

Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) Certification Program

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



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1. What is the RFM Certification Program?

The RFM Certification Program is a voluntary and internationally accredited certification assessment of whether a fishery is responsibly managed based on strict criteria. It consists of two seafood certification standards: 1) Fisheries Standard and 2) Chain of Custody Standard.

RFM is a comprehensive program founded on the strongest and most widely acknowledged international standards and practices. Based on United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) criteria, it is one of the few programs to have an accredited certification process under the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 17065) code.

2. Why was RFM developed?

The RFM Program was developed and adopted in 2010 as a result of market requests and a desire to have a credible choice in certification programs.

Fisheries certification is now a requirement to sell into most marketplaces. Our customers and industry felt that having a choice in certification was important. The goal was to create a cost effective, credible certification alternative that was:

- Independent, third-party and formally accredited;
- Directly based on the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Management;
- Preserves/highlights the origin;
- Cost effective for the supply chain; and
- Provides a consumer facing eco-label without logo licensing fees

* The FAO documents are available from the FAO website:

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/v9878e/v9878e00.HTM>

3. How is RFM the same/different from other certification programs?

RFM shares some key attributes of other certification programs:

- It is a voluntary program;
- It is an independent, third-party verification;
- It has a robust set of criteria which fisheries are assessed against which consist of the following ***Four Key Principles:***
 - The Fisheries Management System
 - Science and Stock Assessment Activities, and the Precautionary Approach
 - Management Measure, Implementation, Monitoring and Control
 - Serious Impacts of the Fishery on the Ecosystem
- It offers a consumer-facing eco-label;
- It has a Chain of Custody Standard which demonstrates traceability through the supply chain for those companies who have undergone a Chain of Custody audit.

Some of the differences to other fishery certification programs are:

- Logo communicates origin and there are no logo licensing fees;
- One of the few programs to have its certification process be accredited to ISO 17065;
- RFM is verification of responsible fisheries management practices and does not interfere, nor dictate, how to manage fisheries – that is left to the competent fisheries authorities.

4. What is the value proposition of the RFM Certification Program?

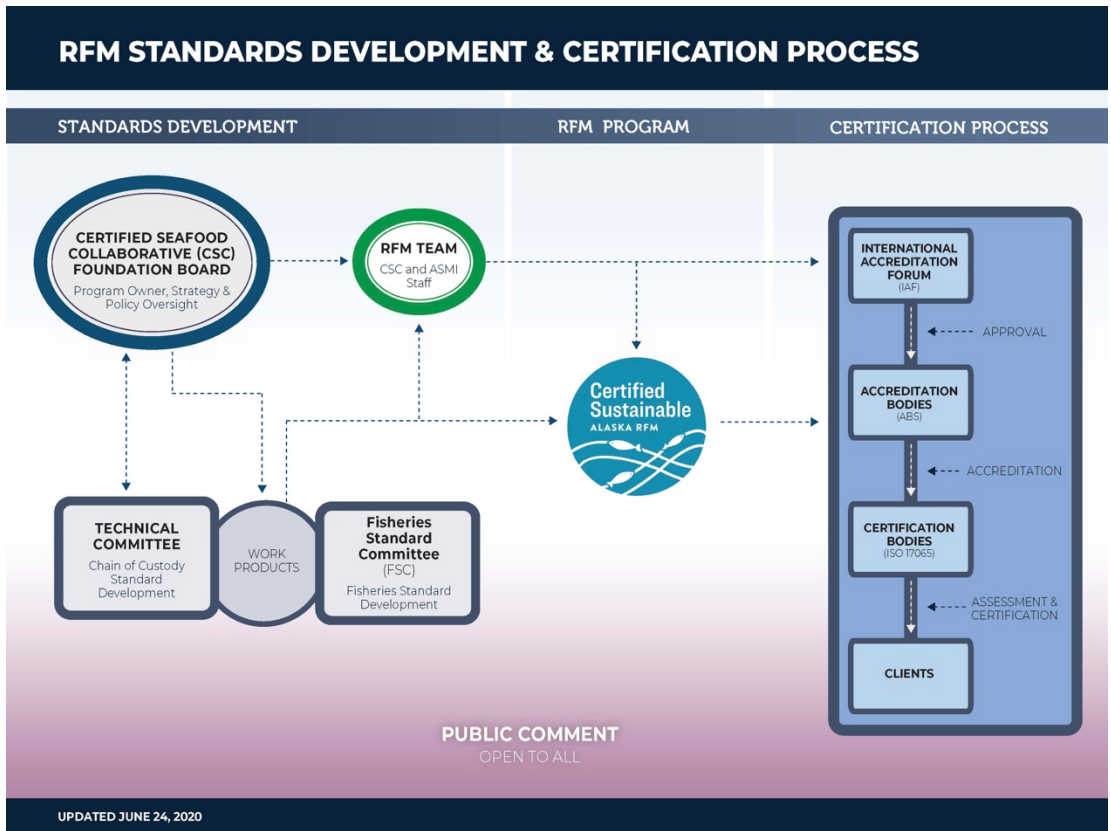
- Provides cost effective and credible choice in the marketplace for wild-capture fishery certification; Choice drives improvements and cost-savings;
- Provides a ‘Certified Logo’ that communicates origin and there are no costly logo licensing fees. In fact, RFM does not charge licensing fees for any use of the RFM logo. This means RFM does not generate any revenue on the marketing of its logo, nor does its success depend on any financial gain through logo licensing. The RFM logo is used purely as a way for those with RFM Chain of Custody to communicate, at no cost, the origin and that their seafood is certified sustainable. Our goal is to make certified sustainable and traceable seafood more accessible to all;
- RFM is verification of responsible fisheries management practices and does not interfere, nor dictate, how to manage fisheries – that is left to the competent fisheries authorities.
- Reliable Standards that are based on FAO Reference Documents. The Program requirements are stable and will evolve with science;

5. What are the benefits of RFM to a customer?

- The origin is included under the Certified Sustainable RFM logo, thus providing customers with a key communication tool indicating where their responsibly managed certified seafood is sourced.
- Supply Chain Companies are able to meet initiatives for a robust, independent 3rd-party certification program and demonstrate responsible sourcing to their customers;
- Customers get assurance at the highest level of market acceptance that fisheries are responsibly managed to meet the fundamental requirements of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Management;
- Those companies that want to make a product or marketing claim, must go through a rigorous Chain of Custody certification process, but do not have to pay for any logo licensing fees to use the recognized Certified Sustainable RFM logo

6. Who owns the RFM Certification Program?

As of July 1,2020, the ownership of the RFM Program transitioned from ASMI to the Certified Seafood Collaborative (CSC). The CSC is the approving body for all standards, strategy, and policy related to the RFM Program. The ownership press release can be seen at <https://www.alaskaseafood.org/for-release-certified-seafood-collaborative/>. The RFM logo in this diagram represents the RFM program.



The RFM Fisheries Standard Committee (FSC) is an independent expert committee which oversees the ongoing review and development of the Fisheries Standard. This committee includes national and international experts in fishery science, management, and sustainability, including eNGO representation. Current members of the FSC can be found at <https://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/about-rfm/governance/>

7. When did the RFM Certification Program originate?

The RFM Certification Program has been in existence since 2010. The first fishery certified was salmon on March 11, 2011.

8. Has RFM been benchmarked by GSSI?

Alaska RFM was the first certification program to achieve recognition by **the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative’s (GSSI) Global Benchmark Tool.**

GSSI publicly recognizes seafood certification schemes that meet the GSSI Essential Components grounded in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the FAO Guidelines for Seafood

Certification and Ecolabelling. Through Supplementary Components GSSI's Tool also outlines the status of existing practices in seafood certification. This helps to make purchasing decisions more efficient by offering greater choice in seafood certification and driving down costs, while promoting environmental sustainability.

In 2019, GSSI conducted their Monitoring of Continued Alignment (MOCA) of the RFM Certification Standard and found it to have continued alignment with all GSSI Essential Components and therefore awarded continued recognition of the Standard.

To access the Alaska RFM Benchmark Report, go to:
<https://www.ourgssi.org/gssi-recognized-certification/>

9. Why does it matter that RFM has GSSI recognition?

One of the ways businesses provide assurance to their customers is the use of seafood certification schemes for both aquaculture production and wild capture fisheries. However, the increase in the number of programs and ecolabels has led to confusion among producers, retailers and consumers over how to recognize a credible seafood certification scheme.

The GSSI Benchmark Tool is an attempt to streamline procurement decisions by making it easy for buyers to see which certification programs have met the rigorous bar set forth by FAO's internationally agreed guidelines.

For the first time, members of the seafood supply chain, NGOs, governmental and intergovernmental organizations and a number of independent scientists have come up with a collective, non-competitive approach to provide clarity on seafood certification and ensure confidence in certified seafood.

This shared solution will make information available across the seafood supply chain to drive change and lower costs:

- **For producers**, it means more options to choose the scheme that is right for them and reduce the need for multiple audits.
- **For seafood buyers**, it means simpler, more consistent data to guide their purchasing decisions.
- **For NGOs**, it means more open and verified information to help promote environmental sustainability.

For RFM, it means being publicly recognized for meeting all applicable GSSI Essential Components, a globally agreed benchmark building confidence in seafood certification. For more information on GSSI go to <https://www.ourgssi.org/>

10. Which fisheries are RFM Certified?

<https://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/certified-fisheries/>

FISH SPECIES	GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF FISHERY	GEAR TYPE
ALASKA PACIFIC SALMON SPECIES Client: Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (King/Chinook, Sockeye/Red, Coho/Silver, Keta/Chum, Pink)	Region 1: Southeast & Yakutat Region 2: Central Region 3: Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region 4: Kodiak, Chignik, Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Islands	Troll, Purse Seine, Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet Purse Seine, Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet, Fish Wheel Purse Seine, Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet
ALASKA PACIFIC HALIBUT Client: Fishing Vessels Owners Association (Eat on the Wild Side)	Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Benthic Longline
ALASKA SABLEFISH (BLACK COD) Client: Fishing Vessels Owners Association (Eat on the Wild Side)	Federal and State fisheries Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Benthic Longline, Pot, Non-pelagic Trawl
ALASKA (WALLEYE) POLLOCK Client: Alaska Pollock Fishery Group (Pacific Seafood Processors Association, At-Sea Processors Association, Alaska Groundfish Data Bank)	Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Pelagic Trawl, and other gears (Non-pelagic Trawl, Jig, Longline, Pot) from other non-directed pollock fisheries legally landing pollock
ALASKA PACIFIC COD Client: Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation	Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Non-pelagic Trawl, Longline, Pot, Jig
ALASKA FLATFISH COMPLEX Client: Alaska Seafood Cooperative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yellowfin sole • Flathead sole • Northern rock sole • Southern rock sole • Arrowtooth flounder • Kamchatka flounder • Alaska plaice • Greenland turbot • Rex sole 	Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska	Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl, Longline Non-pelagic Trawl
ALASKA CRAB Client: Bering Sea Crab Client Group LLC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red King crab • Blue King crab • Golden King crab • Snow crab • Tanner crab 	Bristol Bay St. Matthew Island Aleutian Islands Bering Sea Bering Sea	Pot Pot Pot Pot Pot
ALASKA ATKA MACKEREL AND ROCKFISH Client: Alaska Seafood Cooperative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atka Mackerel • Pacific Ocean Perch • Northern Rockfish • Dusky Rockfish 	Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska	Trawl Trawl Trawl Trawl

11. Who are the fishery clients and what is their role?

RFM is voluntary program. If a fishery is interested in being certified they need to be represented by a client or client group. Below are the current clients for the RFM certified fisheries.

- **Salmon and Cod** – [Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, Inc.](#)
- **Halibut and Sablefish** – [Fishing Vessels Owners Association/Eat on the Wild Side](#)
- **Crab** – Bering Sea Crab Client Group LLC
- **Flatfish Complex, Atka Mackerel, and Rockfish** – [Alaska Seafood Cooperative](#)
- **Pollock** – [At-Sea Processors Association](#)

12. During the assessment process, what are the key areas fisheries are evaluated against?

The RFM Fisheries Standard focuses on **4 Key Principles** for evaluating fisheries:

1. The Fisheries Management System
2. Science and Stock Assessment Activities and the Precautionary Approach
3. Management Measures, Implementation, Monitoring and Control
4. Serious Impacts of the Fishery on the Ecosystem

The scope of the RFM Fisheries Standard and Program is:

“To establish and maintain a program that provides for independent third-party certification of Responsible Fisheries Management, including enhancement practices (but excluding full cycle aquaculture), up to the point of landing, with the main objective being the biological sustainability of the “stock under consideration”, with consideration for conservation, biodiversity and ecosystem integrity; and due regard to social responsibility and the economic viability of the fishery.”

“The RFM Fisheries Standard sets out the requirements that must be achieved by North American fisheries operating within the U.S and Canadian 200nm EEZ for Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) Certification. All well managed North American fisheries are eligible to apply for the RFM Program. The RFM Program has developed a specific Data Deficient tool for fisheries when relevant.”

13. What is the length of a Fishery Certification Certificate and how often are the audits?

Once a fishery is certified to the RFM Fisheries Standard the certificate lasts five years. Each certified fishery enters annual surveillance audits for continuing certification. Re-certification occur after a period of five years. For information on the assessment process go to <http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/about-rfm/how-it-works/>

14. How was the original RFM Fisheries Standard developed?

In 2010 ASMI put out an RFP to develop a standards framework and certification system. This work entailed taking the FAO key reference documents and creating ‘auditable criteria’ against which an independent Certification Body could assess an Alaska fishery.

The RFM Standards were created by an independent group of experts composing the Conformance Criteria Committee (now known as the Fisheries Standard Committee).

Two standards were developed:

1. Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management Conformance Criteria (*now known as the Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management Standard*) and;
2. Alaska RFM Chain of Custody Standard.

The scope of the standards included any Alaska fishery, any fish species, all production systems/gear types, geographical locations, and company structures (single units, groupings of sites/boats, small- scale fisheries, subcontractors, product categories, packers, processors, storage and distribution).

The Fisheries Standard Committee (FSC) members are listed on the RFM website. Members are volunteers and are not paid for their time or effort in developing the Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard.

For more information on how the original RFM Fisheries Standard was developed go to <https://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/fisheries-standard/version-1-2/>

15. Who developed the current RFM Fisheries Standard?

[The RFM Fishery Standard Committee \(FSC\):](#)

- Dr. William Smoker, Chairman, Independent Fishery Consultant, US/Pacific
- Dr. Tom Pickerell, Global Tuna Director, Sustainable Fisheries Partnership
- R.J. (Bob) Allain, Independent Fishery Consultant, Canada
- Suzanne Iudicello, Independent Consultant
- Eric Schwaab, Environmental Defense Fund
- Wendy Norden, Monterey Bay Aquarium
- Meredith Mendelson, Deputy Commission, Maine Department of Marine Resources (no longer a member of the FSC)

16. Is there a multi-stakeholder process for the Standard Development and Fishery Assessment process?

STAKEHOLDER INPUT APPLICABLE TO THE STANDARD OWNER

Comments related to RFM Standards or RFM Program Management go to the Standard owner, CSC, by submitting online in the Comments, Appeals and Complaints section of the RFM website. CSC has planned official public comment periods for the Standards; however, Stakeholders are welcome to submit information to the RFM Program Manager at any time about the Standard or Program Management. The information will be reviewed for eligibility and forwarded to relevant parties.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT APPLICABLE TO THE CERTIFICATION BODY

Comments regarding fishery certification, re-certification, annual surveillance audits or a specific fishery go directly to the relevant Certification Body (CB). Interested stakeholders can register for comment with the appropriate CB – please refer to the individual fishery assessment notifications and certification reports to identify the CB. <https://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/certified-fisheries/>

Comments and information relevant to Standards received outside of official Public Comment periods will be held by CSC until the Standards review activity commences. For more information on the stakeholder process go to <http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/stakeholder-involvement/>

17. How often is the RFM Program reviewed and updated?

The RFM program policies and procedures are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure their relevance and to

verify that they continue to meet the demands of the global marketplace. The reviews include: findings, cause analysis, preventive and corrective actions with deadlines and responsibilities, as applicable. The resulting corrective actions could instigate a revision of the relevant operating policies and procedures, as applicable, with specified time frames.

CSC ensures that this management review is fully documented, is carried out with the involvement of interested parties and directly affected stakeholders, and addresses any relevant issues of concern raised by stakeholders. These could be raised via comments submitted directly to the RFM Program Manager through the available comment's submission tool in RFM's website or during the open public comment periods.

18. How often is the Fishery Standard reviewed and updated?

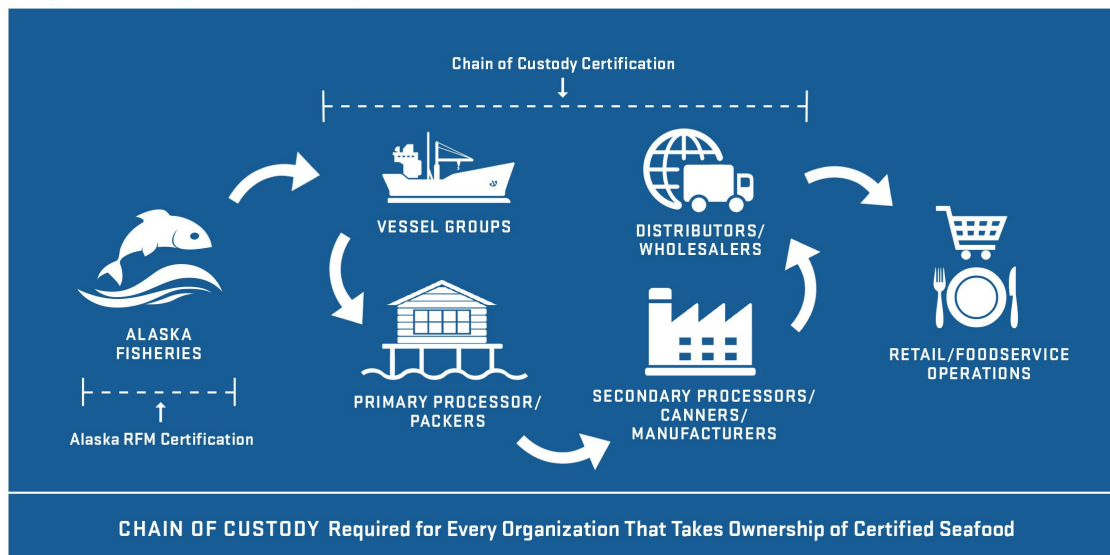
The RFM Standards are reviewed annually as a matter of process and procedure. At a minimum, there will be a full review and/or reissue every five years.

19. Why should a company go through Chain of Custody Certification?

Companies that have Chain of Custody certification can make certification claims on their products, POS materials and/or website. It gives confidence to all buyers of the seafood that it can be traced back through the supply chain to the fishery that was certified as part of the Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) Program.

If a company buys seafood from a certified fishery and wishes to make the certified claim or uses the RFM logo, Chain of Custody certification is required. Every organization that takes ownership of the certified seafood, from the point of first handling after the seafood has been landed, until it is processed into the final consumer product, will need to be certified to the Chain of Custody Standard.

Steps for Using RFM Seal and/or Certification Claim



20. What is the cost for Chain of Custody?

Global Trust/SAI Global and SCS Global Services are the RFM approved CBs who perform Chain of Custody audits for the RFM Program. The cost of your assessment will vary depending on the complexity and size of your organization. Companies who currently have MSC CoC through one of the RFM approved CBs can do a combined RFM/MSC certification audit and add RFM for approximately 20% more (price may vary between a single site vs. a multi-site audit). Each CB can be contacted for a price quote:

<http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/chain-of-custody/coc-certification-bodies/>

21. How long does it take and what is the length of the Chain of Custody Certificate?

You should plan 1-3 months for the application and audit process. The better prepared you are for the audit can help reduce time and costs. Certificates are valid for three years with annual surveillance. On-going certification is maintained where there is substantive and demonstrable evidence that the applicant remains in compliance with the criteria of the Standard.

22. Can a company use the same Certification Body for RFM and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Chain of Custody audits?

Yes, if your current MSC Chain of Custody audit is performed by either of the two RFM approved CBs (Global Trust/SAI Global or SCS Global Services). You can add RFM Chain of Custody for approximately 20% more. This price may vary depending on single vs. multi-site audits.

23. Where can I find a list of RFM Certified Companies?

Go to <http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/certified-companies/>

24. How do I sign up for Chain of Custody?

The first step is to complete an application with one of the RFM approved CBs. Go to <http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/chain-of-custody/application/>

25. What is the cost to use the Certified Sustainable RFM Logo?

Using the Certified Sustainable RFM logo is free once a Terms of Use Agreement is signed. There are no logo licensing fees. Companies that go through the RFM Chain of Custody process incur a cost for the audit which is paid directly to the CBs. However, the CSC ensures all participants have free access to the logo.

26. How can a company demonstrate to consumers that a product is RFM certified?

The RFM program has a Certified Logo that can be displayed on consumer packaging, sales sheets, POS materials and on a company's website. This logo is used in conjunction with a company's CoC number to signify that the product comes from an RFM certified fishery. To use the logo a company must sign a Terms of Use Agreement and then the logo is free to use.

27. Are there fisheries from outside Alaska using the RFM Certification model?

RFM is based on the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Management and the FAO Ecolabeling Guidelines because it is internationally recognized as a model of excellence for seafood certification practices. Other US states, such as Louisiana, and countries such as Japan and Iceland also use these FAO Code and Guidelines for their certification programs, and this model is under consideration for use in other countries and regions.