

Aquaculture Certification

Driven by concerns that some forms of aquaculture are environmentally unsustainable, socially inequitable, and that products are not safe for consumers, there had been attempts, over the years, to respond to the consequent public perceptions and market requirements. Food safety standards were elevated and international trade regulations tightened. Policy and regulations governing environmental sustainability were put in place in many countries, requiring aquaculture producers to comply with more stringent environmental mitigation and protection measures. In order to respond to these environmental and consumer concerns on aquaculture production and to secure better market access, there is increasing interest in certification of aquaculture production systems, practices, processes and products from aquaculture.

In several countries, aquaculture producers are introducing environmental certification of aquaculture products, either individually or in a coordinated manner, to credibly demonstrate that their production practices are non-polluting, non-disease transmitting and/or non-ecologically threatening. Some countries are attempting to introduce state-mediated certification procedures to ensure that aquaculture products are safe to consume and farmed in accordance with certain environmental standards.

The Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, during its third session held in India in September 2006, while recognizing the value of certification for increasing public and consumer confidence in aquaculture production practices and products, also noted that some certification schemes have resulted in higher costs for producers without delivering significant price benefits to small-scale farmers. It was pointed out that the costs of such schemes could be disadvantageous to small-scale producers, including additional costs of market access. It was therefore recognized that there are different needs between small-scale and large-scale producers and these differences should be adequately addressed. The Sub-Committee commented that the emergence of a wide range of certification schemes and accreditation bodies was creating confusion amongst producers and consumers alike and thus the necessity for a more globally accepted norms for aquaculture production, which could provide better guidance, serve as basis for improved harmonization and facilitate mutual recognition and equivalence of such certification schemes.

Within the context of the application of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), the Sub-Committee requested FAO to organise an Expert Consultation to make recommendations regarding the development of harmonised shrimp farming standards and review certification procedures for global acceptance and transparency, and to assist in elaborating the norms and reviewing the diverse options as well as relative benefits of these approaches.

The Fisheries and Aquaculture Department of FAO is repoding to this daunting task. FAO in partnership with the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Paciifc (NACA) and in collaboration with several governments, agencies and stakeholders drew up a consultative programme for developing aquaculture certification guidelines, which will be completed by September 2008. The details are available at <http://www.enaca.org/modules/tinyd10/>

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Cover photos:
Floating houses give livelihoods from inland fishing and cage aquaculture in Thailand, APFIC
The pristine and famous Rock Islands of Palau, attracting tourists from all over the world, S. Etpison, Palau, Micronesia

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