



**GUIDELINES FOR THE ECOLABELLING
OF FISH AND FISHERY PRODUCTS
FROM INLAND CAPTURE FISHERIES**

**DIRECTIVES POUR L'ÉTIQUETAGE ÉCOLOGIQUE
DU POISSON ET DES PRODUITS DES PÊCHES
DE CAPTURE CONTINENTALES**

**DIRECTRICES PARA EL ECOETIQUETADO
DE PESCADO Y PRODUCTOS PESQUEROS
DE LA PESCA DE CAPTURA CONTINENTAL**



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PREPARATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document contains the text of the Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Capture Fisheries, which were adopted by the Twenty-ninth Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), Rome, 31 January–4 February 2011.

PRÉPARATION DE CE DOCUMENT

Le présent document contient le texte des Directives pour l'étiquetage écologique du poisson et des produits des pêches de capture continentales qui ont été adoptées à la vingt-neuvième session du Comité des pêches (COFI), Rome, 31 janvier-4 février 2011.

PREPARACIÓN DE ESTE DOCUMENTO

En el presente documento figura el texto de las Directrices para el ecoetiquetado de pescado y productos pesqueros de la pesca de captura continental que se aprobaron en el 29º período de sesiones del Comité de Pesca, Roma, 31 enero-4 febrero de 2011.

FAO.

Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Capture Fisheries.

Directives pour l'étiquetage écologique du poisson et des produits des pêches de capture continentales.

Directrices para el ecoetiquetado de pescado y productos pesqueros de la pesca de captura continental.

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ABSTRACT

The Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Capture Fisheries are of a voluntary nature. They are applicable to ecolabelling schemes that are designed to certify and promote labels for products from well-managed inland capture fisheries and focus on issues related to the sustainable use of fisheries resources. The guidelines refer to principles, general considerations, terms and definitions, minimum substantive requirements and criteria, and procedural and institutional aspects of ecolabelling of fish and fishery products from inland capture fisheries.

RÉSUMÉ

Les Directives pour l'étiquetage écologique du poisson et des produits des pêches de capture continentales sont facultatives. Elles s'appliquent aux systèmes d'étiquetage écologique destinés à certifier et à promouvoir des labels pour les produits issus de pêches de capture continentales gérées de manière appropriée et portent essentiellement sur des points relatifs à l'utilisation durable des ressources halieutiques. Les directives se réfèrent aux principes, considérations d'ordre général, termes et définitions, conditions minimales requises et critères, et éléments institutionnels et de procédure pour l'étiquetage écologique du poisson et des produits des pêches de capture continentales.

RESUMEN

Las Directrices para el ecoetiquetado de pescado y productos pesqueros de la pesca de captura continental son facultativas. Éstas se aplican a los sistemas de ecoetiquetado cuya finalidad es certificar y promover etiquetas para los productos de una pesca de captura continental bien ordenada, y se centran en las cuestiones relacionadas con la utilización sostenible de los recursos pesqueros. Las directrices se refieren a principios, consideraciones generales, términos y definiciones, requisitos sustantivos mínimos y criterios, y aspectos de procedimiento e institucionales para el ecoetiquetado de pescado y productos pesqueros de la pesca de captura continental.

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GUIDELINES FOR THE ECOLABELLING OF FISH AND FISHERY PRODUCTS FROM INLAND CAPTURE FISHERIES

SCOPE

1. These guidelines are applicable to ecolabelling schemes that are designed to certify and promote labels for products from well-managed inland capture fisheries and focus on issues related to the sustainable use of fisheries resources.

PRINCIPLES

2. The following principles should apply to ecolabelling schemes for inland capture fisheries:

- 2.1 Be consistent with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and other relevant international instruments.
- 2.2 Take into account the provisions of relevance for the management of inland capture fisheries contained in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks.
- 2.3 Recognize the sovereign rights of States and comply with all relevant laws and regulations.
- 2.4 Be of a voluntary nature and market-driven.
- 2.5 Be transparent, including balanced and fair participation by all interested parties.
- 2.6 Be non-discriminatory, do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade¹ and allow for fair trade and competition.
- 2.7 Provide the opportunity to enter international markets.²

¹ Consistent with the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade.

² See Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Article 11.2.

- 2.8 Establish clear accountability for the owners of schemes and the certification bodies in conformity with international standards.
- 2.9 Incorporate reliable, independent auditing and verification procedures.
- 2.10 Be considered equivalent if consistent with these guidelines.
- 2.11 Be based on the best scientific evidence available, also taking into account traditional knowledge of the resources provided that its validity can be objectively verified.
- 2.12 Be practical, viable and verifiable.
- 2.13 Ensure that labels communicate truthful information.
- 2.14 Provide for clarity.
- 2.15 Be based, at a minimum, on the minimum substantive requirements, criteria and procedures outlined in these guidelines.

3. The principle of transparency should apply to all aspects of an ecolabelling scheme, including its organizational structure and financial arrangements.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

4. Ecolabelling schemes should take into account that principles, minimum substantive requirements, criteria and procedures set out in this document will apply equally for developed, transition and developing countries.

5. Bearing in mind that ecolabelling schemes relate to fisheries management, and rights and duties of States,³ it is recognized that the involvement of States in ecolabelling schemes is desirable and should be encouraged. It is also recognized that States and, as appropriate, regional fishery bodies (RFB), (which includes regional fishery management organizations), relevant regional commissions or other organizations or arrangements may develop ecolabelling schemes in a manner consistent with these guidelines. Ecolabelling schemes should give full consideration to the recommendations and advice by States, and, as appropriate, RFBs, relevant regional commissions or other organizations or arrangements and FAO.

³ In these guidelines, the reference to States includes the European Community in matters within its competence.

6. In accordance with Article 5 of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and recognizing that all countries should have the same opportunities, and in view of the special conditions applying to developing countries and countries in transition and their important contribution to international fish trade, it is acknowledged that in order to benefit from applying ecolabelling schemes, States, relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and financial institutions should provide developing countries and countries in transition with financial and technical assistance to develop and maintain appropriate fisheries management systems and arrangements that will allow them to participate in such schemes. Such assistance should also consider direct support towards the often high costs of accreditation and certification. Development agencies and donor institutions are encouraged to support FAO in facilitating financial and technical assistance to developing countries and countries in transition.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

7. For the purpose of these international guidelines, the following terms and definitions apply.

Accreditation

8. Procedure by which a competent authority gives formal recognition that a qualified body or person is competent to carry out specific tasks.

(Based on ISO/IEC Guide 2:1996, paragraph 12.11)

Accreditation body

9. Body that conducts and administers an accreditation system and grants accreditation.

(Based on ISO Guide 2, paragraph 17.2)

Accreditation system

10. System that has its own rules of procedure and management for carrying out accreditation.

11. Note – Accreditation of certification bodies is normally awarded following successful assessment and is followed by appropriate surveillance.

(Based on ISO Guide 2, paragraph 17.1)

Arrangement

12. A cooperative mechanism established by two or more parties be they governmental, private or non-governmental entities.

Audit

13. A systematic and functionally independent examination to determine whether activities and related results comply with planned objectives.

(Based on Codex Alimentarius, Principles for Food Import and Export Certification and Inspection, CAC/GL 20)

Aquaculture

14. The farming of aquatic organisms involving intervention in the rearing process to enhance production and the individual or corporate ownership of the stock being cultivated.

Certification

15. Procedure by which a third party gives written or equivalent assurance that a product, process or service conforms to specified requirements. Certification may be, as appropriate, based on a range of inspection activities which may include continuous inspection in the production chain.

(Based on ISO Guide 2, paragraph 15.1.2, and Principles for Food Import and Export Certification and Inspection, CAC/GL 20)

Certification body

16. Competent and recognized body that conducts certification. A certification body may oversee certification activities carried out on its behalf by other bodies.

(Based on ISO Guide 2, paragraph 15.2)

Chain of custody

17. The set of measures which is designed to guarantee that the product put on the market and bearing the ecolabel logo is really a product coming from the certified fishery concerned. These measures should thus cover both the tracking/traceability of the product all along the processing, distribution and marketing chain, as well as the proper tracking of the documentation (and control of the quantity concerned).

Complaint

18. An objection by a person or body to a decision regarding accreditation, de-accreditation, certification or de-certification.

Conformity assessment

19. Any activity concerned with determining directly or indirectly that relevant requirements are fulfilled.

20. Notes: Typical examples of conformity assessment activities are sampling, testing and inspection; evaluation, verification and assurance of conformity (supplier's declaration, certification); registration, accreditation and approval as well as their combinations.

(ISO Guide 2, paragraph 12.2)

Decision

21. Any resolution by an accreditation or certifying body or arrangement concerning the rights and obligations of a person or body.

Ecolabelling scheme

22. Ecolabelling schemes entitle a fishery product to bear a distinctive logo or statement which certifies that the fish has been harvested in compliance with conservation and sustainability standards. The logo or statement is intended to make provision for informed decisions of purchasers whose choice can be relied upon to promote and stimulate the sustainable use of fishery resources.

Enhanced fisheries

23. Fisheries that are supported by activities aimed at supplementing or sustaining the recruitment of one or more aquatic organisms and raising the total production or the production of selected elements of a fishery beyond a level which is sustainable by natural processes. Enhancement may entail stocking with material originating from aquaculture installations, translocations from the wild and habitat modification.

Inland capture fisheries

24. The extraction of living aquatic organisms from natural or man-made inland waters, but excluding those from aquaculture facilities.

Introduced species (alien species)⁴

25. Species (including associated races or strains) that are intentionally or accidentally transported and released by humans into an environment outside their natural range.

⁴ Adapted from Article 8(h) of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Naturally reproductive stock component

26. In fisheries enhanced through stocking, that component of the total stock that is maintained by natural reproduction. This component may include organisms derived from natural reproduction of stocked fish.

Standard for certification

27. Document approved by a recognized organization or arrangement that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for products or related processes and production methods, with which compliance is not mandatory under international trade rules. It may also include or deal exclusively with terminology, symbols, packaging, marking or labelling requirements as they apply to a product, process or production method.

(Based on TBT agreement, Annex 1, paragraph 2)

In these guidelines, unless otherwise qualified, the word standard refers to a standard for certification. The standard for certification will include requirements, criteria and performance elements in a hierarchical arrangement. For each requirement, one or more substantive criteria should be defined. For each criterion, one or more performance elements should be provided for use in assessment.

Standard-setting organization or arrangement

28. Organization or arrangement that has recognized activities in standard setting.

(Based on ISO Guide 2, paragraph 4.3)

Stocking

29. The release of cultured or wild aquatic organisms at any life stage into an aquatic ecosystem for the purpose of enhancement, stock rebuilding or biological control.

Third party

30. Person or body that is recognized as being independent of the parties involved, as concerns the issue in question.

(ISO/IEC Guide 2:1996)

Translocations (transfers)

31. Movement of individuals of a species or population, intentionally or accidentally transported and released within their natural range.

Unit of certification

32. The “unit of certification” is the fishery for which ecolabelling certification is sought, as specified by the stakeholders who are seeking certification. The certification could encompass: the whole fishery, where a fishery refers to the activity of one particular gear type or method leading to the harvest of one or more species; a subcomponent of a fishery, for example, a national fleet fishing a shared stock; or several fisheries operating on the same resources. The “stock under consideration” exploited by this fishery (unit of certification) may be one or more biological stocks as specified by the stakeholders for certification. The certification applies only to products derived from the “stock under consideration” (see paragraph 37). In assessing compliance with certification standards, the impacts on the “stock under consideration” of all the fisheries utilizing that “stock under consideration” over its entire area of distribution, including all life stages, are to be considered.

MINIMUM SUBSTANTIVE REQUIREMENTS AND CRITERIA FOR ECOLABELS

Introduction

33. The following sets forth the minimum substantive requirements and criteria for assessing whether a fishery can be certified and an ecolabel awarded to a fishery. Ecolabelling schemes may apply additional or more stringent requirements and criteria related to sustainable use of the resources. The requirements and criteria presented below are to be based on and interpreted in accordance with the current suite of agreed international instruments including the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, as well as provisions of relevance for the management of inland capture fisheries contained in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement.

34. Requirements are specified for each of three areas: the management systems, the fishery and associated “stock under consideration” for which certification is being sought (subsequently referred to as “stock under consideration”), and consideration of serious impacts of the fishery on the ecosystem including stock enhancement activities. Criteria and related measurable performance indicators and a corresponding monitoring system should be established in order to assess the conformity of the fishery concerned with the requirements and the criteria of the ecolabelling scheme. In developing and applying the criteria

and assessing the conformity of the fishery with the standard of certification, the views and opinions of States, RFBs, relevant regional commissions or other organizations or arrangements and FAO should be fully considered.

Management systems

35. Requirement: The fishery is conducted under a management system which is based upon good practice and that ensures the satisfaction of the requirements and criteria described in paragraph 36. The management system and the fishery operate in compliance with the requirements of local, national and international laws and regulations, including the requirements of any regional fisheries management agreement that directs the management of the fisheries on the “stock under consideration”.

35.1 For the “stock under consideration”, there are documented management approaches with a well-based expectation that management will be successful, taking into account uncertainty and imprecision, and the multipurpose nature of the use patterns in inland waters.

35.2 There are objectives, and as necessary, management measures to address pertinent aspects of the ecosystem effects of fishing as per paragraph 41.

36. The following criteria will apply to management systems for any fisheries, but it must be recognized that special consideration needs to be given to small-scale fisheries, which are prevalent in inland capture fisheries, with respect to the availability of data and with respect to the fact that management systems can differ substantially for different types and scales of fisheries.

36.1 Adequate and reliable data and/or information are collected, maintained and assessed in accordance with applicable international standards and practices for evaluation of the current state and trends of the stocks⁵ (see below: Methodological aspects). This can include relevant traditional, fisher or community knowledge, provided their validity can be objectively verified.

⁵ After Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Article 7.4.4.

- 36.2 In determining suitable conservation and management measures, the best scientific evidence available is taken into account by the designated authority, as well as consideration of relevant traditional, fisher or community knowledge, provided their validity can be objectively verified, in order to evaluate the current state of the “stock under consideration”⁶ in relation to, where appropriate, stock specific target and limit reference points.⁷
- 36.3 Taking due account of paragraph 42, for the “stock under consideration” the determination of suitable conservation and management measures should include or take account of:
- Total fishing mortality from all sources is considered in assessing the state of the “stock under consideration”, including discards, unobserved mortality, incidental mortality, unreported catches and catches in other fisheries.
 - Management targets are consistent with achieving maximum sustainable yield (MSY) (or a suitable proxy) on average, or a lesser fishing mortality if that is optimal in the circumstances of the fishery (e.g. multispecies fisheries) or to avoid severe adverse impacts on dependent predators.
 - The management system should specify limits or directions in key performance indicators (see paragraph 37.2), consistent with avoiding recruitment overfishing or other impacts that are likely to be irreversible or very slowly reversible, and specify the actions to be taken if the limits are approached or the desired directions are not achieved.
- 36.4 Similarly, data and information, including relevant traditional, fisher or community knowledge, provided their validity can be objectively verified, are used to identify adverse impacts of the fishery on the ecosystem, and timely scientific advice is provided on the likelihood and magnitude of identified impacts (see paragraph 41).

⁶ Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Articles 6.4 and 7.4.1.

⁷ Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Article 7.5.3.

- 36.5 The designated authorities adopt and effectively implement appropriate measures for the conservation and sustainable use of the “stock under consideration” based on the data, information, and scientific advice referred to in the preceding bullets.⁸ Short-term considerations should not compromise the long-term conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources.
- 36.6 An effective legal and administrative framework at the local, national or regional level, as appropriate, is established for the fishery⁹ and compliance is ensured through suitable mechanisms for monitoring, surveillance, control and enforcement. This could include relevant traditional, fisher or community approaches, provided their performance could be objectively verified. (see also paragraph 6).¹⁰
- 36.7 In accordance with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Article 7.5, the precautionary approach is being implemented to protect the “stock under consideration” and the aquatic environment. This should take due account of stock enhancement procedures. *Inter alia* this will require that the absence of adequate scientific information should not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take conservation and management measures.¹¹ Further, relevant uncertainties are being taken into account through a suitable method of risk assessment, including those associated with the use of introduced or translocated species.¹² Appropriate reference points are determined and remedial actions to be taken if reference points are approached or exceeded are specified.¹³
- 36.8 In the case of enhanced fisheries, the management system is able to demonstrate that the stocking material

⁸ Based on Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Article 7.1.1.

⁹ Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Article 7.7.1.

¹⁰ Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Article 7.1.7.

¹¹ Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Article 7.5.1.

¹² FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries No. 2 – Precautionary approach to capture fisheries and species introductions.

¹³ Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Article 7.5.2.

originating from aquaculture facilities meets the requirements of paragraph 40.

- 36.9 In the case of enhanced fisheries, the fishery management system should take due regard of the natural production processes and minimize adverse impacts on ecosystem structure and function.

“Stock under consideration”

37. Requirement: The “stock under consideration” is not overfished, and is maintained at a level which promotes the objective of optimal utilization and maintains its availability for present and future generations,¹⁴ taking into account that longer term changes in productivity can occur due to natural variability and/or impacts other than fishing. In the event that biomass drops well below such target levels, management measures (Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Article 7.6), including measures to favourably enhance the environment, should allow for restoration within reasonable time frames of the stocks to such levels. This requirement also pertains to species introductions or translocations that have occurred historically and which become established as part of the natural ecosystem. The following criteria are applicable:

- 37.1 The “stock under consideration” is not overfished if it is above the associated limit reference point (or its proxy).
- 37.2 If fishing mortality (or its proxy) is above the associated limit reference point, actions should be taken to decrease the fishing mortality (or its proxy) below that limit reference point.
- 37.3 The structure and composition of the “stock under consideration” which contribute to its resilience are taken into account.
- 37.4 In the absence of specific information on the “stock under consideration”, generic evidence based on similar stocks can be used for fisheries with low risk to that “stock under consideration”. However, the greater the risk of overfishing, the more specific evidence is necessary to ascertain the sustainability of intensive fisheries.

¹⁴ Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Article 7.1.1.