

# UBC scientists call for stricter sustainable fishery standards

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Two **UBC** scientists have criticized the certification process for the U.K.-based **Marine Stewardship Council** (MSC) and are calling for stricter standards when approving a fishery as a sustainable operation.

In an opinion piece published this month in the journal *Nature*, **Jennifer Jacquet** and **Daniel Pauly**, with the **Sea Around Us Project** at the **UBC Fisheries Centre**, say loose interpretations of MSC certification rules by third-party certifiers is unjustly giving unsustainable fishing operations an opportunity to obtain an environmental stamp of approval for consumers.



Jacquet said in an interview, "If the MSC strengthened its criteria so that the rules were more explicit, then certifying bodies would have less room to interpret them. Right now, the criteria are pretty loose."

While the MSC bans the use of poison and dynamite, Jacquet said other forms of fishing should also be banned, including bottom trawling and other methods that have a large impact on habitat and fish other than targeted species. The article added that fisheries that create fishmeal to feed factory-farmed animals shouldn't be certified.

It also raised concerns that the certification process should be changed to avoid a potential conflict of interest for third-party certifiers who might leniently interpret MSC guidelines to receive more work down the road.

"There's a financial incentive to say an operation is good," the article stated, "because then the certifying body gets future work from yearly audits and potentially recertification in the future. If they said no, they'd essentially lose future revenue."

But in a four-page response, the MSC defended its standards and processes, noting it abides by the **United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization** guidelines for eco-labelling of fish and fishery products and uses an open, rigorous and science-based standard. It said it recognizes a need to demonstrate the effectiveness of its program and has commissioned a scientific study that will look at the environmental impacts of fishery certification.

"The MSC," it said, "is ambitious about achieving change in management practices where it is needed and driving progress toward sustainability across all types of fisheries and it will do so, not by excluding fisheries from the program, but by encouraging them to participate."

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