

Alaska Seafood Sustainability Forum, July 20-21 2008

Living up to the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute for the opportunity to talk to you today. I would also like to express my appreciation for having the Marketing Institute as a partner of the FAO Globefish Project since 2005.

I am indeed sorry that I could not be with you in person today but the good news is that now it is possible to make live presentations from cyberspace and even take questions. The last and only time I attended a conference in Alaska was back in 1990. That visit 18 years ago left with me the thought final the natural beauty of the state is such that it leaves a lasting impression - what today we call eco-consciousness. As a part of the developed world, it seems to me that Alaska has done a great job in developing and managing its fisheries. Most capture fisheries, however, take place in the developing world and many of those countries are struggling to come to grips with managing their fisheries - some even the basics. Yet, more that 50% of fishery products on the international market today originate in developing countries. The bulk of this fish is imported to North America, the European Union and Japan.

Today I want to discuss with you what I believe is crucial to the future of our fisheries sector: How we can harvest the resources sustainably and generally meet the new eco-demands set out by food retailers and society at large.

I want to make clear that the views presented in this talk may not necessarily represent those of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

But first, a word about FAO.



The FAO has a broad mandate:

It is a provider of unbiased information on food and agriculture, it is a neutral forum for all its 192 members to negotiate international agreements and it provides development assistance.

The current economic slowdown and high energy prices are changing the global food scene, as discussed at the recent High-Level Conference on World Food Security, Climate Change and Bioenergy convened by the FAO in early June of this year. Before the energy crisis 850 million people in the world were suffering from hunger but that figure is now bound to rise.

The Fisheries and Aquaculture Department of FAO has limited staff and resources and therefore we are very dependent on extra-budgetary funding. Now we are taking part in a new World Bank project being established, called ALLFISH, that attempts to reach out to industry organizations around the world to help improve fisheries governance. We will be seeking your help and your experience for the ALLFISH project.

Outline

- Why are we concerned?
- A plethora of instruments
- Ecolabelling
- The Code of Conduct
- Clear fishing rights
- Where does this leave us?
- The way ahead



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My focus will very much be:

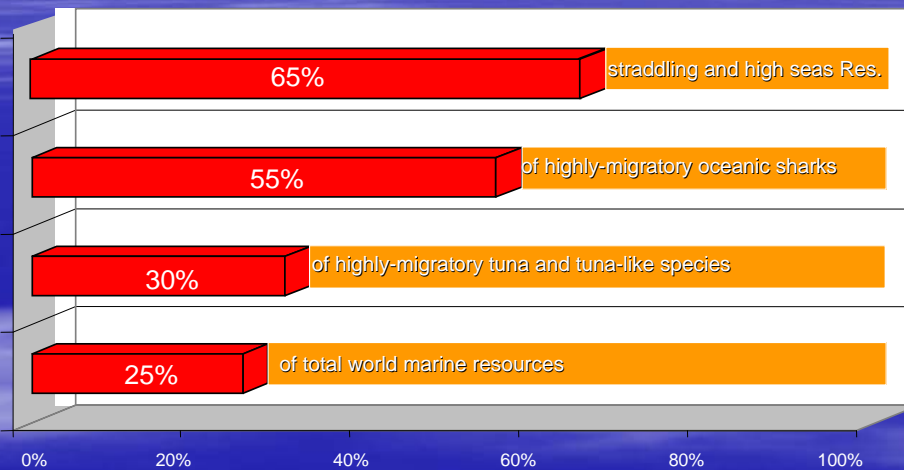
The evolving and maturing eco-demands: Governments have to set the stage but the industry has to get directly involved.

Industry must change the “if” question to “how” and “when”.

Why are we concerned?



Overfished or depleted marine resources: *facts*



SOFIA, 2006

FAO FTP 495, 2006

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The FAO publications give the following sad account of overfishing – or in more correct terms: overfished and depleted marine resources. From the bottom: Total world marine resources 25%. Highly-migratory tuna and tuna-like species 30%. Highly-migratory oceanic sharks 55%. Straddling and high seas resources 65%.

And our sector is bombarded with negative press about the poor state of fishery resources, which of course underlines the ineffective mechanisms in place to restrain fisheries. I will soon be adding to my library the newest book on the subject, a book by Mark Kurlansky called “The Last Fish Tale”.

Needless to say, this situation is not acceptable and emphasizes the need for more effective fisheries management, which actually is materializing in many places around the world, but - admittedly - too slowly.

Conflicting interests...



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In addition to the overfishing problem, there are more and more conflicting interests:

Commercial fisheries, tourism, oil exploration, food for marine mammals, sports fishing, space for aquaculture and general balance in the ecosystem or maintaining biodiversity, as it is called. The quest is for more integrated, holistic solutions. The days are gone when there were plenty of fish in the sea and the sector could do more or less as it liked.

Some people think that those “good old days” will return. Well, they won’t.

“Deploring the fact...”

sparsely regulated.. inadequate flag State control..
heavy fishing effort.. overfished..

inadequate enforcement..

illegal, unregulated fishing... etc.

UN General Assembly:
Resolution A/621/177,2007



The latest UN General Assembly resolution on sustainable fisheries from last year gives an indication of the mood surrounding fisheries at present:

One of the preamble paragraphs reads: *“Deploring the fact that fish stocks... in many parts of the world are overfished or subject to sparsely regulated and heavy fishing efforts as a result of inter alia, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, inadequate flag State control and enforcementetc. etc.”*

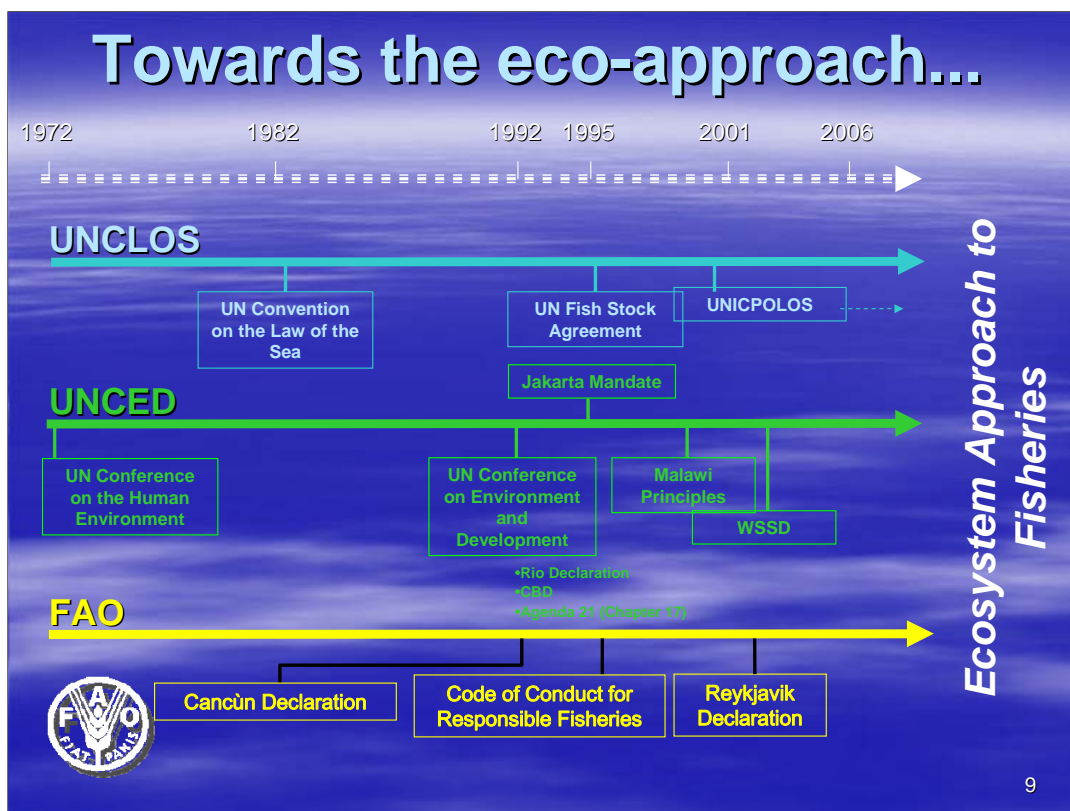
Is this a matter of concern to our sector? In my view it is because it suggests that capture fisheries are unmanageable. Those who believe that capture fisheries are unmanageable will opt for closing those fisheries down. As I will show later, I believe that we now have more and more examples from around the world of effective, responsive and eco-friendly fisheries management regimes that actually work well. One of these examples we find here in Alaska.

A plethora of instruments has been developed to deal with fisheries management with an eco - approach...



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So, to the plethora of instruments that deal with managing fisheries...



1. The blue line: First of all there is the basis: The UN Law of the Sea Convention of 1982. The UN Fish Stock Agreement notes the importance of preserving biodiversity, maintaining integrity of marine ecosystems and minimizing risks.

2. The green line: There is also the process named after the UN Conference on Environment and Development that produced the Rio Declaration in 1992. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Agenda 21, of which chapter 17 specifically deals with protecting the marine environment. As a follow-up to that we had the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, where a commitment was made to implement an Ecosystem Approach to fisheries by 2010.

3. The yellow line: FAO had its own process, the Cancun Declaration led to the very important Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries adopted in 1995. The Reykjavik Declaration on Responsible Fisheries in the Marine Ecosystem in 2001 largely built on the principles laid down in the Code.

Moreover, FAO developed specific International Plans of Action to deal with specific environmental problems such as to avoid catch of seabirds and sharks besides plans to deal with IUU fishing and excessive fishing capacity.

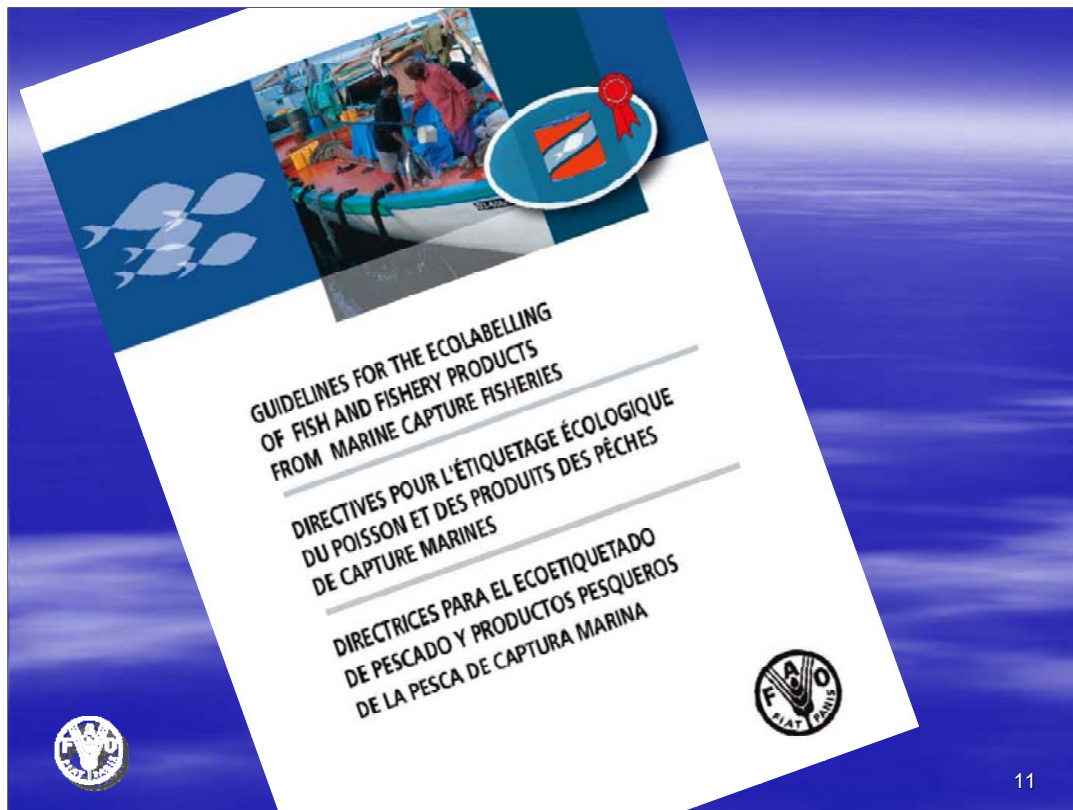
So, in the 1990s the fisheries management paradigm was expanded to also include broader ecosystem considerations as reflected in the Code of Conduct. Importantly the Reykjavik declaration speaks about "...effective management plans with incentives that encourage responsible fisheries..." As I will mention later, we are learning that right incentive structures are imperative for achieving effective management.

Ecolabelling



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But these instruments were obviously not enough – so ecolabelling was established



FAO started working on voluntary guidelines on ecolabelling in 1997 and they were finally adopted at the FAO Committee on Fisheries in 2005. That it took 8 years shows just how contentious the issue was. Developing countries were worried, and actually still are worried, that ecolabelling schemes can represent barriers to fish trade.

The Guidelines define the institutional arrangements for ecolabels and the minimum substantive criteria.

We are still learning about the role ecolabels are playing in fisheries management but there is no question that they have raised awareness and led to substantive work on defining the minimum eco-criteria.

Work is now underway in FAO on how to further elaborate on the three substantive minimum requirements spelled out in the Guidelines, that is the fisheries management system, the "stocks under consideration" and ecosystem considerations. An expert consultation has already been held by FAO for further elaboration of these requirements. So, this to me is a crucial piece of work in progress as it has implications far outside the scope of ecolabelling as such.

So, how well have the various certification and ecolabeling schemes been accepted by the market? As of 2007 these leading retailers were committed to various ecolabelling and certification schemes for fishery products.

Leading retailers had by 2007 become committed to various certification and ecolabelling schemes...

Retailer	Policy
Wal-Mart	MSC for wild, GAA for organic
Sainsbury	Working closely with the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
Coop Swiss	Naturland for organic shrimp
Tesco	Partnering with MSC
Metro	EII, MSC
Carrefour	Own scheme for "responsible fishing"
Ahold USA	Eco-Sound: sustainable fisheries
ICA Sweden	MSC
Lidl	MSC





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Here you see the cover of a new FAO Globefish publication called “Ecolabels and Marine Capture Fisheries: Current Practice and Emerging Issues”.

In light of the large number of schemes claiming to uphold sustainable fisheries, the call for FAO to work towards a standardized approach is getting stronger.

Many have questioned the wisdom of leaving the all-important sustainability issues to the market – as might be incurred by the use of voluntary ecolabelling schemes that are basically competing in the marketplace, sustainability being so important that it should be made obligatory to comply with minimum standards in that respect. That would be much in line with how food safety is dealt with, i.e. it is a basic requirement. Labels on foods with food safety claims would actually look strange: “Buy our product as it is safer than that of the competitors”.

In light of the urgency of these matters it is important that the capture industry, retailers, NGOs and international organizations collaborate to speed up such work. Direct industry involvement should ensure that such schemes contain a good deal of eco-pragmatism as opposed to eco-fundamentalism.

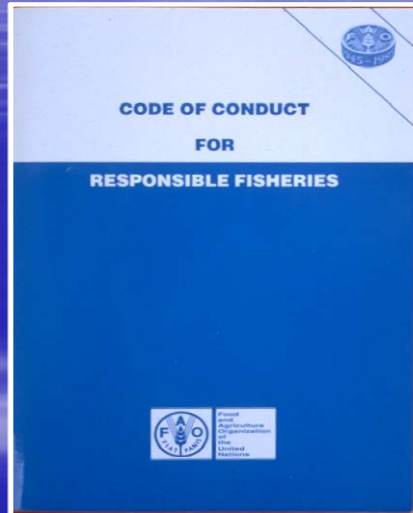
The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries



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All this brings us to the all-important CCRF – and how we are going to live up to it. Is it a useful benchmark for fisheries sustainability? My answer is clear: Yes it is.

Code of Conduct 1995



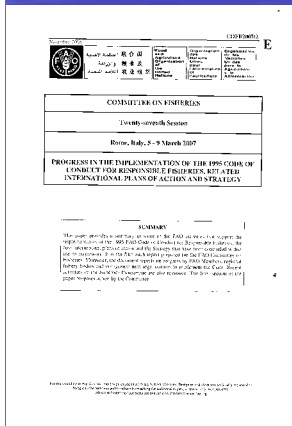
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The Code, as many of you know, is a voluntary instrument which...
“provides the principles and standards applicable to the conservation, management and development of all fisheries” (1.3).

The Code is the foundation on which the criteria or minimum requirements are to be based. That is very clear. However, the Code is too broad to judge the effectiveness of individual fisheries management regimes or how well they actually work.

FAO has over the years reported to its Committee on Fisheries (COFI) how adherence to the Code is progressing. This is done through questionnaires that are sent to member countries.

FAO evaluates progress of the Code of Conduct...



Fisheries Management: one in four Members reported not to have plans in place...

57% manage fisheries through access regulation...

72% implement Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS)...

80% have effective food safety systems...

53% have improved use of bycatch...

Fisheries Research: 60% obtain reliable data on at least some of the stocks...



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This is an example of the collated questionnaire from the latest survey communicated to COFI in 2007. You can see some of the responses gathered.

Nevertheless, the CCRF is not entirely without criticism. It has been pointed out that the principles advanced by the Code of Conduct fail to recognize that fishing is largely an economic activity. In other words, fishing responds to economic incentives similar to those of any other business.

Sustainability can actually be detached from economic considerations. Fishery resources can be fully sustainable and yet be in a pretty poor state. They can be maintained at much lower yield than they could produce with good management. And a sustainable fishery can be run at a financial loss through overinvestment financed by government subsidies.

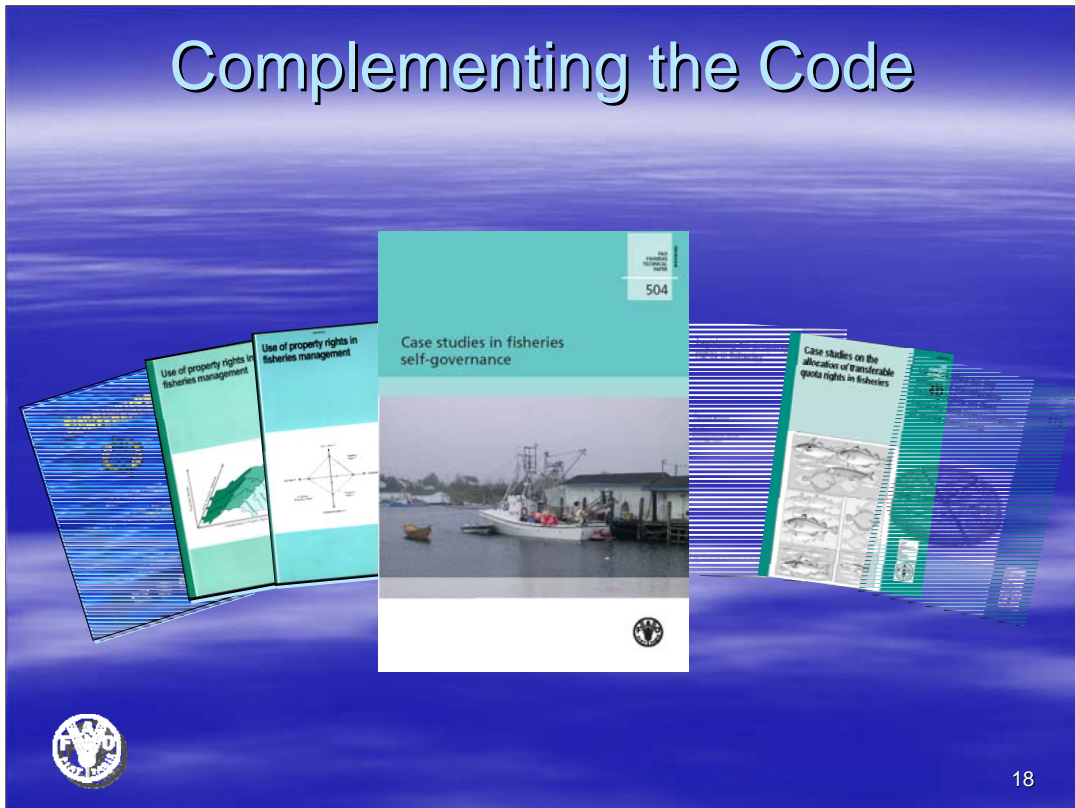
Clear fishing rights



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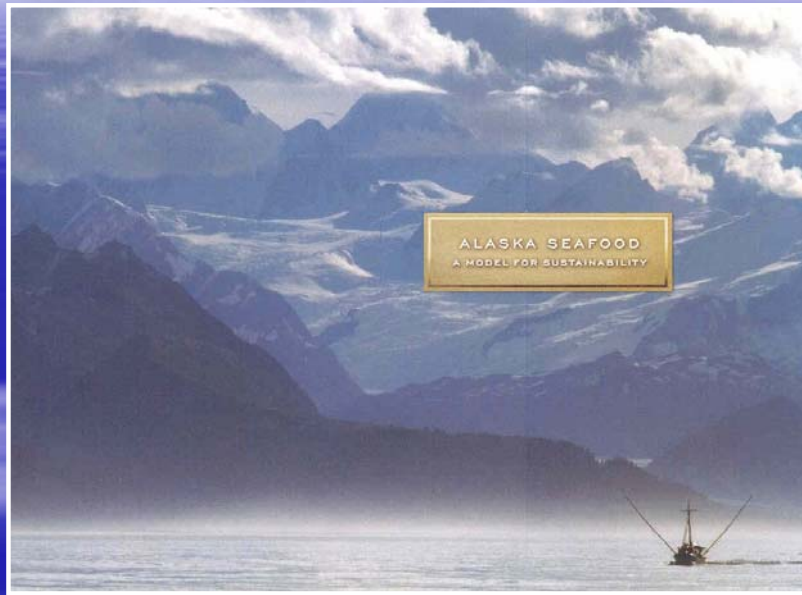
And now, on to the role of clear fishing rights. Actually the case for clear, legally defensible fishing rights in managing fisheries is becoming ever stronger. Numerous publications and case studies from around the world point to the fact that successful fisheries management is highly correlated with rights-based regimes. The Code of Conduct guides us on where we want fisheries to be. How to get there on the other hand, and how to stay there, are very much about the right incentive structures being set up for management. Clear fishing rights are the engine of fisheries management.

Complementing the Code



FAO has been working since the 1970s on rights-based fisheries management. The newest FAO publication on the issue is called “Case studies in fisheries self-governance”. It is the 4th such publication by FAO and is an account of 32 case studies of management with close involvement of the sector itself – involvement which has been given the term “self-governance” or “co-management” with the common thread that all these fisheries are rights-based.

Alaska fisheries management...



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In the FAO publication covering self-governance, it is really interesting to read how fisheries in Alaska have evolved over the last few decades:

Basically, management has moved from top-down, centralized state and federal controls to rights-based systems, the management of which have significant participation by industry. Today there is no question that Alaska is among the leaders in how to complement conservation with utilization. FAO is very grateful for the help and support US experts have given in dealing with these complex issues, not the least of which in the area of fishing rights, i.e. allocation and consolidation of fishing quotas.

As I said before, we will continue seeking your help and ask you to share your experience with other countries.

Where does this leave us?



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First, there is a call for more holistic fisheries management, more eco-friendly, more sophisticated management.

Second, there is a call for effective fisheries management. That means that when the authorities decide on say, less catch or less discards, the system responds to produce that result, much in the same way that when we push down on the brakes of a car we expect it to slow down right away. Experience shows that rights-based systems reinforce effective and responsive fisheries management.

I believe that we can draw valuable lessons from developments in the late 70s to the early 80s when fish safety and quality schemes then in place were by and large failing. Safety and quality were entrusted to fish inspectors working for state institutes. This led to the predictable situation that the name of the game for the processors was how to outsmart the inspectors. HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) involved the sector directly and made the processors responsible with excellent results. HACCP plans are tailor-made for each processing facility based on the 7 universal HACCP principles.

Similar developments should occur in resource management, i.e. involving the sector in setting and achieving the management objectives. In that way a tailor-made plan is made for each fishery, based on the principles laid out by the Code of Conduct.

The way ahead...

- The new eco-demands: industry has to become directly involved in developing minimum sustainability criteria.
- Industry must change the “if” question to “how” and “when”.



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That is how we will take big steps towards living up to the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

Thank you

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to view this presentation:

<ftp://ftp.fao.org/FI/ppt/AlaskaJuly2008/>

