2. Private standards: relevant definitions and a typology

2.1 STANDARDS – SOME RELEVANT DEFINITIONS

Standards, and related certification, are developed by a variety of public and private organizations, target variety of objectives and cover a variety of industrial activities. Consequently, the terminology is varied and rich and can lead to confusion. Therefore, it is important to define clearly the context and scope of standards and certification schemes as they apply to fisheries and aquaculture.

In fisheries and aquaculture, the relevant definitions and terminology derive from:
- the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Guide 2: Standardization and related activities – General vocabulary (ISO, 2004);
- binding agreements of the WTO – the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement), and the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement); and
- relevant food standards, guidelines and codes of practice issued by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex, or CAC).

According to the ISO (2004), a standard is: "A document established by consensus and approved by a recognized body, that provides for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines, or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievements of the optimum degree of order in a given context." It also notes that: "Standards should be based on the consolidated results of science, technology and experience, and aimed at the promotion of optimum community benefits."

The TBT Agreement distinguishes mandatory standards (or technical regulations) from voluntary standards as: "A standard is a document approved by a recognized organization or entity, that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for products or related processes and production methods, with which compliance is not mandatory under international trade rules. It may also include or deal exclusively with terminology, symbols, packaging, marking or labelling requirements as they apply to a product, process or production method."

In contrast, a technical regulation is defined as: "a document which lays down product characteristics or their related processes and production methods, including the applicable administrative provisions, with which compliance is mandatory. It may also include or deal exclusively with terminology, symbols, packaging, marking or labelling requirements as they apply to a product, process or production method."

Other key definitions relevant to fisheries and aquaculture, such as certification, conformity assessment, audit, verification and many others are provided in Appendix III.

2.2 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE STANDARDS

Standards set by public authorities, usually referred to as "technical regulations", are typically mandatory. Private standards by definition are voluntary, although as discussed later, they may in practice become de facto mandatory where compliance is required for entry into certain markets. Private standards and certification schemes have emerged for a number of reasons (described below). In the food safety area, private certification schemes emerged to verify compliance with government-mandated requirements for firms to introduce Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) food safety management systems. In terms of fisheries and aquaculture, the

more recent proliferation of private standards schemes appears most evident in areas where there is a perception that public standards or regulatory frameworks are failing to achieve given outcomes (sustainability and responsible fisheries management, food safety assurance [especially for imported food], robust traceability) and/or where there is a desire to differentiate certain products or operators in the market.

Standards and the certification systems sitting behind them, whether public or private, are a means of assuring buyers of the quality of products or the conformity of processes and production methods. Quality aspects can be related to the product itself or the process by which it was produced. Standards and certification are especially useful where there is *information asymmetry*, that is, where buyers and consumers cannot easily judge certain quality aspects of products or production processes. These quality aspects include what are termed *credence goods*. Food safety and the environmental friendliness of products are both examples of credence goods because consumers cannot practically assess either aspect and use that assessment to inform their purchasing decisions (FAO, 2001). Standards, and certification against those standards, are a way of compensating for information asymmetry. Certification (and related labelling of certified products) offers verification or a "burden of proof" that given standards have been complied with.

2.3   A TYPOLOGY OF PRIVATE STANDARDS IN FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

Table 2 shows the wealth and range of standards and certification schemes (public and private) applying to fisheries and aquaculture. It is not an exhaustive list.

Private standards differ in terms of content, certification and verification methods, standards developer, and focus.

TABLE 2
Standards and certification schemes operating in fisheries and aquaculture

	Type[1]	Main market orientation	Market access issues addressed				
			Food safety	Animal health	Environment	Social/ ethical	Food quality
Codex Alimentarius	S, C, G	Global	√	–	–	–	√
World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)	S, C, G	Global	√	√	–	–	–
GLOBALG.A.P	S, CS	Europe	√	√	√	–	√
Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA)/ Aquaculture Certification Council (ACC)	CS, L	United States	√	–	√	√	–
Naturland	CS, L	Europe	√	–	√	√	√
Friend of the Sea	C, S	Global	–	–	√	–	–
Seafood Watch	C, L	United States	–	–	√	–	–
Alter-Trade Japan (ATJ)	C, L	Japan	–	–	√	√	?
Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP) code of conduct	C	Europe	√	√	√	√	√
Safe Quality Food (SQF)	S, L, CS	Global	√	–	–	–	√
British Retail Consortium (BRC)	S, L, SC	Global	√	–	–	–	√
Quality Certification Services (QCS)	CS, L	Global	√	–	–	–	√
Fairtrade	L	Global	–	–	–	√	–
ISO 22000	S	Global	√	–	√	–	√
ISO 9001/14001	S	Global	–	–	√	–	√
Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)	C, S, L	Global	–	–	√	–	–
Fair-Fish	S, L	Switzerland	–	√	√	√	–
International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance (ISEAL)	S, C, L	Global	–	–	√	√	–
Scottish Salmon Producers' Organization (SSPO), Code of Good Practice (COGP)	C, L	Global	√	√	√	–	√

TABLE 2 (continued)

	Type[1]	Main market orientation	Market access issues addressed				
			Food safety	Animal health	Environment	Social/ ethical	Food quality
Pêche responsable Carrefour, France	C, L	Global	–	–	√	–	–
SIGES Salmon Chile	CS, L	Europe, United States	√	√	√	–	√
Shrimp quality guarantee ABCC, Brazil	CS, C, L	United Kingdom, Europe	√	√	√	√	√
Thai quality shrimp, GAP, Thailand	S, L	Europe, United States	√	–	–	–	√
COC-certified Thai shrimp, Thailand	S, L	Europe, United States	√	√	√	√	–
International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)	S, L	United Kingdom, Europe	√	√	√ Organic	√	√
Soil Association	S, L	United Kingdom	√	√	√ Organic	√	√
Agriculture Biologique	S, L	Europe	√	√	√ Organic	–	–
Bioland, Germany	CS, L	Europe	√	√	√ Organic	–	–
Bio Gro, New Zealand	S, L	Global	√	√	√ Organic	–	–
Debio, Norway	CS, L	United Kingdom, Europe	√	√	√ Organic	–	–
KRAV, Sweden	C, L	Europe	√	√	√ Organic	–	–
BioSuisse	C, L	Switzerland	√	√	√ Organic	–	–
National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia (NASAA)	C, L	Global	√	√	√ Organic	–	–
Irish Quality salmon and trout	C, L	Europe	√	√	√ Organic	–	√
Label Rouge, France	C, L	France, European Union	√	–	–	–	√
La truite charte qualité	C, L	France, European Union	√	–	–	–	√
Norway Royal Salmon	S, L	Europe	√	√	–	–	√
Norge Seafood, Norway	S, L	Europe	–	–	√	–	–
Qualité aquaculture de France	S, L	France, European Union	–	–	√	–	√
Shrimp Seal of Quality, Bangladesh	S, L	Global	√	–	√	√	√
China GAP	C, CS	Global	√	√	–	–	√
Fishmeal and fish oil Code of Responsible Practice (CORP)	C, CS	Global	√	–	√ Sustainability	–	√
The Responsible Fishing Scheme	C, CS	United Kingdom	–	–	√ Responsible fishing	√ Safety of fishers	–

[1] S = standard, C = Code, G = guidelines, L = label, CS = certification scheme.
Source: Adapted from FAO (2009a).

2.4 PRODUCT AND PROCESS STANDARDS

In terms of content, standards can relate to products themselves (specifications or criteria for product attributes) or to processes (outlining criteria and practices for the way products are made). Food safety standards typically focus on process aspects with the overall goal of improving the safety of final products. However, they can also define product standards related to residues of additives, contaminants or in terms of microbiological criteria. Ecolabels focus on where fish and seafood come from and how they are harvested or farmed (and/or the impact of that harvest on related fauna and flora) rather than on aspects of the products themselves. Process standards might relate to performance criteria that establish verifiable requirements for the production process, or management criteria relating to documentation and monitoring.

In the fish and seafood area, some schemes are concerned with marine capture fisheries, some with aquaculture, and some with both. Recently, a standards scheme has been developed that deals exclusively with fishmeal[2] (and includes both safety and environmental considerations).

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[2] The International Fishmeal and Fish Oil Organisation's Global Standard for Responsible Supply. See www.iffo.net.

2.4.1   Focus linked to standards developer

Some standards and certification schemes cover a range of aspects but their primary focus is to a large extent determined by the interests of the developer. Standards developers include a range of actors:

- Buyers (individual retailers, processors, food service operators, etc.) – standards are internal to the company and might simply reflect product and process specifications required of suppliers and/or requirements for certification to an independent third-party certification scheme.
- Groups of producers and/or industry bodies – usually reflecting their quality claims, sometimes based on geographical origins, and often referred to as codes of conduct or codes of practice.
- Coalitions of retail firms – for food safety standards.
- Independent non-profit organizations or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In general, standards developed by retailers or groups of retailers primarily focus on quality and safety aspects, those developed by producers (harvest or aquaculture) concentrate on quality assurance, while those developed by NGOs are more directed at the environmental implications of fisheries and aquaculture. That is not to say that retailers, for example, are not interested in environmental issues. As discussed below, the fisheries procurement policies of most large retailers and processors now include a significant sustainability component, but in that case they are more likely to associate themselves with an existing ecolabel than to develop their own.[3]

2.4.2   Certification and compliance

Certification is the procedure by which a certification body or certifier gives written or equivalent assurance that a product, process or service conforms to certain standards. There are three main types of certification:

- *first-party certification:* by which a single company or stakeholder group develops its own standards, analyses its own performance, and reports on its compliance, which is therefore self-declared;
- *second-party certification:* where an industry or trade association or NGO develops standards. Compliance is verified through internal audit procedures or by engaging external certifiers to audit and report on compliance; and
- *third-party certification:* where an accredited external, independent, certification body, which is not involved in standards setting or has any other conflict of interest, analyses the performance of involved parties, and reports on compliance.

Private standards in fisheries and aquaculture are usually underpinned by certification schemes. Where standards are established by individual companies and based on their own product specifications, compliance is typically verified by internal audit procedures. However, where buyers require certification against a wider FSMS, third-party verification of compliance, by bodies independent of the standard setter and the organization to be audited, is the norm. This is also the case for the main ecolabelling schemes.

There have been attempts in various fora to define the determinants of a credible certification scheme. Some relate to certification schemes generally, for example: the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) guidelines for certification programmes, and the Leuven Centre For Global Governance benchmark for assessing the credibility of certification initiatives (Marx, 2008). Others

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[3] Some corporations have been involved in partnerships to help fund the development of certification schemes (such as Unilever's involvement in setting up the Marine Stewardship Council [MSC]). Carrefour is one of the few retailers to have set up its own ecolabel: "Pêche responsable" for wild-capture fish.

are specific to fish and seafood. FAO has defined guidelines for the ecolabelling of fish and fishery products from marine and inland capture fisheries, and for aquaculture certification (discussed below).

In any case, the independence of certification is seen as a proxy for credibility – being audited by an independent body clearly offers a more credible judgment than a self-assessment: "For credence goods, one may rely on producer claims, but generally [there is] more trust in an independent third party to provide truthful information… In this case, either a third-party private certification may be used, or there may be government regulations requiring that certain product characteristics be revealed … by means of government testing or inspections" (Roheim, 2003).

2.4.3   Business-to-business versus business-to-consumer models
Private standards related to food safety and quality, are typically business-to-business (B2B) arrangements, whereas those related to sustainability or environmental protection, or directed to other niche markets such as organics, typically follow a business-to-consumer (B2C) model. In the former case, certification is a tool for communicating assurance to buyers that the supplier is in compliance with the food safety and quality standard (although sometimes a quality mark is marketed directly to consumers). In the latter case, certification is marketed to consumers at point-of-sale, often through the medium of a label attached to the product. As discussed below, the B2B aspect of ecolabels and the certification process sitting behind them are becoming increasingly important.