

**SeaChoice commends ASC's decision to stop making changes to standard rules behind closed doors**

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VANCOUVER AND HALIFAX - SeaChoice welcomes the news that the Aquaculture Stewardship Council is going to open up its process for granting exemptions from standard requirements for the certification of farms. The ASC, one of the most recognized eco-certifications for farmed seafood, announced last week that it will stop making decisions on exemptions, termed 'variances', behind closed doors and instead seek input from civil society and technical experts.

"We applaud ASC for heeding calls from SeaChoice and numerous other stakeholders, as well as their own accreditation partner, who urged the Council to fix its flawed variance procedure," said Kelly Roebuck, SeaChoice representative from Living Oceans. "Incorporating local stakeholder expertise, knowledge and concerns, as well as independent scientific input, into variance decisions was a necessary step for the credibility of the eco-label".

"The original ASC standards were established through open dialogue among industry and civil society stakeholders. Its provisions represent industry best practice and, as originally conceived, offer consumers assurance that a product bearing the ASC label meets rigorous environmental and social standards," stated Shannon Arnold, SeaChoice steering committee member from Ecology Action Centre. "However, the practice of varying those standards without local stakeholder and scientific input resulted in many global stakeholders worried that the standard's rigour was not being upheld".

SeaChoice first sounded the alarm on the variance process in 2015 when ASC decided to vary the sea lice control provisions of the salmon standard for British Columbia farms, enabling them to be certified with no effective limit on sea lice levels. Following a complaint by Living Oceans regarding these variances, ASC's own accreditation body Assurance Services International had warned ASC that variances that substantially alter the standard were "probably putting at risk the program integrity". ASI further recommended such variances should not be approved without stakeholder review and consultation.

The problematic sea lice variances that were granted under the previous procedure remain in effect. A review of the sea lice variances is pending under the new procedure. "We look forward to ASC's stakeholder consultation on these sea lice variances and ensuring that certified farms are held to a scientifically robust limit on sea lice levels to help protect wild juvenile salmon from farm-derived lice," concluded Dr. Kilian Stehfest, marine conservation specialist from the David Suzuki Foundation.

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**Media contact:**

Karen Wristen - Executive Director at Living Oceans Society and SeaChoice steering committee member - phone: 604-696-5044, cell: 604-788-5634, email: [kwristen@livingoceans.org](mailto:kwristen@livingoceans.org)

Kelly Roebuck - Sustainable Seafood Campaigner at Living Oceans Society –  
[kroebuck@livingoceans.org](mailto:kroebuck@livingoceans.org)

Shannon Arnold - Senior Marine Program Coordinator at Ecology Action Centre and SeaChoice steering committee member - phone: 902-446-4840, cell: 902-329-4668, email:  
[sarnold@ecologyaction.ca](mailto:sarnold@ecologyaction.ca)

**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. 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.

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

**Background:**

[ASC announcement of the new variance process](#)

[SeaChoice backgrounder on ASC variances](#)

[SeaChoice previous press release on ASI's complaint findings](#)