

Annotated Agenda
MAFAC Meeting – May 22 - May 24, 2012
Seattle, WA

- 1. Title of Discussion:** Certification of sustainable seafood
- 2. Presenters:** Dr. Mark Holliday, Director, Office of Policy, NMFS
- 3. Objective/Purpose:** **[Informational]**
- Overview of NMFS' role in advising public on fisheries sustainability
 - Status review of the NMFS' policy on third-party certification programs
 - Share Fact Sheet on NOAA's newly updated Fishwatch webpage

4. Background/Synopsis:

A number of organizations have created seafood guides to assist consumers and buyers with their "sustainable seafood" choices. Seafood guides rate seafood, typically based on environmental and biological criteria of species, fisheries, or aquaculture practices. Some guides include health concerns regarding mercury or other contaminants. The ratings found in these guides generally reflect an organization's policy stance regarding these issues, and as a result, the guides sometimes contradict each other, confusing consumers and affecting fishermen's ability to sell their catch. Internationally, criteria and guidance for third-party certification has been produced by the FAO.

In 2005, NMFS developed a policy ([30-122](#)) to clarify its role and responsibility to private sector certification of sustainable harvest practices for specific U.S. seafood products or fisheries. It is NMFS policy to neither endorse nor participate directly or indirectly in the private sector certification of fisheries. Rather, as a nation, the Magnuson Stevens Act provides the framework to achieve sustainable fisheries by meeting its 10 National Standards. Since data and information from NMFS is required by external organizations to inform their seafood guides, the NMFS policy outlines the actions that NMFS will or will not take in response to requests at any stage of a private sector certification process.

In 2008, the policy was proposed to be revised to allow the agency at its discretion to issue a declarative public statement on whether a particular fishery was "sustainably managed" in response to an agency request based on the National Standards premise in the original 2005 policy. This approach was proposed and supported by MAFAC in lieu of pursuing a federal label or mark to be displayed on final sale products. The proposed revision was not enacted because while there would be ample evidence to support the conclusion that a fishery met the 10 national standards, there was no legal basis in the Magnuson Act for equating this to a definition of "sustainably managed" and therefore the proposed revision did not proceed.

In April 2012 NMFS released a new and improved FishWatch webpage (<http://www.fishwatch.gov/index.htm>). FishWatch delivers regularly updated information on popular seafood harvested in the United States. The new page introduces consumers "to the dynamic process of sustainably managing living resources in an ever-changing ocean environment." These resources are influenced not only by fishing, but also by many other variables such as climate, pollution, and natural shifts within the ocean ecosystem. This tool provides factual information about the biological and ecological status of a fishery and lets consumers draw their own opinion relative to satisfying a personal sustainability standard.

5. Options listed from 1 to n:

- 1.No action by MAFAC
2. Enlist MAFACs assistance in designing and contributing to a process that seeks a more definitive standard of “sustainably managed” among fisheries stakeholders based on the existing policy, including consideration of potential legislative remedies.

6. Preferred Recommendation (Include action/product/decision needed; responsible/accountable party; date/timeline/schedule for action):

Record of Decision:

Decision, Next Step(s) and/or Action:

Assigned to:

Due Date: