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NEWS RELEASE

Red-listed fishery undeserving of sustainability label

Environmental groups oppose certification of harmful Canadian fishery

For immediate release

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Leading environmental groups are strongly opposing the potential eco-certification of Canada's Atlantic longline swordfish fishery, saying fishing operations that seriously threaten endangered species like sea turtles and sharks cannot be considered sustainable.

"Due to severe species and ecosystem impacts with this fishery, and a failure on the part of the government of Canada to manage them, the Canadian longline swordfish fishery does not meet essential sustainability criteria and should not be certified," said Scott Wallace, sustainable fisheries analyst with the David Suzuki Foundation.

The David Suzuki Foundation and Ecology Action Centre are among at least eight Canadian and U.S. groups that oppose the possible certification of this fishery, which is one of several in Canada currently being evaluated under a global eco-label program run by the U.K.-based Marine Stewardship Council.

In contrast to some seafood that has minimal ecosystem impacts, longline-caught swordfish are on sustainability "red lists" worldwide. These red lists are reserved for fisheries that cause severe damage to marine species and ecosystems.

Each year, the Canadian longline swordfish fishery catches about 170 endangered leatherback sea turtles, 1,200 loggerhead turtles (listed as threatened in the U.S.), and tens of thousands of blue, shortfin mako and porbeagle sharks – all considered to be species at risk based on scientific assessments. Although many of these animals are released alive, many later die from injuries incurred while on the hook.

The traditional harpoon swordfish fishery, which has no bycatch, is also being assessed for certification by the MSC and is considered by all groups to be a more sustainable method of catching swordfish. Wallace warned that certifying both fisheries not only undermines the lower-impact harpoon fishery, but also threatens the credibility of the MSC label.

“Significant measures must be taken by the longline swordfish fishery to stop harming so many threatened and endangered species before certification of this fishery could even be considered,” Wallace said.

Last week, details of these recommended measures were sent to the independent body conducting the certification assessment who will be meeting with ENGOs later this week. The first results of the assessments should be released this fall for public review and comment.

“Our submission to the assessment team demonstrated that the current operational and management conditions of the longline swordfish fishery do not pass even the minimum scoring guidepost on several performance indicators,” said Alexandra Curtis, sustainable fisheries scientist with the Ecology Action Centre in Halifax.

“Both the longline industry and the Canadian government must demonstrate a serious commitment to reducing and monitoring the amount and mortality of bycatch before this fishery could meet any sustainability standards.”

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