



Halibut fishery first in B.C. to achieve sustainability certification

Canada's largest food retailer on mission to source 100% sustainable seafood

by *Sustainable Food News*

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British Columbia's Pacific halibut fishery is the first fishery in the province to earn Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification for being a sustainable and well-managed fishery.

"As we continue to move towards meeting our stated initiative of sourcing all seafood sold in our stores from sustainable sources by the end of 2013, the MSC certification of the BC fishery will help to increase our ability to meet our customers' desire for fresh and frozen halibut, but from a sustainable source," said Paul Uys, vice president at Loblaw Companies Limited, Canada's largest food retailer.

Between mid-March and mid-November each year, this hook-and-line fishery catches Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*), a large flatfish that ranges offshore of California, northward to the Bering Sea and westward into Russian and Japanese waters.

Halibut from the fishery is available fresh or frozen as whole fish, fillets, steaks and boneless roasts; halibut cheeks are also available.

British Columbia halibut is sold to the United States, to Europe and across Canada.

During the assessment - conducted by Scientific Certification Systems, Inc. - the three principles of the MSC standard were evaluated in detail: the status of the fish stock, the impact of the fishery on the marine ecosystem and the management system overseeing the fishery.

Over 150 fisheries are engaged in the MSC program with 56 certified and over 100 under full assessment. Another 40 to 50 fisheries are in confidential pre-assessment.

The combined harvest of these fisheries is near seven million metric tons, MSC said. The harvested volume of certified fisheries is about four million metric tons.

More than 2,500 seafood products, which can be traced back to the certified sustainable fisheries, bear the blue MSC eco-label worldwide.

Since 1923 the halibut fishery has been managed under the International Pacific Halibut Commission, a joint U.S./Canada fisheries management agency, along with the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

The client for this fishery's MSC certificate is the Pacific Halibut Management Association of B.C. (PHMA), a fishermen's association that represents the vast majority of commercial halibut vessel owners in British Columbia.

All catch from commercial license holders in good standing with the PHMA is now MSC-certified.

"We're delighted that the B.C. halibut fishery has proven itself one of the best managed in the world by meeting the MSC standard," said Jake van der Heide, president of the PHMA. "Our fishermen are fully accountable for their catch—both halibut and non-target species—and every vessel is monitored electronically."