

# West Coast Groundfish Get Certified as Sustainable

JEFF BARNARD, Associated Press

More than a decade after overfishing led to the collapse of the one of the West Coast's most valuable fisheries, it has been certified as sustainable.

The international Marine Stewardship Council announced Tuesday in Portland, Oregon, it has certified that 13 bottom-dwelling species collectively known as groundfish are harvested in an environmentally sustainable way. That applies to species sold as red snapper, Dover sole and lingcod.

In a 400-page report, the council said federal regulations are in place to protect habitat, hold fishermen responsible and set harvest quotas based on scientific data.

The action led the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watchlist to move six West Coast rockfish species from "Avoid" status, to "Good Alternative."

"A proud day for fishermen in Oregon, Washington and California," Dan Averill, fishery outreach manager for the council, said in a statement. "MSC certification confirms the rigorous management of the fishery and assures a steady and stable supply of seafood long into the future."

It was not always so.

After the United States established a 200-mile exclusive fishing zone in 1977, the groundfish fleet grew rapidly, helped by the government. Warnings from scientists that the fishery was being depleted went unheeded until 2000, when the 20-year catch average dropped from 74,000 tons to 36,000 tons and the federal government declared an economic disaster.

The Government Accountability Office, the research arm of Congress, found that federal assessments of fish populations used to set groundfish seasons were based on questionable research.

Since then, Congress required that harvest quotas be based on scientific assessments of fish populations, and fishermen organized a buyback program that cut the fleet by one-third.

Pressed by environmental groups, federal fisheries managers put areas of the ocean off-limits to fishing to protect habitat. Fishermen were given individual shares of the overall harvest, and observers were put on board every vessel to be sure they do not exceed limits for sensitive species that cannot be landed, known as bycatch.

"It may come as a surprise for some to learn that commercial fishermen and

## **West Coast Groundfish Get Certified as Sustainable**

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

---

environmentalists work closely together, but we've been doing that successfully here for almost 10 years, and the result is a win-win for fish and fishermen," said Shems Jud of the Environmental Defense Fund.

Oregon State University marine ecologist Jane Lubchenco, who oversaw many of the changes as chief of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said the certification was recognition of substantial changes.

"This West Coast groundfish fishery has really turned around and is on the path to sustainability and profitability," she said.

Warrenton, Oregon, fisherman Paul Kajala said it has been a tough road that he hoped would produce better fish prices.

"We've been living this sustainability a long time, and it's nice to get credit for it," said Kajala, skipper of the 55-foot stern trawler Cape Windy. "We do think our fish is a better choice in the seafood market than a lot of others next to it."

The 100 boats in the groundfish fleet landed \$21 million worth of fish in Oregon, Washington and California in 2012, the council said.

**Source URL (retrieved on 04/25/2015 - 9:21am):**

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2014/06/west-coast-groundfish-get-certified-sustainable>