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MSC defends hoki fishery certification

Eco-label group denies greenwash label

March 20 - WorldCatch News Network - (Editor's Note: Earlier today, one of New Zealand's leading environmental groups, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society (RFBPS), charged that New Zealand's hoki fishery does not meet the requirements of The Marine Stewardship Council's eco-labeling program, and the accreditation of this fishery should have been rejected. Brendan May, chief executive of the MSC, replies to the RFBPS charge in this exclusive rebuttal published exclusively on WorldCatch.)

MSC fights back over 'greenwash' claims
By Brendan May

The New Zealand Hoki Fishery recently received certification to the MSC standard. This represented a great victory for industry and conservationists alike. Although this is not how some have portrayed the news.

Some representatives of the conservation community have identified concerns about the environmental impact of the hoki fishery. This is their right, and the MSC takes such concerns seriously. Unfortunately however, emotional language may have led to some distortion of the real issues.

It has been suggested the MSC should withdraw the certification. This implies a misunderstanding of our process. As an independent, third party certification process, it is not the MSC which awards certification, but an independent certification body.

Some have sought to suggest the MSC has in some way compromised its principles and claimed the fishery is perfect. This could not be further from the truth.

In the case of the hoki fishery, there are ten corrective actions which have been identified. The fishery has committed to taking these corrective actions. These issues are all now in the public domain and open for public scrutiny. A plan of action with an agreed time-scale has been developed to address these issues. This is exactly why the MSC programme is such a valuable tool in improving fisheries management.

How, other than through the MSC, could the environmental community have persuaded a fishery publicly to agree to a series of corrective actions which must be undertaken in a specific time frame in order to retain the right to use our logo? Without the MSC process, and the fishery's willingness to participate in it, many of these issues could still be unresolved with no agreement on how or when to make much needed improvements.

Many groups will be watching to make sure that changes happen. None more so than the certification body which will be monitoring the fishery regularly.

If at any point there are contraventions to the requirements of the certification by the fishery, it is the certifier not the MSC that has the right to suspend or withdraw certification. And surely there is only one thing worse for a fishery than not winning the right to use our label. It is winning the label and then losing it.

It is in the fishery's commercial interest, especially in the European retail sector, to retain MSC certification. Therefore the incentive exists to ensure corrective actions are taken seriously.

Of course, the other benefit of the MSC programme is precisely that it provides the consultative mechanisms through which all stakeholders, including the environmental community, can express



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mechanisms through which all stakeholders, including the environmental community, can express their views, whether positive or negative.

Conservationists and industry have the same objective - protecting the marine environment to ensure that fish stocks remain at a sustainable level. This why the MSC has built such a broad global coalition of allies.

The MSC has strong support from major environmental groups such as WWF International and also retailers and restaurateurs worldwide who want to sell products certified to the MSC Standard.

Every time a certified product is bought, it is a victory for conservationists, industry and consumers. We believe that working together achieves more for sustainable development than headline-grabbing but potentially unproductive stand-offs.

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