Information for Businesses

Making Seafood Sustainability Claims

CERTIFICATION AND RATINGS
COLLABORATION

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The Certification & Ratings Collaboration works together to advance environmental sustainability and social responsibility. In 2018, we created a brief for businesses that clarifies our member programs' complementary roles and how we fit into responsible sourcing policies.

We created this document for businesses to assess whether their claims meet the level of practice that we follow in our own programs. **This document is provided for informational purposes only. Countries have different regulations for sustainability claims and we recommend consulting your legal counsel to ensure your claims comply with relevant laws.**

This guidance covers three types of claims:

1. Seafood product claims
2. Claims about business participation in improvement programs
3. Claims about progress against seafood sourcing commitments

If help is needed, the business may connect with the relevant certification or rating programs or other experts.

Seafood Product Claims

This section addresses two types of claims that appear on seafood products. This includes claims that appear on product packaging, on a tag attached to fresh fish, on a price tag for the product in a fresh case, next to an item on a restaurant menu, or in similar locations that reference a specific product. The types of claims include reference to:

For more detailed guidance on claims

ISEAL is a membership organization that supports sustainability systems and their partners to define credible practice based on emerging global consensus. ISEAL's Code of Good Practice supports sustainability systems to improve how they operate and deliver greater impact. ISEAL's Credibility Principles help businesses and governments make informed choices about the sustainability systems they work with.

The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems guides programs such as the members of the Certification and Ratings Collaboration in developing and managing their policies and systems for controlling claims and labels related to their standards. We have drawn upon resources produced by ISEAL in developing this document.

An example of new regulatory requirements for claims: the EU's Empowering Consumers (EmpCo) Directive

Under the EU's Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (UCPD), sustainability claims must be truthful, clear, specific, accurate, unambiguous and supported by evidence. From September 2026 the EmpCo rules will amend the UCPD framework, introducing considerably stricter rules effectively prohibiting generic environmental claims. For businesses selling on the EU market, we strongly recommend consulting an EU legal expert with knowledge of the Empowering Consumers Directive (Directive (EU) 2024/825) regarding (on-pack) sustainability claims.

Certification or Rating Claims

A claim that the product comes from a fishery that has achieved a level of performance consistent with a specific, third-party certification or rating standard. Some programs have additional requirements for the use of an ecolabel. Always check the specific program requirements.

> **Certification claim example:** *This seafood comes from a fishery that has been independently certified to the MSC's environmental standard for fishing. msc.org*

Improvement Claims

A claim that the product comes from a fishery that participates in an improvement program. Some programs have additional requirements about the level of improvement that must be achieved to make an improvement claim.

Guidelines for seafood product claims:

☑ Clear, accurate and transparent

- The claim is understandable and specific to the product.
- The claim is consistent with either:
  - The scope and performance level of the standard the claim is based on (for certification or rating claims); or
  - The scope and requirements of the improvement program the claim is based on (for improvement claims).
- The claim is based on:
  - standards and program requirements that are publicly available, and
  - data and/or information that can be substantiated.
- Information about the performance of fisheries and farms against the standard is publicly available.

☑ Controlled by the program on which the claim is based

- The program upon which the claim is based has disclosed information and processes for approving claims (and label use, if applicable).

☑ **Independent verification that the fishery or farm(s) has achieved the certification or rating or has met the improvement program requirements**

- For certification and rating claims, the organization verifying that the fishery or farm(s) has met the reference standard is separate from the business making the claim
- For an improvement program, the organization verifying participation is separate from the business making the claim

- Confirm that organization has:
  - Disclosed and made available the methodology.
  - Qualified assessors that are trained in the methodology.
  - A system for regularly assessing performance against:
    - The standard (for certification or rating claims).
    - The program requirements (for improvement claims).
  - Documentation about the current performance of the fishery or farm(s).

☑ **Independent supply chain assurance that the product comes from the fishery or farm(s) that has achieved the certification or rating or is engaged in the improvement program**

- The business making the claim demonstrates that the product is:
  - Traceable from the product or menu item to the level of the supply chain appropriate to the claim, and
  - Segregated from other products as it moves through each stage of the supply chain, as appropriate to the claim.

- An independent chain of custody program or digital traceability provider verifies the traceability and segregation of the product.

- The chain of custody program or digital traceability provider has systems for ensuring its program is working properly. For example:
  - Effective mechanisms for regularly verifying conformance of businesses and products throughout the chain. Examples include independent audits, tracebacks, DNA testing, and/or trace element fingerprinting.
  - Disclosure when a chain of custody certification is suspended or withdrawn.
  - Consistent implementation, performance-tracking, and periodic improvements.

- The business making the claim makes available the chain of custody program or digital traceability provider used.

Examples of Traceability and Segregation Appropriate to Various Claims

Seafood supply chains are complex and products often are mixed during processing. Traceability and segregation help ensure accuracy and credibility when making a claim that a product comes from a specific fishery or farm(s) that has achieved a level of performance consistent with a certification or rating or participates in an improvement program. The following are examples of traceability and segregation appropriate to three different claim types.

Example of traceability and segregation requirements for certification claim
Claim: *The Atlantic salmon in this product comes from seafood farms that have been independently certified to the ASC's environmental and social standard. www.asc-aqua.org*

For this claim, the product must:

1. Be traceable back to the farm(s) that holds the ASC certificate.
2. Travel through a certified supply chain that segregates certified from non-certified product.

Example of traceability and segregation requirements for rating claim
Claim: *Pacific cod caught with longlines in the Gulf of Alaska are rated green by the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch® Program.*

For this claim, the product must:

1. Be traceable back to the longline cod fishery in the Gulf of Alaska.
2. Be segregated from cod from other gear types and/or locations as it moves through the supply chain.

Example of traceability and segregation requirements for improvement claim
Claim: *This product comes from a fishery which is in the Marine Stewardship Council's Improvement Program. www.msc.org/improve*

For this claim, the product must:

1. Be traceable back to the fishery participating in the MSC Improvement Program.
2. Be segregated from products that do not participate in the MSC Improvement Program as it moves through the supply chain.

Recommendation for small-scale restaurants participating in sustainability initiatives

Restaurants can play an essential role in educating customers about seafood sustainability. Here are some guidelines:

- If making certification claims about specific menu items, you should have independent supply chain traceability assurance as described in this document. Certification claims typically require prior approval from the standard developer.
- If making rating claims about specific menu items, best practice is for the restaurant to confirm that its suppliers have independent supply chain traceability assurance as described in this document and in line with that program's guidelines.
- Partnering with certification and ratings programs can support you in moving toward best practice supply chain assurance in ways that are practical for your business.

Claims about Business Participation in Improvement Programs

Businesses can make claims that they participate in an improvement initiative. This claim is not product-specific and is used for marketing purposes only. Guidelines for seafood marketing claims should include:

> **Example:** *We are participating in the Improver Programme by ASC (link to specific aquaculture improvement project).*

☑ Clear, accurate and transparent

- The claim is understandable and qualified, to the extent necessary to minimize consumer confusion.
- The claim is consistent with the scope and performance level of the improvement program the claim is based on.
- The claim is based on publicly available criteria, data, and information that can be substantiated.

☑ Documented

- The business making the claim makes available evidence supporting the claim. We recommend that evidence pertain to actions a company has taken and will take as a participant in an improvement initiative, such as contributing money, collecting data, or changing practices.

Claims about Progress Against Seafood Sourcing Commitments

Businesses can make claims about their progress toward meeting a seafood sourcing commitment that references certifications, ratings, or improvement initiatives. These claims often appear on corporate websites or in annual sustainability reports. We consider transparency and clear progress reporting on seafood sourcing commitments to be best practice. Guidelines for seafood product claims:

☑ Grounded in a specific, timebound, and public seafood sourcing commitment

- The seafood sourcing commitment contains specific statements about:
  - The scope of the seafood included in the commitment (e.g., wild or farmed, fresh, frozen, shelf-stable, etc.),
  - The sustainability issues included in the commitment (e.g., environmental sustainability, social responsibility, etc.),
  - The metrics used to evaluate progress toward the seafood sourcing commitment (e.g., certified, rated, etc.), and
  - The relevant timeframe.
- The seafood sourcing commitment is posted on a company's website or in some other publicly accessible location.

☑ Clear

- The claim is understandable and specific about progress achieved against the commitment.
- The claim includes the time period (e.g., 2024, between 2020 and 2024, etc.) and the scope of seafood (e.g., wild or farmed, fresh case, frozen, or shelf-stable, etc.) covered by the claim.
- If claiming a percentage of seafood meets the commitment, the claim should specify which certifications or ratings the percentage reflects and disclose evidence that supports the percentage.

☑ Accurate, transparent, and documented

- The business making the claim discloses the systems and information that demonstrate the claim's accuracy.

Documentation example

We hold MSC and ASC chain of custody certification, licence agreements, and label user guides for the certified and labeled seafood we sell. [MSC-COC-XXXX, ASC-COC-XXXX]

Through [traceability company], we collect product information from our seafood suppliers to verify that our non-certified wild and farmed fresh seafood comes from production methods and locations that align with Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch® green and yellow ratings.

We publicly disclose the sources of all of our wild and farmed fresh seafood on the Ocean Disclosure Project https://oceandisclosureproject.org/.