

THURSDAY 3RD MAY 00.01 HOURS BST (GMT+1)

PRESS RELEASE

CERTIFICATION SCHEMES FOR FISH AND PALM OIL OFFERING A FALSE PROMISE OF SUSTAINABILITY

New report finds most schemes failing to achieve any protection for environment

Many certification schemes which supposedly help consumers make environmentally friendly decisions when buying seafood and foods containing palm oil, were found to stand in the way of sustainability and should undergo significant reform, according to a new report.

The findings come in new research from the Changing Markets Foundation, which investigated whether voluntary certification schemes for seafood, palm oil and textiles are accurately guiding consumers towards sustainable products. In the vast majority of cases, the evidence of schemes' benefits was lacking, while the report revealed many cases, in which they provided cover for companies that are destroying the environment.

"Certification schemes are failing the environment and consumers, who increasingly want to make ethical and sustainable choices. It's time for a serious rethink about how we achieve sustainability because the current system is broken," said Nusa Urbancic, Campaigns Director at Changing Markets.

The report looked at the two schemes that certify most of sustainable seafood (wild catch), namely MSC and FOS, which certified over 9 million metric tonnes of fish each, in 2015. The report also looked at most schemes certifying sustainable palm oil for its use in food products, cosmetics or biofuels¹. The report says that the schemes are so focused on getting a vast majority of industry players on board, or meeting the growing demand for certified products, that they had to lower their standards.

"The main conclusion of this report is that certification has lost its way and that its contribution to creating a more sustainable world is minute," says the report, which calls for abolition of the least ambitious schemes and for the significant reform of others, based on the principles of transparency, independence, holistic approach and continuous improvements. The report also warns that voluntary certification schemes should not replace strong governmental and international regulations.

¹ The majority of palm oil in the EU is destined for energy generation 61% - split into transport biodiesel. (45% or 3.2Mt) and electricity & heating (16% or 1.1Mt) sectors. In comparison, only 34% (2.4Mt) goes into food sector.

This report joins recent calls by several NGOs to reform the MSC, which cannot currently be used as sufficient proof of sustainability and must undergo significant reform.²

On palm oil, the report says:

- Palm oil is now estimated to be present in half of all supermarket products.
- Production is one of the leading drivers of deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions and loss of habitat for endangered species such as orangutans, elephants and rhinos.
- None of the certification schemes examined has been effective at slowing down deforestation, peatland draining or the loss of biodiversity.

On fish, the report says:

- Nearly 90% of global fish stocks are either fully fished or overfished.
- Two of the biggest certification schemes for sustainable fish, run by Friends of the Sea (FOS) and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), certified over 9 million metric tonnes of fish in 2015
- Both FOS and MSC have certified fisheries which are overfished, have very high levels of by-catch and in some cases are at odds with national legislation.

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Further information

About the Changing Markets Foundation

The Changing Markets Foundation partners with NGOs on market-focused campaigns. Our mission is to expose irresponsible corporate practices and drive change towards a more sustainable economy.

www.changingmarkets.org / @ChangingMarkets

About the report

The report, entitled *The False Promise of Certification: how certification is hindering sustainability in the textiles, palm oil and fisheries industries*, is based on qualitative research into the identified schemes, interviews with NGO experts and an extensive review of the academic literature. It is available at <https://changingmarkets.org/portfolio/dirty-fashion/>

² <http://www.make-stewardship-count.org>