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One Month Left to Comment on NOAA Sustainable Seafood Certification

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Members of the U.S. seafood industry have until **April 30, 2014** to comment on whether the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) should establish their own sustainable seafood label for U.S. wild-caught and aquaculture fishery products. Comments and suggestions can be submitted to: nmfspolicy@noaa.gov.*

WASHINGTON (NOAA Fisheries) -- March 31, 2014 -- The topic of seafood certification has come up at many meetings of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) over the past decade, and their previous guidance has informed the agency's current policy. Due to stakeholder requests and increasing public interest, in mid-2012, NOAA Fisheries asked MAFAC to explore the creation of a NOAA certification mark or other acknowledgement that could certify sustainability of domestic wild-caught and aquaculture fishery products. MAFAC agreed and organized a working group to investigate the topic and develop a recommendation. Your assessment of MAFAC's recommendation is welcome. **Send comments by e-mail to: nmfspolicy@noaa.gov by April 30, 2014.**

Background

In developing its recommendation over the course of the past year, MAFAC invited external experts to present information on the subject at meetings; solicited public input from producers, buyers, and non-governmental organizations; conducted personal interviews; and engaged in extensive internal deliberations.

MAFAC finalized and delivered its recommendation to NOAA Fisheries in December 2013. The recommendation was supported by a majority of, but not all, MAFAC members. The Committee included the alternative points of view in their report.

Results

The full MAFAC report can be [found here](#). In January, the Chair of MAFAC presented a briefing to the Council Coordination Committee (comprised of Regional Fisheries Management Council Directors and Chairs under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens

Act) outlining the goals, process used, and outcome of MAFAC's efforts this past year. This presentation is also provided as helpful information.

The MAFAC working group focused on these primary goals:

- Identifying a US seafood certification framework. This included assessing potential program costs where possible, options, and a recommendation for how to pay for it.
- Identifying certification criteria/standards.

The MAFAC recommendation includes a simple business-to-business framework offering value to the seafood industry consistent with the NOAA Fisheries legal authorities and minimizing conflicts with existing third-party ecolabels.

The envisioned approach would initially focus on wild-caught seafood from Federally managed waters, and phase in a process for seafood derived from state-managed commercial fisheries (if/when requested by a state) or aquaculture products at some point in the future.

The core concepts of the MAFAC recommendation are:

- The program should be fee-for-service, not reliant on new appropriated funds or taking funds away from existing programs and services.
- The focus is business-to-business, not consumer-based.
- The framework relies on the 10 National Standard principles in the Magnuson-Stevens Act.
- Existing resources should be used to the maximum extent:
 - Enhance FishWatch - NOAA's seafood sustainability web site.
 - Employ the existing NOAA Seafood Inspection Program.
- Accept limitations on scope/adopt a phased approach: the recommendation does not try to solve everything.

Submit a Comment

Your assessment of MAFAC's [recommendation](#) is welcome, and we ask that you consider the following "trigger" questions to help focus responses. To submit your comments to NOAA Fisheries, please send them by e-mail to: nmfspolicy@noaa.gov no later than **April 30, 2014**.

Trigger Questions

- What parts/aspects of the recommendation do you agree with and support?
- What parts/aspects of the recommendation do you not support? Can you recommend a different approach or changes that you would support.

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