

Q&A: Tradex CEO, Robert Reiersen, gives his take on Alaska Salmon producers withdrawing from the MSC Program

What was your reaction when you heard that Alaska Salmon producers were withdrawing from the MSC program?

I was not really surprised with the change. There is a huge cost involved with getting recertified and given the current economy and state of the market, manufacturers cannot afford more wear and tear on their profit margins.

Do you anticipate that other fisheries will follow suit?



I think that once manufacturers believe their fishery is sustainable they will likely opt out of certification. It is in the government's best interest to maintain sustainable fishing practices – and governments are becoming more involved and are adopting stricter regulations.

An example of this would be the regulations on production out of China. For import into more and more countries, you need to know the vessel that caught your fish. This regulation is to combat the black market and it qualifies whether fish is being caught illegally. Illegal fishing is not sustainable and by implementing practices to prevent this, it rules out the need for a certification. I think that as more regulations are adopted, it may lead to more fisheries trusting their government for regulating sustainable fishing practices, rather than relying on third party organizations.

With increasing government regulation – do you think it will impact the need for eco-labels on seafood?

I think there are too many eco-labels today. I think that there are a lot of questions around who qualifies eco-labels, which ones are better and what the differences are between all the standards. What it comes down to for many manufacturers is the cost – if no single eco-label is *better* than the other – than in today's industry, they will adopt the most cost-effective solution. Which is what Alaska Salmon producers have done.

How do you think the decision by Alaska Salmon producers to withdraw from the MSC program will impact demand for Alaska Salmon?

It's tough to say. I think that it might make MSC Salmon out of Russia a priority fishery. This could be especially true for canned processors. Many Tuna and Salmon canners use eco-labels and it may be hard for them to continue with Alaska Salmon – can they promote a certifiable sustainable fishery that is not certified?

I think it will come down to effective marketing by the [Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute](#) (ASMI). ASMI is smart – they've created a great reputation for themselves so far and I think they will continue to do so.



MSC and ASMI have gone back and forth in various articles about whether certification by Global Trust to the FAO Based Responsible Fisheries Management Standards is comparable to the MSC Program. What do you think about this?

I am not an expert on this. Again, I think that there are too many eco-labels and certification boards. This is not only confusing to the end-consumer, but even I find it confusing – and I have been in the industry for 30 years.

I think that the evolution of so many certification boards and eco-labels is detrimental to the sustainable seafood movement. Rather than focusing on the true cause – raising consumer awareness about sustainable seafood and promoting a single, international standard – organizations are competing with each other. This creates confusion.

How do you think retail chains who have adopted sustainable sourcing policies will adapt to Alaska Salmon not being MSC certified?

I think that regionalized marketing programs will really come into play here. Many retail chains have adopted sustainable sourcing policies – but customers in California recognize different eco-labels than customers elsewhere, say in Chicago. I think that rather than requiring all stores to use one eco-label – they will use whatever makes the most sense in that particular region. The problem with this comes back to there being so many eco-labels and understanding the differences between them all.

Tradex is MSC Chain of Custody certified – do you plan to continue with this program?

Yes, for the time being our certification still means something to our customers - as does our affiliation with the [Ocean Wise](#) program of the Vancouver Aquarium.

Have many customers expressed concern with the change?

Not as of yet. We expect people to start asking questions, but that likely won't start until November or December when the implications of the change sink in.

Will you continue to sell Alaska Salmon?

Yes. Alaska as a state is known to be one of the best managed fisheries in the world – and I believe that Alaska Salmon is no exception to this. As I said before, the [ASMI](#) is smart – I think they will do their job at promoting Alaskan Salmon as a sustainable option to buyers and end-consumers.