project (FIP)

The Marine Stewardship Council has funded Blue Ventures, a UK-based conservation NGO, to work with communities in rural southwest Madagascar to support a FIP for the octopus fishery. The fishery underwent an MSC pre-assessment in 2010 and the FIP will support the fishery to achieve full MSC certification. The project involves collaboration with government agencies, Madagascar's national marine institute, other environmental organisations as well as commercial seafood exporters.

Has it been successful? As the FIP project only began in 2017, it is too early to judge its success, but the temporary octopus fishery closure model being used to manage stocks, developed between local communities and Blue Ventures, has been demonstrated to boost catch and consequently local incomes. The model has been replicated across Madagascar's southern, western and northern coastlines. It has also catalysed the development of a network of locally managed marine areas (see report card 10).

Challenges facing the project: include a lack of funding for regional fisheries departments and an absence of data on the fishery and robust stock assessments, the absence of a clear legal framework that supports effective fisheries co-management and understanding of the wider impact of the fishery on the reef ecosystem.

Future application: Blue Ventures is supporting local communities to develop innovative data collection methods including the use of smartphone apps and tablets to support octopus stock assessments.



Further reading

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