

A public ecolabelling scheme under development

The work on seafood products ecolabelling began in France in 2006, one year after EU Commission launched a consultation within state members. At first the French operators, summoned by the French Agriculture and Fishery Ministry to express their views (so as to choose between 3 proposed options), were a bit reluctant. But their position evolved quickly and soon, some professionals expressed the need to know more on this matter.

Consequently, a working group including participants from the whole sector -from producers to consumers associations and administration-, was set up in 2007. It focuses on: 1/ various existing ecolabelling schemes, 2/ Food and Agriculture Organization's guidelines for ecolabelling of fish and fishery products from marine captures fisheries (Rome, 2005), 3/ and minimal requirements associated to an ecolabel (the option taken by European Commission in 2005).

This dynamic working group is led by OFIMER (Office Interprofessionnel des Produits de la Mer et de l'Aquaculture / FranceAgriMer). It published its conclusions on March 2008. The main consensus adopted was **the building of a public ecolabel** for seafood products coming from sustainable fisheries, consistent with FAO guidelines and with a future European scheme. This choice is the expression of care for :

- credibility for operators,
- clarity for consumers
- and for diversity, the study concluding that only one existing label, *Marine Stewardship Council*, currently complies with FAO guidelines.

In compliance with this preliminary work, the national debate on the Environment (called "Grenelle") offered the possibility to work out a law to design the foundation of an ecolabel dedicated to sustainable seafood products. This law - presently in discussion - will be followed by a flexible regulating scheme, a set of decrees, which shall detail the methods of accreditation and certification (by independent impartial and transparent bodies), requirements for certification and the use of a logo. The overall purpose is to comply with FAO guidelines, and to precise, when needed, the way to do it.

This legal work in progress is developed in close cooperation with the whole fishery sector and NGOs. All stakeholders are invited to participate, especially on the standardization process. The standard under preparation relies on 15 requirements classified in 4 categories: stock management, ecosystem impacts, social/economic and post catching management (including traceability). We hope this first public ecolabel in EU will be available by the end of 2009 and will help, inspire and further debates on the seafood ecolabel at a European level.