

New northern shrimp trawling certification not green enough, says conservation groups

August 21, 2008 HALIFAX - SeaChoice, Canada's national sustainable seafood program, will maintain its cautionary yellow listing for Canadian northern shrimp trawling despite the eco-certification from the UK-based Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) as 'a sustainable and well managed fishery.' It is the first fishery in Canada to be stamped with the international MSC eco-label.

In its comprehensive buying guide for sustainable seafood in Canada, SeaChoice says the northern shrimp trawl fishery does not warrant a green rating because of continual damage to underwater ecosystems from bottom trawling. "We're encouraged that this particular fishery is moving toward sustainable practices, but the fishery in its current state does not meet all the criteria necessary to be listed as a 'Green' choice for consumers," said Ms. Susanna Fuller, of the Ecology Action Centre in Halifax.

SeaChoice's main concern lies in the minimal passing grade in the ecosystem category of the Marine Stewardship Council's certification process. It also failed to achieve the MSC minimum standard in several of the sub-categories. The MSC evaluates fisheries using three guiding principles: stock status, ecosystem impacts, and management effectiveness.

Potential impacts to the ecosystem include:

- destruction of seafloor habitat by drag nets along the bottom;
- unintended catch (by-catch) of ground fish species currently protected by fishing moratoria; and,
- consequences of removing 160, 000 tones of a species from the food web that play an important role in the lower levels the marine food chain.

The Northern Shrimp fishery is second only to the Greenland halibut trawl fishery in soft and hard coral by-catch.

"As the first fishery in Canada to be stamped with the MSC eco-label we are concerned that the shrimp trawl fishery will be considered clean and green, yet there are significant conservation concerns that remain unaddressed by the industry and government" said Bill Wareham, senior marine conservation specialist with the David Suzuki Foundation.

MSC has certified the shrimp trawl fishery with conditions that the fishery should improve on its less than satisfactory aspects. However, under the current rules, a renewal of the certification does not require the fulfillment of these conditions.

Canadian fishery management does not currently require any fisheries to address the impact that they have on sea floor habitat. Canada has yet to implement or finalize a sensitive benthic (ocean floor) areas policy.

"To certify a bottom trawl fishery as the first fishery in Canada in the absence of a habitat protection policy for the ocean's floor is somewhat premature" says Susanna

Fuller.

SeaChoice will continue its regular assessments on the shrimp trawl fishery to determine whether or not conditions for certification by MSC are being addressed.

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