

Mowi Canada West's claim that farms are all ASC-certified is misleading

July 10, 2020: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VANCOUVER — An ASC loophole allows Mowi Canada West to mislead the public on the extent of its farms' certification. Up to 14 months of Mowi's production cycle may never be assessed by auditors, leaving the company unaccountable for all environmental impacts during this stage.

On Monday, a news release from Mowi Canada West stated "every Mowi Canada West farm off B.C.'s coast is now certified by the Aquaculture Stewardship Council — the most rigorous, gold standard aquaculture certification in the world."

This statement is misleading.

Since 2015, at least six interim smolt farms that have never been assessed against the standard have been used during the production cycle of Mowi's ASC-certified salmon. These Mowi interim farms are not ASC-certified.

The production cycle of B.C.-farmed salmon commonly includes an interim farm (often referred to as smolt-entry site, nursery pen or initial grow-out site) that is used between the hatchery and final grow-out stage. ASC's interpretation of its own standard allows auditors to exclude the interim farm stage of production from audits.

In fact, ASC's loophole means up to 14 months of the production cycle may avoid any assessment and Mowi can remain unaccountable for all environmental impacts during the interim farm stage, such as high sea lice loads or antibiotic and chemical treatments. For example, Mowi reports indicate that in May 2020, its ASC-certified Hardwick grow-out farm received fish from the interim farm Larsen, which is not certified. Reports show that smolts first entered Larsen farm in March 2019, suggesting a total of 14 months of the production cycle that has been excluded from auditing for compliance with the ASC standard.

Consequently, an ASC label does not necessarily guarantee the fish was "farmed responsibly" from egg to harvest. It also means an ASC-certified salmon in Canada is not held to the same level of scrutiny as an ASC-certified salmon farmed in Chile or Norway (where interim farms are not common).

Mowi Canada West's final grow-out farms might be all ASC-certified, but it should be noted that many of those farms do not comply fully with the standard because of ASC-approved exemptions from criteria such as no maximum sea lice limit for B.C. certified farms. To state that all of its farms off B.C.'s coast are certified is simply misleading.

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ASC Interpretation: [http://variance-requests.asc-aqua.org/questions/are-smolts-that-are-temporarily-held-in-saltwater-pens-but-are-not-yet-in-final-stage-grow-out-sites-within-scope-of-the-requirements-of-the-asc-salmon-standard-v1-0-1-1-if-so-which-principl/](http://variance-requests.asc-aqua.org/questions/are-smolts-that-are-temporarily-held-in-saltwater-pens-but-are-not-yet-in-final-stage-grow-out-sites-within-scope-of-the-requirements-of-the-asc-salmon-standard-v1-0-1-1-if-so-which-princip/)

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About SeaChoice: SeaChoice is a collaboration of three internationally recognized organizations — the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecology Action Centre and Living Oceans Society — that use their broad, national expertise to find solutions for healthy oceans. SeaChoice is a science-based, solutions-focused influencer, advocate and watchdog leading the next evolution of seafood sustainability in Canada. It is a member organization of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions and works with consumers, retailers, suppliers, government and producers to accomplish its objectives.

SeaChoice member groups have been active stakeholders in the ASC and Salmon Aquaculture Dialogue for 15 years. This has included steering committee representation during the original Aquaculture Dialogues, core participation in numerous ASC advisory and working groups, and active stakeholder engagement on ASC audits and projects.

Note: The absence of other eco-certifications from this news release should not be taken as an endorsement for those schemes.