



FAO entrusted to develop guidelines on Aquaculture Certification

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In March 2007, an Expert Workshop was held in Bangkok, Thailand with the view to bring stakeholders together to initiate a process of developing guidelines on aquaculture certification as requested by the FAO Committee on Fisheries, Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (COFI/AQ/III) during its third session. The Expert Workshop was jointly organized by FAO and the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA) and was hosted by the Royal Government of Thailand.

The workshop was intended to assist in scoping the content of the certification guidelines and laying the groundwork for the programme of work on aquaculture certification. In addition, the workshop considered certification issues specific to the Asian region. This Expert Workshop complemented the regional analysis for Latin America which will be undertaken from 31 July to 03 August 2007 during the planned workshop in Fortaleza, Brazil.

The following are the main outputs of the workshop, driven by the discussions and perspectives of the participants:

- > Stakeholders brought together to initiate a process for developing guidelines for aquaculture certification as requested by the COFI/SCA
- > Key aquaculture certification issues examined
- > Consensus built and scoping of the contents of the certification guidelines
- > Groundwork laid for a programme of work on developing aquaculture certification guidelines and

- > Roadmap agreed for developing the guidelines.

Driven by concerns that some forms of aquaculture are environmentally unsustainable, socially inequitable and that products are not safe for consumers, over the years there have been attempts to respond to the consequent public perceptions and market requirements. Food safety standards have been elevated and international trade regulations tightened. Policy and regulations governing environmental sustainability have been put in place in many countries, requiring aquaculture producers to comply with more stringent environmental mitigation and protection measures. In some countries these changes were initiated by the aquaculture sector itself, usually within the more organized private industry sector to ensure its sustainability and to protect operations from poorly-managed activities. The private sector has made significant advances in the management of its activities and there are many examples of improved management of farming systems that have reduced environmental impacts and improved efficiency, including profitability, in all regions.

Owing to the need for responding to these environmental and consumer concerns on aquaculture production and in order to secure better market access, there is increasing interest in certification of aquaculture production systems, practices, processes and products from aquaculture. For example, recent legislation in both Europe and the US require mandatory certification to identify whether

aquatic products are produced from aquaculture or wild caught. These markets increasingly recognize that some form of certification is a way of assuring buyers, retailers and consumers that fishery products are safe to consume and that they originate from aquaculture farms or capture fisheries adopting responsible management practices. Certification has been introduced to capture fisheries for some time. Guidelines for eco-labelling of capture fishery products have been developed by FAO in 2005¹ and efforts are being made to develop eco-labelling guidelines for inland fisheries². There is a need for harmonization of fish quality and safety standards within aquaculture, implying increased development, thus wider use of internationally agreed, scientifically-based standards has become necessary.



In several countries, aquaculture producers are introducing environmental certification of aquaculture products, either individually or in a coordinated manner, in order to credibly demonstrate that their production practices are non-polluting, non-disease transmitting and/or non-ecologically threatening^{3,4}. Some countries are attempting to introduce state-mediated certification procedures to certify that aquaculture products are safe to consume and farmed in accordance with certain environmental standards⁵. Most of the work done on improved management has been on salmon and shrimp, mainly due to their high commodity value, cost absorption capacity and the importance attached as the most important internationally traded products.

During the Expert Workshop, a series of orientation presentations were made, outlining the general issues facing the development of aquaculture certification guidelines and some guidance on the global state of aquaculture certification and relevant agreements and standards. There were 13 presentations made by participants at the workshop covering their national or institutional experiences on different forms of certification schemes.

The Expert Workshop was attended by 72 participants from 20 countries, including several major aquaculture producing and consuming nations. The participants included experts from government agencies, private business, experts involved in certification schemes and food safety and non-government organizations.

It is expected that the first draft of the Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification will be tabled during the workshop in Fortaleza, Brazil in July 2007.

Further details on the process of developing guidelines on aquaculture certification and all relevant technical documents are available at www.enaca.org/certification

Further information can be obtained from:

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¹FAO. 2005. Guidelines for Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries. Rome. FAO. 2005. 90p.

²Expert Consultation - Guidelines on Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Fisheries Rome, Italy. 23 May 2006- 26 May 2006

³ABCC. 2004. "Código de conduta para desenvolvimento sustentável e responsável da carcinicultura brasileira". ABCC - Association of shrimp growers of Brazil.

⁴FAO. 2006. The state of world aquaculture 2006. FAO Fisheries Technical Paper. No. 500. Rome, FAO. 2006. 134p.

⁵FAO TCP/CHI/3002 Certification of the compliance of the environmental regulations by the aquaculture industry in Chile.