

Information

What is environmental labelling?

As ethical and environmental awareness increases, consumers are demanding more information and guidance on the ethical or environmental performance of the products they purchase.

The concept of eco-labelling was globally endorsed in 1992 at a meeting of the United Nations Committee on Environmental Development (UNCED). Governments agreed to encourage expansion of environmental labelling and other environmentally related product information programmes to assist consumers in making informed choices.

Food labelling

With increasing interest in and awareness of the nature and manner in which our food is produced, market-based instruments such as food labels are becoming more widespread. In particular 'Organic' and 'Fair-trade' labels or logos are becoming increasingly more popular, as demand for products that have been produced with regard for environmental and social issues increases.

Organic farming and food

The main principle of organic farming is that it severely restricts the use of artificial chemical fertilisers and pesticides and animals are reared without the routine use of drugs and antibiotics. It should be noted however that for meat classed as 'organic', animals are not necessarily free-ranging.

Organic labelling

All organic food production is governed by strict rules. Food sold as organic must originate from growers, processors and importers who are registered with an approved body and subject to regular inspection. More recently, organic standards have been developed for organically farmed fish and fishmeal.

Organically farmed fish

Organic certification is awarded by ten accrediting bodies and can be recognised by labelling on the food packaging. Two of these bodies (Soil Association and Organic Food Federation) have developed aquaculture standards for organically farmed fish in the UK.

Organic standards address key issues in the farming process and requirements for organic production include

but are not limited to: reduced stocking densities; limitations/restrictions on the use of medicines and treatments; sustainable feed sourcing and no toxic antifoulant use.

For more information go to: <http://www.soilassociation.org> and <http://www.orgfoodfed.com/>

The Advisory Committee on Organic Standards (ACOS) (formerly UK Register of Organic Food Standards)(UKROFS) Prior to the formation of ACOS in 2003, UKROFS, established in 1987, was responsible for ensuring that EC organic standards are properly applied in the UK by the various approved certifying authorities which register organic farms and processors. UKROFS standards are the minimum standards which apply in the UK and are based on an EC Regulation ((EEC) No 2092/91).

Welfare labelling

While the inclusion of welfare standards is widespread in many areas of farming, so far it has been largely overlooked within aquaculture. However, with such a huge growth in fish farming over the past decade (farmed fish now representing the UKs second largest livestock in terms of numbers of animals), the welfare of these animals is of increasing importance. Many people would be surprised at the lack of welfare consideration given to fish, especially as evidence points to the fact that fish feel pain in a similar way to both mammals and birds. Freedom Food (see below) is the only welfare focused label for fish, currently for farmed Atlantic salmon, and requires producers to be approved to Standards developed by the RSPCA.

Fish labelling

With the exception of 'dolphin-friendly' or 'dolphin-safe' labelling of canned tuna (see below), few marine products from wild caught fisheries are labelled to promote environmental responsibility. This is changing, however, as interest in accreditation of fisheries and labelling of fish products as a measure to harness consumer support for conserving fish stocks develops.

A number of organisations have developed labels to promote the quality and/or environmental credentials of wild-caught or farmed fish. These are summarised in the table below.




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Issuing or Accrediting Body	Assured scheme	Logo	Products
Soil Association	Soil Association	 Code: organic certification UK 5	Farmed fish, dairy foods, meat etc.
Organic Food Federation	Organic Food Federation		Farmed fish, meat etc
Food Certification Scotland (FCS)	Tartan Label (Scottish Salmon Producers Org)		Farmed salmon
Freedom Food Ltd	Freedom Food RSPCA monitored		Meat, poultry, dairy eggs & farmed salmon
Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)	Marine Stewardship Council		Marine fish
Earth Island Institute	Dolphin Safe	See EII for details	Canned tuna

Soil Association

The Soil Association (SA), a registered charity, was founded in 1946 and is one of 10 certifying bodies regulated by the Advisory Committee on Organic Standards (formerly UKROFS). It undertakes 80% of all UK organic food certification in the UK and is the most widely recognised organic logo in Britain.

Organic Food Federation

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The Organic Food Federation (OFF) was established in 1986 and is one of the first UK certification bodies to be officially approved. OFF certify in all areas of organic food production and processing.

Tartan Quality Mark

The Tartan Quality Mark (TQM) is a label that assures the retailer and the consumer the salmon is Scottish and production processes have been independently inspected at every stage. Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO) (formerly Scottish Quality Salmon) developed and own the Tartan Quality Mark standard, with certification and auditing being carried out by Food Certification Scotland. Every salmon carrying the TQM can be traced back to source through a unique number printed on the gill tag on whole salmon or labels on pre-packed fresh salmon portions. In addition to participation in the Product Certification Scheme all SSPO members are required to sign up to a Code of Good Practice for Scottish Finfish Aquaculture which sets out the standards required for farmed salmon production, compliance with the code is independently audited on an annual basis.

Freedom Food

The most recent labelling scheme for farmed fish is the RSPCA Welfare Standards for Atlantic salmon launched in October 2002 by Freedom Foods. Freedom Food is an independent farm assurance and food labelling scheme. It was set up by the RSPCA in 1994 in response to consumer demand for higher welfare products and clearer food labelling. The scheme aims to improve animal welfare by working in partnership with the farming industry to raise standards. The Welfare Standards for farming of Atlantic salmon cover all aspects affecting welfare including health, feeding, handling and management, transport and slaughter. Visit www.freedomfood.co.uk for an up-to-date listing of where you can find Freedom Food labelled products.

Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is an independent, global, non-profit organisation with its head office based in London. In a bid to reverse the continued decline in the world's fisheries, the MSC is seeking to harness consumer purchasing power to generate change and promote environmentally responsible stewardship of the world's most important renewable food resource.

Though operating independently since 1999, the MSC was first established by Unilever, the world's largest buyer of frozen seafood, and WWF, the international conservation organisation, in 1997. Following a two year consultation period with various organisations around the world, the MSC developed an international standard for sustainable and well-managed fisheries encompassing the Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing based on the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing. Any fishery around the world is eligible to be assessed against the MSC Standard. An independent certification company, which has been approved by the MSC, undertakes the assessment taking into account the views of stakeholders. If a fishery passes the

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assessment then it becomes certified to the MSC Standard which means that products from that fishery are eligible to bear the MSC eco-label.

For more information and a list of fisheries certified by MSC see www.msc.org

Dolphin Safe

'Dolphin safe' labelling was established in the USA – the largest consumer of tuna in the world – in 1990 with the aim of reducing the number of dolphin deaths in tuna fisheries in the Eastern Tropical Pacific (ETP).

The main problem with by-catch of dolphins was first identified in the ETP in the 1950s, where schools of yellowfin tuna swim in association with dolphin and where one third of the world's harvest of yellowfin tuna, representing a quarter of the world's tuna catch, is taken. Today the number of yellowfin tuna taken in nets set deliberately on dolphins only accounts for a very small proportion (3.3% in 1997) of tuna on the world market.

'Dolphin-safe' labelling was developed to assure consumers that the tuna they purchase is caught using methods that do not involve the deliberate hunting, capture and subsequent death of dolphins.

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Earth Island Institute

The Earth Island Institute (EII) was founded in 1982 in San Francisco, California by veteran environmentalist David Brower (who died in 2000). Since its inception, more than 50 projects have been launched, including its International Marine Mammal Project, to stop the slaughter of dolphins and whales. In 1988, EII was responsible for organising the most successful consumer-led boycott of a product – tuna - resulting in tuna companies adopting 'dolphin-safe' standards in 1990 and the requirement that all US tuna be 'dolphin-safe'. In 2000 the Clinton Administration lifted the US embargo on 'dolphin-deadly' (see below) tuna. However, since such tuna cannot use the 'dolphin-safe' label, to date little has appeared on the US market. If this situation changes EII has vowed to lead another boycott of such products.

The most reputable and stringent standards for 'dolphin-safe' labelling are those developed by the EII. These standards were developed in 1990 by EII and the HJ Heinz Corporation (the largest supplier of canned tuna in the world) and have been adopted by approximately 300 tuna companies, canneries, brokers, import associations, retail stores and restaurant chains around the globe.

EII dolphin-safe criteria prohibits intentional chasing, encircling or netting of marine mammals and use of driftnets and gill-nets. EII dolphin-safe criteria also prohibit any accidental killing or serious injury of dolphins,

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which is rare outside of dolphin net sets, but does sometimes occur. The organisation also works to reduce by-catch of other non-target species (sea turtles, sharks, marine mammals and birds etc.) and juvenile tunas.

All companies, participating in the EII project, representing more than 90% of the world's canned tuna markets and including the US, Canada and Europe, are required to sign an EII policy document pertinent to the section of the industry the company represents (i.e. fishing, processing or distributing) and must comply with the following restrictions and conditions in order for the tuna to be certified as 'dolphin-safe'.

The use of driftnets is prohibited. Intentionally encircling or 'setting' purse-seine nets on marine mammals (known as dolphin-fishing) at sea is prohibited. Shipments of tuna taken by purse-seine nets in the Eastern Tropical Pacific are required to be accompanied by documentation which certifies that an observer was on board the fishing vessel (400 gross tons and above only) during the entire trip and that purse-seine nets were not intentionally deployed during the trip to encircle marine mammals. Companies must permit EII monitors to observe fishing operations or carry out any inspections deemed necessary by EII.

Companies are required to make a sincere effort to reduce by-catch in their fishing operations by utilizing methods such as larger mesh sizes and release of non target species while still alive.

Long-line vessels are required to incorporate effective devices to safely discourage sea birds from approaching baited hooks. Crew members are required to avoid causing death or injury to marine mammals and other non-target species by, but not limited to, deploying nets only after dolphins have been driven away unharmed from the fishing area and/or carefully releasing animals, alive and not injured when possible, which may wander into fishing nets. Crew members are prohibited from shooting, harpooning or in any way intentionally harming marine mammals or using their flesh for bait. Participation in shark-finning operations is prohibited. Companies and their subsidiaries or affiliates must not be involved in whaling operations, dolphin drive fisheries or shark fin fisheries. Earth Island Institute's International Monitoring Program EII's International Monitoring Programme (IMP) was established in 1990 to monitor all aspects of the international tuna industry to ensure that companies are not selling tuna caught by setting nets on dolphins, or in drift nets. Monitors are located in every continent of the world including Europe.

IMP Europe was set up in 1992 in Milan, Italy. Tuna operations and sales are monitored in Portugal (Azores), Spain, France, UK, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Turkey. Companies participating in IMP Europe include major retail chains, brokers and importers and comprise 90% of the European tuna industry. IMP Europe also networks with EII and IMP monitors in Thailand, Mexico, Philippines, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Indonesia, Seychelles, Mauritius, Senegal, the Ivory Coast and the EII HQ in Hawaii and San Francisco, USA to check tuna shipments.

More than 7 million dolphins have drowned in tuna nets in the Eastern Tropical Pacific (ETP) in the past 40 years. Since 1990 the IMP, together with the support and collaboration of the tuna industry, has managed to reduce dolphin mortality in the region by 98%, from approximately 80-100,000 dolphin kills per year in the

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1980's to current levels of 2 – 3,000 animals per year. It is important to note that these are reported kills and it is likely that many more dolphins are dying in net sets than are being reported, because dolphin populations are not recovering.

Dolphin-deadly

Standards for dolphin-safe tuna have also been developed by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATCC) and the Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program (AIDCAP). AIDCAP is a binding international instrument adopted in 1998 by countries (including Mexico, Venezuela, USA, Spain and Ecuador) fishing for tuna in the ETP. Parties to the Agreement are required to adhere to certain management measures to progressively reduce dolphin mortality in their fishing operations. Enforcement of these measures, however, is left entirely to the discretion of the individual national fisheries agencies and violations are often ignored. Although a 'binding' agreement, nations can leave at any time – Mexico is currently threatening to leave the Agreement because they cannot falsely label their tuna as 'dolphin-safe' and sell it in the USA. The IATCC/AIDCAP standards are weaker than those international standards approved by EIU and do not prohibit the intentional chasing, netting or encirclement of dolphins (known as 'dolphin fishing' which is 'dolphin-deadly'). Provided there is no observed mortality or injury to dolphins by onboard IATCC observers, the tuna can be labelled as 'dolphin-safe'. This definition is misleading as many unobserved deaths are caused by physiological stress (some dolphin schools are chased and netted as often as three times a day), injuries incurred during netting with subsequent death after release and death of calves who become separated from their mothers. Furthermore, the IATCC definition allows mixing of 'dolphin-safe' and 'dolphin-deadly' tuna aboard ship!

UK Retailers and dolphin-safe

Although EIU does not yet have a uniform 'dolphin-safe' logo they are in the process of adopting one for introduction to the European market. In the past companies adhering to the EIU Standards produced their own 'dolphin-safe' label. Unfortunately, this system has become confusing (particularly in the US) due to the introduction of the IATCC 'dolphin-deadly' labelling standards. For example, several of the Mexican companies that continue to kill dolphins label all of their tuna as 'Amigo de Delfin' (dolphin-friendly). Although little of the 'dolphin-deadly' tuna is likely to enter the European market it is on sale in Spain and EIU is working to address this situation. To ensure that tuna is in fact 'dolphin-friendly', UK consumers should only buy brands produced by an EIU listed and approved company.

Although some countries such as Mexico, Venezuela and some boats from Panama and Colombia continue to deliberately net dolphins in their tuna operations, the Maldives is an example of a tuna fishing nation which uses traditional pole and line methods to capture tuna. In waters around the Maldives all marine mammals and turtles are protected and net-fishing is banned within 200 miles of their coastline.

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Traditional methods of capturing tuna (pole and line) are not associated with high by-catch levels of marine mammals, turtles and birds. They are also more labour intensive providing employment and income for artisanal fishermen.

For more information see www.dolphinsafetuna.com

Labelling for origin and species

Labelling and product information for fish and its products varies according to the nature of the product – fresh, frozen or tinned – and the retailer or processor. Fresh fish tends to be accompanied by the least information whilst for tinned or processed fish the country of origin is usually stated. Information on the method of capture is generally absent.

From January 2002 labelling for origin and species became mandatory in the EC for fish (whole and fillets only – legislation does not apply to further processed products e.g. fish fingers etc.) which will have to be labelled with the following information:

The commercial name of the species (addition of the scientific name is discretionary).

Production methods i.e. caught at sea or in fresh water, farmed or cultivated.

Area where the fish was caught.

No information relating to the method of capture is as yet required. Marine Conservation Society is working to encourage producers or manufacturers and retailers to provide more comprehensive labelling, including details on area and method of capture, in order that consumers can make more informed choices about the fish they buy.

It should be noted that information on origin on the packaging of processed fish e.g. fillets in breadcrumbs, relates to the origin of the product and not to the origin of the raw material i.e. the fish (unless otherwise stated).

For more information see www.foodstandards.gov.uk

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