

Ross Sea Toothfish

Through a rigorous, independent process, the Ross Sea toothfish fishery was certified in November 2010 as meeting the globally recognized MSC environmental standard. The scientifically based, scientifically peer-reviewed assessment process, which involved extensive stakeholder input, resulted in certification, representing a significant positive step in global efforts to protect the species and underlying marine ecosystem in the Antarctic.

The fishery operates within the Ross Sea Ecosystem of the Southern Ocean. All fishing activity is overseen by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and all vessels operating in the area must comply with CCAMLR and individual flag state requirements. Management rules and practices closely follow precautionary and ecosystem-based principles. Catch levels and other conservation measures are agreed by CCAMLR, based on the advice of their scientific committee, and accredited observers monitor compliance with these measures onboard each vessel.

The MSC program has proven in fisheries around the world that the program confirms sustainability in a scientifically rigorous and transparent process, and can also catalyze change through requirements for further improvement. MSC believes that certification will enhance, not inhibit, any efforts toward further improvements in the Ross Sea toothfish fishery. In addition to MSC certification confirming sustainability, annual independent audits reconfirm sustainability throughout the five year life of a certification.

About the Ross Sea toothfish fishery

The fishery opened in 1996 and has been managed, from the outset, as an exploratory fishery. This categorization ensures that biological data is provided by each fishing vessel and that a conservative and precautionary total allowable catch (TAC) is set.

- The TAC is adjusted annually, and has been in the 3000 tonne range for a number of years.
- Full capture of the TAC depends on ice conditions each season, and some fishing grounds remain covered in sea ice throughout the year, preventing fishing activities. In 2007/08, around 80 per cent of the TAC was actually caught and landed.
- Vessels belonging to the MSC-certified fishery typically account for between one third and one half of total toothfish catches each year from the Ross Sea.
- Stock assessments are carried out annually and current assessments estimate the stock levels at approximately 80 per cent of the original biomass, considerably above the target level of 50 per cent of original biomass.

Several improvements are required to maintain MSC certification, including: enhance scientific understanding of the life-cycle of the target stock; broaden the tagging program to increase the data available for stock assessments; improve knowledge of the benthic habitat of the Ross Sea; improve understanding of the interactions between species; and further reduce uncertainties about the potential impact of the fishery on by-catch species.

The fishery is also required to promote and cooperate with any relevant processes to identify which areas, if any, need to be closed to fishing. Two further requirements relating to descriptions of the national and international management frameworks for the fishery were added following the decision by an Independent Adjudicator to uphold elements of an objection to the certification.

Please see reverse for information about the MSC program

MSC Certification Confirms Sustainability



While Greenpeace is pressuring retailers into removing Ross Sea toothfish from store shelves, the MSC strongly disagrees with the idea that any MSC-certified fish should be removed from retailers' shelves. In fisheries around the world, the MSC program has proven to be effective and scientifically rigorous, inviting all voices to be heard and information reviewed, while maintaining a standard that demands an outcome based on independent, peer-reviewed science.

- MSC-certified fisheries have each gone through exhaustive third-party review backed by extensive science and data. They also undergo annual surveillance audits.
- No other organization's assessment of fisheries approaches the rigor or scientific credibility of MSC's approach to assessing fisheries' sustainability. The MSC standard, which is fully consistent with United Nations guidelines, was developed over nearly two years of international consultation with leading scientists, academics, environmentalists, industry representatives, government officials and other experts.
- In January, 2010 WWF International commissioned an independent study of seafood sustainability certification programs and seafood ecolabels. The MSC outranked every other program by a wide margin. The study analyzed the programs against 103 criteria across six major areas that included governance, standard setting, assessment procedure, minimum ecological criteria, fishery management system attributes and traceability and the report concluded the MSC is the only program "compliant" with the criteria of the evaluation.
- The MSC program has the support of many environmental NGOs. 14 environmental organizations in North America that have committed to a "Common Vision for Environmentally Sustainable Seafood" in working with seafood businesses, have endorsed the MSC as an important initiative and encourage businesses to purchase MSC-certified products as part of their sustainable seafood policies. The National Fisheries Institute has suggested to retailers that they consider engaging with a third-party certification program, such as MSC for wild-capture seafood.
- While MSC is widely recognized as the leading global seafood certification and eco-labeling program with a high standard for sustainability and environmental responsibility, this does not preclude any individual or organization disagreeing with certain aspects or outcomes of the certification process. The process is open and transparent, and any interested parties are encouraged to raise issues or objections, which are taken into account in the certifier's examination and assessment of the fishery. MSC certification also does not preclude separate and further engagement by NGOs and other stakeholders.
- MSC-labeled seafood is fully traceable throughout the supply chain via the MSC's Chain of Custody certification program.
- Governments around the world regulate fisheries within their jurisdiction, and MSC is not a regulatory organization. MSC is a global standard for measuring sustainability that complements and does not compete with government. MSC certification demonstrates to the market which fisheries are fishing sustainably, in many cases incentivizing positive environmental changes on the part of fisheries wishing to achieve certification.
- In spite of disagreement on Ross Sea toothfish— Greenpeace has indicated it has viewed MSC participation and products favorably in its ranking of retailers.
- More information, including detailed fishery assessment reports, is available at www.msc.org.

Please see reverse for facts on the MSC-certified Ross Sea toothfish