



New UNEP publication on “Certification and Sustainable Fisheries”

Background and aim of the paper

Eighty percent of the world’s fish stocks are exploited, over-exploited or depleted. This results in adverse impacts on ecosystems and may have detrimental effects on food security and jobs in developing countries. One of the measures to address the rapid decline in the world’s fish resources and to promote sustainable fisheries is the use of certification or eco-labelling of fish products.

The aim of the paper is to look at benefits and challenges of the aforementioned market-based tools, in particular also for developing countries. Focus is given to environmental certification of capture fisheries rather than to social and/or aquaculture certification.

Main findings and conclusions

The paper’s conclusions relate to three areas, namely 1. demand and need for certification, 2. experiences of certification to date and its potential to bring about sustainable fisheries and other benefits, as well as to 3. further action that is required

With regard to the first category, the paper points to the rapid increase of trade in fish products in developing countries. It also notes, among others, that the demand for fish products is not uniform between countries, market segments and individual businesses, or species and that demand already exceeds the availability of certified products.

In relation to the second area, the paper concludes that while certification has so far concentrated on fisheries that are already well managed, it does seem to offer the potential to lead to fisheries management improvements. In addition, due to increases in the demand for certified products, it will be increasingly likely that less well managed fisheries will strive for certification.

As for the third point, the paper outlines that different possibilities would exist for different stakeholders (retailers, scheme managers, UNEP) to support certification in developing countries which face a number of challenges to become certified. It underlines that action would be more effective if it was not taken by one stakeholder alone but rather jointly with other institutions.

UNEP work on Certification and Sustainable Fisheries

This paper was developed under the project entitled “Promoting Sustainable Trade, Consumption and Production Patterns in the Fisheries Sector” that aims at assisting and strengthening the capacities of governments and stakeholders to promote the sustainable management of fisheries and to contribute to poverty reduction. More specifically, it contributes to the component on “public and private sector initiatives to enhance consumer demand for sustainable fisheries products”. It is one of a series of UNEP reports and activities aimed at contributing to a better understanding of market-based tools, policies and instruments.