

Aquaculture Stewardship Council certified salmon isn't a "Good Alternative"

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VANCOUVER/HALIFAX — Today's decision by a renowned seafood recommendation program to label some eco-certified farmed salmon as a "Good Alternative" for consumers is faulty, according to SeaChoice, a collaboration among Canadian environmental groups. Seafood Watch published its recommendations today following a review of the Aquaculture Stewardship Council's (ASC) salmon certification standard.

"We're concerned that the salmon standard — as evaluated by Seafood Watch — is not being applied," says Kelly Roebuck, SeaChoice representative from the Living Oceans Society. "Every farm certified in Canada departs from the standard and requires variances to the ASC's environmental health requirements."

The Aquaculture Stewardship Council is a certification and labelling body for farmed seafood that manages global standards for responsible aquaculture.

Allowing variances to meet the sustainability criteria undermines the salmon standard. SeaChoice does not recognize ASC certified farmed salmon as a "Good Alternative" equivalent for consumers because Seafood Watch did not review these variances in its benchmarking process.

Canadian salmon farms are allowed variances in relation to the standard's sea lice indicator, which requires fish farm operators to control sea lice while wild juvenile salmon migrate nearby. The ASC now allows British Columbia farms to be certified with more than 60 times the number of lice permitted by the standard.

"We have always maintained that the regulation of sea lice in Canada is inadequate to protect wild fish, especially small juveniles as they begin their migration," said John Werring, senior policy analyst for the David Suzuki Foundation. "By allowing variances, ASC has diluted the value of its own standard to protect wild fish."

Elsewhere in the world, ASC has also approved variance requests that substantially alter the salmon standard in practice. For example, in Chile and Norway, chemical and drug use far exceeds prescribed limits. In Australia, benthic monitoring procedures have been changed in favour of local regulations.

"The ASC salmon standard was set up to be a global gold standard certification through a multi-stakeholder Salmon Aquaculture Dialogue. Now, four years into operations, the ASC is setting new rules that override the dialogue agreements without an appropriate scientific, transparent and inclusive process," Roebuck said.

SeaChoice is asking the ASC to repeal its variance request processes so that it can legitimately benchmark to a Seafood Watch "Good Alternative" recommendation.

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SeaChoice

SeaChoice is a collaboration between the Ecology Action Centre, David Suzuki Foundation and Living Oceans Society and has been working for over a decade to improve sustainable seafood purchasing policies among retailers across Canada, as well as to provide information to help consumers make sustainable seafood choices. SeaChoice is a member of the international Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions. SeaChoice member groups have been active stakeholders in the ASC and the Salmon Aquaculture Dialogues for more than a decade. This has included Steering Committee representation during the dialogue, membership in the Technical Advisory Group, the sea lice working group, as well as active stakeholder engagement on ASC audits and projects.

Further information on SeaChoice website: www.seachoice.org/seafood-recommendations/certifications/ and www.seachoice.org/improving-seafood-supply/.

Backgrounder:

The ASC Salmon Standard

The ASC salmon standard was created in 2012 following a multi-stakeholder process known as the Salmon Aquaculture Dialogue. The standard is assessed by criteria to eliminate or minimize the environmental and social impacts of aquaculture. Version 1.1 of the standard was published in May 2017. Further information: www.asc-aqua.org.

ASC Variances and Process

Variance requests allow third-party auditors to seek an ASC interpretation of, or variance from, either a salmon standard criterion or auditor requirements. The variance request process can be used for any of the eight ASC standards. Of the 232 variance requests currently listed on the ASC website, as of May 17, 2017, 121 apply to the salmon standard alone.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch Benchmarking Exercise

Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program provides seafood recommendations based on the following rankings: "Best Choices", "Good Alternatives" and "Avoid". To determine which eco-certifications are consistent with at least a Seafood Watch "Good Alternative", the benchmarking exercise compares certification standards to the Seafood Watch methodology. The ASC Salmon Standard Version 1.1 was subject to this exercise and was deemed equivalent to at least a Seafood Watch "Good Alternative". No varied criteria of the ASC Salmon Standard were reviewed. Further information: www.seafoodwatch.org/seafood-recommendations/eco-certification.