

Common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products

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In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products, the Commission presents a feasibility report on **options for an eco-label scheme for fishery and aquaculture products (FAPs)**.

Purposes of the report: based on a study analysing existing eco-labels and on a public consultation, the report:

- describes the context in which eco-labels have developed in the fishery and aquaculture sector;
- presents relevant public and private initiatives at EU and international level on environmental voluntary claims;
- summarises the situation of the market for eco-labelled products, as are the main issues raised with regard to eco-labels;
- identifies areas of possible action in relation to an eco-label scheme for FAPs and evaluates their respective feasibility.

The market for eco-labels: the report shows that **eco-labels in FAPs have become increasingly important** over the past decade. Volumes of eco-labelled products are now substantial, yet **concentrated in some EU markets and products**. The EU is currently the largest market for eco-labelled FAPs. However, market penetration of eco-labelled products varies significantly across Member States and concentrates on frozen or processed products.

Action at EU level: over the past decade, European Union has taken **several initiatives** to ensure consumer protection and regulate the provision of environmental information. Analysed globally with other sectors, there is no major specificity of eco-labels in fisheries and aquaculture products. **Non-legislative initiatives** have also been developed to provide guidance on voluntary claims. In addition, **at the request the European Parliament**, the Commission will launch in 2016 a pilot project for the assessment of voluntary claims on fisheries and aquaculture products. The project will explore to what extent such claims are present on FAPs and compliant with relevant requirements.

Advantages of eco-labels and problems encountered: the report stresses that today, eco-labels in the fishery and aquaculture sector:

- give assurance to retailers as regards the sustainability of the products they sell. In turn, retailers use this assurance to emphasise sustainability aspects in their consumer information campaigns and to protect their brand;
- inform consumers on the sustainability performance of a product;
- allow differentiating products in the market and may help consumers to make a choice.

However, there are **three major problems** with eco-labelling in the FAB sector, which were stressed in the study and during the consultation. These are: (i) the **credibility** of the claims; (ii) **confusion** related to the perceived proliferation of eco-labels and to the parallel use of other communication tools, as well as to the difference in content and scope of eco-labels; (ii) **costs** linked to certification may be substantial for producers.

Possible action by public authorities: three options for action by the EU were identified in the report and show different results regarding the added value for the EU, the costs, subsidiarity and proportionality:

Option 1: no change: current legislation and effective use of available tools: this would prove effective in addressing the credibility of claims, but would not improve the state of confusion resulting from multiple messages, since consumer information that falls outside existing EU regulations would not be subject to control. However, as regards costs, use of public funds could help reduce the costs of certification for producers.

Option 2: setting of minimum requirements on sustainability and certification process: this would address issues such as potential confusion and credibility. It would imply extensive preparation and adoption of new legislation or a recommendation at EU level. Similar objectives could, alternatively, be reached by supporting international standards that are being developed.

Option 3: the establishment of a self-standing Union-wide eco-label scheme for FAPs: this option may bring positive effects in terms of credibility of eco-labels by creating incentives and an effective public control. The issue of the confusion on the content of environmental claims could also be improved, but it is not clear whether there would be any effect on the provision of other types of environmental information to consumers.

New legislation would need to be adopted to establish such Union-wide scheme. Given the differences in market penetration of eco-labelled products across Member States, and the premature stage of implementation of national schemes, action at EU level could be **contested from a subsidiarity viewpoint**. The costs of this option are also significant compared to the other two options.

The Commission considers that the [common fisheries policy](#) is expected to deliver on sustainability by 2020 at the latest, and will partially reduce the need for a public label as a driver of sustainability.