



Research Brief

A Gold Standard for Sustainable Aquaculture

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You're peering into the seafood case in your local supermarket, examining a label. The salmon is "organic" and farm-raised. Next to it is "wild-caught" salmon. Next is shrimp that's been raised "sustainably."

You want to do the right thing, choosing seafood that is healthy for your family and also protective of the environment. At the same time, you wonder whether these labels have meaning or whether they are just marketing ploys?

In partnership with the Ocean Foundation, ELI created a gold standard for the design of sustainable aquaculture ecolabels that is already being used to test the credibility of new claims. When, for example, Whole Foods issued its purchasing standards for farmed salmon, other finfish, and shrimp this summer, we responded by evaluating and constructively challenging its approach.

Ecolabeling, if designed and deployed in a credible, effective manner, can help all of us exert pressure as consumers to stem the serious impacts to the ocean — pollution, destruction of habitat, damage to ecosystems — as well as the

harm to human health associated with this exploding industry.

Our aquaculture initiative is only a small part of a larger program at ELI created in 2006, under the direction of Dr. Kathryn Mengerink, to foster sustainable fisheries and effective management of industrial oceans. A lawyer and marine biologist, Kathryn led us in creating the Ocean Program to inform and encourage economically viable and sustainable management of the oceans.

Poor forms of aquaculture are far from the only threat. Pollutants and nutrients from land-based activities create enormous impacts on the biological diversity of the ocean. Overfishing is depleting the resource and creating dangerous imbalances. Shipping, expanding exploitation of oil, gas, and mineral resources, and the development of alternative energy sources add additional pressure.

ELI's ocean team is working to educate policymakers about the need for integrated management and appropriate governance mechanisms capable of overseeing this enormous and still-productive

resource. "If we are to maintain the health and resiliency of our ocean and coasts, we should manage our activities in a comprehensive way," says Kathryn. "Impacts do not occur in isolation, yet we approach ocean and coastal resources as if they do."

The Program is identifying new models for managing the ocean environment and building the capacity of those charged with portions of its governance. Our projects range from an assessment of the potential to develop new integrated management approaches in the Arctic region to an evaluation of the effectiveness of ongoing federal enforcement efforts in fisheries. We are assisting Virginia in evaluating offshore energy uses, examining the Commonwealth's governance framework and helping the state position itself institutionally and legally to effectively address future issues related to coastal energy.

And we are reaching out to important stakeholders on critical ocean issues. This year our seminar series "Managing Industrialized Oceans," supported by the Naomi and Nehemiah Cohen Foundation, took

up the issue of alternative offshore energy development just as the Minerals Management Service issued its 450-page proposed rule. In November, we presented a high-level panel on offshore oil and gas development that analyzed and debated the merits of proposed comprehensive energy legislation. In 2009 we will bring this exciting series to Capitol Hill and address issues that will inform the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and reauthorization of the Coastal Zone Management Act.

Kathryn and her team are continuing to engage the challenges of ocean energy production, climate change, and food security. We will continue to advocate for strong compliance and enforcement mechanisms while taking into account the needs of diverse members of the ocean community.

Again Kathryn keeps our eye on the ball, focusing our priorities: "The oceans make up 99 percent of the biologically available living space on earth. They are home to incredibly diverse organisms and ecosystems, from charismatic megafauna like dolphins and orcas that cruise the ocean surface to strange and bewildering lantern fish that dangle glow-in-the-dark organs as bait in front of their mouths in the dark depths of the sea. We need to preserve this biodiversity so that generations to come can enjoy the same spectacular ocean and all of its creatures."