

Scientists take a stick to blue tick that flags sustainable fisheries

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GUILT-FREE seafood has taken another hit. The world's premier sustainable fishing scheme is under attack from eminent scientists for failing to protect the environment.

The Marine Stewardship Council's blue tick of approval is appearing on Australian seafood, ranging from West Australian rock lobster to canned Pacific tuna.

As the world's wild fish stocks decline, the London-based council's tick has become a benchmark among schemes. But a dispute between the council and some of the world's top marine scientists spread into the pages of the science journal *Nature* yesterday.

After months of struggling with some of the council's out-sourced approval schemes, the scientists warned it had lost its way. "We believe that, as the [council] increasingly risks its credibility the planet risks losing more wild fish and healthy marine ecosystems," said the scientists, led by the University of British Columbia's Jennifer Jacquet and Daniel Pauly.

They called for tougher standards, a crackdown on loose rule interpretation and the removal of potential financial incentives to certify large fisheries.

The council, founded in 1997 by the wildlife campaigner WWF and the fish retailer Unilever, now covers 94 fisheries producing 6.3 million tonnes of seafood and is growing rapidly, with 118 more fisheries being assessed. Scientists and environmentalists have been alarmed by some of its recent decisions, particularly covering south-west Pacific and Antarctic fisheries.

Dr Jacquet and Dr Pauly complained that the Pacific hake was certified by the council in 2009 despite an 89 per cent decline from its late 1980s peak.

The Antarctic toothfish was also recommended for a blue tick. "Yet almost nothing is known about this fish: no eggs or larvae have ever been collected," they said.

The council said it did not certify any overfished stock. Its vice-chairman, Keith Sainsbury, said one of the council's strengths was its ability to respond rapidly to stock changes, reducing or increasing catch limits.

Professor Sainsbury, of the University of Tasmania, said the Antarctic fisheries were at such low levels that they were safe.

"It's good to see the MSC getting attention," he said. "But unfortunately they haven't really understood MSC processes."

This story was found at: <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/environment/conservation/scientists-take-a-stick-to-blue-tick-that-flags-sustainable-fisheries-20100902-14rq2.html>