



EMBARGOED BY Nature

FOR RELEASE ON Wednesday, September 1, 2010 10:00 AM PDT

Wednesday, September 1, 2010

Seafood Stewardship Questionable: UBC-Scripps Experts

International group of scientists criticizes actions of fisheries certifier

Scripps Institution of Oceanography / University of California, San Diego

The world's most established fisheries certifier is failing on its promises as rapidly as it gains prominence, according to the world's leading fisheries experts from the University of British Columbia (UBC), Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California at San Diego and elsewhere.

Established in 1997 by the World Wildlife Fund and Unilever, one of the world's largest fish retailers, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) has been helping consumers eat fish "guilt-free" by certifying fisheries. Major North American grocery chains such as Wal-Mart, Whole Foods and Europe's Waitrose carry seafood bearing the blue-mark label as part of their sustainability strategy.

But in an opinion piece published in the current issue of *Nature*, six researchers from Canada, Italy and the U.S. object to the many of the MSC's procedures and certification of certain species.

"The MSC is supposed to be a solution, but a lot of what they do has turned against biology in favor of bureaucracy," says Jennifer Jacquet, lead author and post-doctoral fellow with UBC's Sea Around Us Project.

The largest MSC-certified fishery, with an annual catch of one million tonnes, is the U.S. trawl fishery for pollock in the eastern Bering Sea. It was certified in 2005 and recommended for recertification this summer.

"Pollock has been certified despite a 64 percent decline of the population's spawning biomass between 2004 and 2009, with no solid evidence for recovery. This has worrisome implications for possible harmful impacts on other species and fisheries besides the viability of the pollock fishery itself," says

[Email Release »](#)

Contacts

Mario Aguilera or Robert Monroe

Phone: 858.534.3624
scrippsnews@ucsd.edu

Jennifer Jacquet
UBC Fisheries Centre
740-507-7339
j.jacquet@fisheries.ubc.ca

Related Links

[Center for Marine Biodiversity and Conservation](#)

[Geosciences Research Division](#)

[Integrative Oceanography Division \(IOD\)](#)

[Nature](#)

[Scripps Home](#)

[ScrippsNews Home](#)

Share This Story



Jeremy Jackson from Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. "How is that sustainable?"



Scripps biological oceanographer Paul Dayton

Paul Dayton, also of Scripps Oceanography, and David Ainley, a biologist who works in the Antarctic, remain concerned about the recent certification of krill and the proposed certification of toothfish.

"The certification of the Ross Sea is an embarrassment as it flies in the face of existing data and denies any sense of precautionary management," says Dayton.

"We're especially concerned about the recent certification of Antarctic krill despite estimates of long-term decline and a link between krill

population depletion and declining sea ice in areas sensitive to climate change," says Daniel Pauly, head of UBC's Sea Around Us Project. "The rationale for this certification is on further thin ice because the catch is destined to feed farmed fish, pigs and chicken."

Fisheries that are being heavily depleted, reliant on high-impact methods such as bottom trawling and that aren't destined for human consumption should be excluded from certification, conclude the authors, which include Sidney Holt, a founding father of fisheries science.

"The MSC should not certify fisheries that are not demonstrably sustainable, fisheries that use high-impact methods such as bottom trawling and/or fisheries that aren't destined for human consumption," says Pauly.

"The MSC needs to strengthen its commitment to its own principles in order to fulfill its promise to be 'the best environmental choice,'" says Jackson.

The authors also note that the current certification system, which relies on for-profit consultants and costing as much as \$150,000, presents a potential conflict of interest and discriminates against small-scale fisheries and fisheries from developing countries, most of which use highly selective and sustainable techniques.



Scripps marine ecologist Jeremy Jackson

Dayton points out that "the failure of the MSC hurts the populations that are not sustainably taken and their ecosystems; it deprives the public of an opportunity to make a meaningful choice and it damages those fisheries that are well managed - this is especially important for those sustainable small-scale fisheries competing with the giants that buy certifications they have not earned."

"Unless MSC goes under major reform, there are better, more effective ways to spend the certifier's \$13-million annual budget to help the oceans, such as lobbying for the elimination of harmful fisheries subsidies or establishing marine protected areas," says Jacquet.

###

Note to broadcast and cable producers: University of California, San Diego provides an on-campus satellite uplink facility for live or pre-recorded television interviews. Please phone or e-mail the media

contact listed above to arrange an interview.

Scripps Institution of Oceanography, at University of California, San Diego, is one of the oldest, largest and most important centers for global science research and education in the world. The National Research Council has ranked Scripps first in faculty quality among oceanography programs nationwide. Now in its second century of discovery, the scientific scope of the institution has grown to include biological, physical, chemical, geological, geophysical and atmospheric studies of the earth as a system. Hundreds of research programs covering a wide range of scientific areas are under way today in 65 countries. The institution has a staff of about 1,300, and annual expenditures of approximately \$155 million from federal, state and private sources. Scripps operates one of the largest U.S. academic fleets with four oceanographic research ships and one research platform for worldwide exploration.