

Ekofish Group North Sea twin rigged otter trawl plaice Achieves MSC Certification

Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification of the Ekofish Group North Sea twin rigged otter trawl plaice fishery was announced on 4th June 2009. The Group is the first in Europe to obtain independent certification for plaice as a well managed and sustainable fishery.

The Ekofish group chose Moody Marine as their independent accredited assessors, working closely with them to provide the detailed technical information necessary. This enabled Moody's expert team to evaluate the overall health of the fish stocks, the fishery's impact on the ecosystem, and the efficiency of the management system.

"We are pleased to verify that this fishery, which takes place in the central North Sea between Denmark and Scotland using a bottom trawl, has met the exacting standards of the MSC," says Dr Andy Hough, Director of Moody Marine. "Certification is valid for a period of five years, but we will carry out surveillance audits of the fishery throughout that time," he added.

The plaice fishery operates between April and December and has a quota of 2,500MT for 2009. Landed into the Netherlands, it is sold as whole fresh fish and also processed to provide fresh and frozen filets for the domestic and wider European markets.

Louwe de Boer of Ekofish explained that certification was an important step for his company and that close liaison was maintained with WWF Netherlands during the assessment process. "We operate a small fishery that operates in a tight geographic area, closes during the spawning season, uses large mesh gear, and an innovative trawl design. This means that there is a very low incidence of by-catch of undersized fish or non target species such as cod," he says.

The benefits of MSC are already apparent to the company. "There is currently demand for a greater volume of MSC certified product than we can land, and with interest growing fast in sustainability, we believe there will be an excellent market for our plaice in the future," stated Louwe.

Moody Marine recently augmented its team of experts with 16 new fishery auditors and has a global network of offices. Their appointment means that Moody now has reserve capacity and is more than capable of meeting the growing demand for certification audits.