

Seafood Coalition

"Promoting science-based marine resource conservation and management"

At-sea Processors Association, BASE New England, Blue Water Fishermen's Association, Coalition of Coastal Fisheries, Columbia River Crab Fisherman's Association, Coos Bay Trawlers, Directed Sustainable Fisheries, Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association, Garden State Seafood Association, Long Island Commercial Fishing Association, Midwater Trawlers Cooperative, Monkfish Defense Fund, North Carolina Fisheries Association, Northeast Seafood Coalition, Organized Fishermen of Florida, Pacific Seafood Processors Association, South Carolina Seafood Alliance, Southeastern Fisheries Association, Southern Off-shore Fishermen's Association, West Coast Seafood Processors Association, United Catcher Boats, Western Fishboat Owners Association

Seafood Coalition asks the National Park Service what happened to FishWatch?

July 12, 2013

Last month the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Park Service (NPS) announced that it was now requiring that vendors at all of the food service establishments in its parks, monuments, etc. serve seafood that is certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council or identified as "green" or "yellow" in reports prepared by the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

The members of the Seafood Coalition applaud the decision of the NPS to require that only sustainable seafood products be served by the vendors it does business with. By definition any permitted commercial fishery in U.S. waters must be sustainable and would therefore qualify for inclusion on NPS menus. We don't understand how the leadership at the NPS in making this decision completely ignored the existence of FishWatch, an existing program of the National Marine Fisheries Service that has been rating U.S. fisheries for several years, while endorsing two private enterprises, one of which is a voluntary eco-labeling program in which many fisheries choose not to participate and the other rates fisheries arbitrarily and randomly based on its own internally developed standard.

Why would the NPS limit its vendors to those whose products are deemed sustainable by outside interests while ignoring Fishwatch, an existing and proven program? To do so is particularly ill conceived considering that the FishWatch program was created by and is administratively part of the agency that manages our nation's fisheries – with the primary management goal of ensuring the sustainability of the fisheries it manages. Beyond that, the agency employs world-class scientists and managers who can provide unbiased reviews of non-U.S. sourced fish products that might be offered by NPS vendors.

But our concerns extend beyond the inherent waste resulting from passing over an existing federal program fully capable of and in fact already providing sustainability certification. As a federal agency, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, the National Marine Fisheries Service can and will be held to a level of transparency and accountability that is not and will not be possible with similar "private" enterprises. Considering the level to which various ENGOs and the foundations that support them have become adept at swaying public policy in support of their particular agendas, the domestic seafood industry needs the protection that such transparency and accountability will provide.

We don't oppose the NPS, or any federal agency, demanding that any vendors that they deal with provide proof of the sustainability of their products, and we trust that this admirable action on the part of the NPS leadership will be extended to all of its vendors for all of their products (including meats, poultry, dairy, vegetable, and paper or plastic items). However, in the interests of equity and objectivity, a federal sustainability certification program should be allowed as one of the acceptable paths for providing products to federal agencies.

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The Seafood Coalition is composed of organizations and companies that represent or participate in commercial fishing and seafood processing as well as organizations that include many of the major suppliers of seafood directly to the American consumer. The Coalition was formed in 2001 to provide a strong, coordinated voice for the seafood industry in promoting science-based marine resource conservation and management in the U.S. and in international arenas. The Coalition is a forum for affected commercial fishing and fish processing interests and seafood suppliers to develop and support policies that improve federal marine resource conservation and management practices. In addition, the Coalition's goal is to foster sustainable development and to strengthen fishing communities along with enhancing the supply of healthy and nutritious seafood for consumers. The membership of the Seafood Coalition represents commercial fishing and fish processing interests in every coastal state from Maine to Texas, from California to Alaska, and in Hawaii as well as seafood suppliers in most interior states. In 2008, U.S. commercial fishermen landed over 8 billion lbs. of seafood. Seafood Coalition members account for the harvesting and/or processing of over three-quarters of those landings.