

## Solomon Islands' tuna fishery achieves MSC certification

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*In July 2016, the Solomon Islands skipjack and yellowfin purse seine and pole-and-line fishery achieved Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification.*

The certification firm that conducted the assessment (MRAG Americas) found sufficient guarantees that the Solomon Islands (SI) fishery will continue to be managed in a way that ensures healthy stocks, minimises environmental impacts and promotes good management under the existing regulatory structure for the fishery. This structure includes overlapping national and regional regulations, including the Solomon Islands Tuna Management and Development Plan that was established by the SI Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, the Parties to the Nauru Agreement Vessel Day Scheme, and a framework set by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission – all of which encourage sound management of the tuna resources in the country

The certification covers five purse seiners and three pole-and-line vessels owned by National Fisheries Developments LTD (NFD), which fish at Noro within Solomon Islands' archipelagic waters and exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Around 25,000–30,000 tonnes per year of the skipjack and yellowfin tuna that is caught by NFD fleet from free schools, anchored fish aggregating devices (FADs) or pole-and-line, could potentially qualify as MSC-certified if caught under all the certification conditions.

The majority of NFD catch is used by the Noro-based tuna processing facility Soltuna, which is covered by the certification's Chain of Custody.



Early morning on a pole-and-line fishing boat, Solomon Islands (image: ©Francisco Blaha).

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Soltuna sells canned tuna locally and to other Pacific Island markets where its premium product, chilli tuna, is well known and appreciated. It also exports pre-cooked frozen loins of tuna to Europe.

NFD and Soltuna are locally managed and collectively employ over 2000 Solomon Islanders, which together makes them one of the country's largest private sector employers.

The certification is not a one-off event; to maintain it, NFD must continue to adhere to several conditions, such as the inclusion of observers on fishing trips to ensure regulatory

compliance; this is something that NFD has done for years.

NFD must also continue to follow an action plan that implements harvest control rules and adheres to documentation and evaluation standards. Also, NFD and Soltuna must continue to ensure that the certified tuna is kept separate from non-certified product at all stages along the supply chain.

The MSC is one of the most highly regarded ecolabels in the world, hence, fisheries that achieve this certification are in an advantageous position to respond to the growing demand for certified sustainable sources of tuna.

## What is an ecolabel?

Many governments have introduced diverse policies and mechanisms at national, regional and international levels (with different degrees of success and capacity), to ensure the sustainability of fish stocks. In addition to the official measures, the private sector has also introduced market-based initiatives to support the same objective.

Ecolabels are one of these initiatives; for marine products, they are designed to influence the purchasing decisions of consumers and the procurement policies of retailers, in order to reward producers that are involved in responsible fishing practices that lead the way in sustainable use of natural resources.

Ecolabels are seals of approval given to products that are considered to have a lesser impact on the environment than other products in the same market segment.

An ecolabel is a logo or label that is placed directly on a product and provides information that links the product to the production process, thereby instantly influencing the buying decision of the consumer or retailer.

An organisation that is developing and managing an ecolabel – such as MSC – sets a series of standards that must be adhered to by hopeful applicants. If applicants are found to be in compliance with these standards after being assessed by the ecolabelling organisation, they are then certified in due course.

Assessments are done by certifiers and auditors, who must be accredited as being competent to carry out the assessments and certification against the standards that are specific to each ecolabel.

The organisation that delivers the certification also promotes the significance of the label to consumers in order to ensure appreciation and demand for the certified products.



Four examples of ecolabels