Certifier's assessment of toothfish fishery remanded

**UNITED KINGDOM**

Third-party certifier Moody Marine Ltd has been asked by an independent adjudicator to reconsider some of its scores in an assessment of the Ross Sea toothfish fishery. It is the first time the adjudicator has remanded the scoring indicators used for two principles to the certifier for revisions and reconsideration in a Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) assessment.

The certifier “failed to give adequate consideration” to stakeholders’ submitted comments during formation of the assessment tree, and the determination was remanded so UK-based Moody Marine could review the relevant Performance Indicators (PIs) on the stock’s alleged sustainability, MSC revealed on Monday.

The decision came after the certifier’s 12-month scientific assessment of the fishery and a five-month review of an objection to its finding that the fishery meets the MSC standard.

Independent Adjudicator Michael Lodge concluded that Moody Marine made a “serious procedural error.” He thus asked the certifier to review certain relevant principles taking into account stakeholder comments and either adjust or justify them.

Last 15 December, the MSC received an objection to Moody Marine’s recommendation from the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC), which called Lodge’s remand a “victory for science and the Antarctic marine environment.” The Coalition disputed that the data on the stock and lack of scientific rigour in the assessment make certification unjustifiable.

Also supporting the objection were the Centre for Biological Diversity and 39 marine scientists under the collective name of Friends of the Ross Sea Ecosystem (FORSE).

“This fishery should never have been allowed to undergo full assessment in the first place -- there are simply too many unknowns about this highly vulnerable stock, which is precisely why the fishery is officially classified as ‘exploratory’ by CCAMLR (the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources) -- the Antarctic body that manages fishing in the Southern Ocean,” ASOC Executive Director James Williams stated. “The adjudicator has agreed with ASOC that Moody cannot justify its scores for a number of crucial indicators.”

If Moody Marine decides to modify the PIs, Lodge said further re-scoring may be required. The certifier also “failed to consider and give due weight to” peer reviewer comments and the effect of some referenced reports while scoring of other PIs, and will thus have to re-evaluate its scoring on six assessed PIs.

Lodge challenged the scores under 14 of the performance indicators on the fishery’s health, among other matters. He dismissed eight of these objections and remanded six to Moody Marine for more consideration, and rejected an objection against the definition of the “Unit of Certification,” which he called “properly established in accordance with the MSC’s Fishery Certification Methodology.”

Per the MSC Objections Procedure, Moody Marine has 10 days to issue a “reasoned response” regarding the remand but can apply to Lodge for an extension.

The objections process will be finalised once Lodge considers the response, any associated submissions and the outstanding components of the objection concerning certain scorings.

The Ross Sea toothfish fishery has a long way to go before it will be certified by the MSC.

(Photo: APMA)
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