

Rep. Young Brings Up Sustainable Fishing Certification at Hearing

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Alaska seafood marketers and other state officials met a week ago with executives from Walmart corporation about its policy of not sourcing Alaska salmon because it does not have a Marine Stewardship Council endorsement. Alaska Congressman Don Young brought up certification schemes such as MSC's, during a Natural Resources Committee hearing this week.

Young questioned fishing industry officials and scientists about the certifications. He asked Rod Moore, the executive director of the West Coast Seafood Processors Association about his experience with the MSC process.

"The decision by somebody to go with Marine Stewardship Council certification, I'll say MSC for short, is really an economic one. For example, we find that to be able to sell seafood to Europe, you got to have MSC certification," Moore said. "That is changing now, but for many years that was what had to be done. It was sort of, in some ways, an economic blackmail. You had to do it."

Young agreed it was blackmail and asked Moore why the North Pacific Fishery Management Council couldn't certify the fisheries.

"They're saying our salmon is unsustainable. Now that's Beeeeee-elbows," Young said. "That's blackmail. Now why don't we have our own?"

"Mr. Chairman, Mr. Young, there's some of us in the industry who have been exploring with NMFS the concept of defining sustainability in the Magnusen-Stevens Act," Moore said.

Moore went on to explain that if an American vessel was fishing legally in accordance with federal or State of Alaska fishery management plans, then by definition, they should be considered sustainable.

"I spend most of the summer in Bristol Bay and let me tell you, I've heard a lot about it this year," said Ray Hilborn, professor of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences at the University of Washington. "What's really happening is MSC has more or less established a monopoly in the European markets, as Rod said, and in fact through some NGOs in the U.S. And the Alaska salmon industry is basically trying to break that monopoly by getting other certification schemes accepted at the same standard as the MSC. It's really a political battle — it's not really a scientific or sustainability battle."

Young suggested that as the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act continues, Congress should examine the issue of sustainability certifications and establish a uniform definition based on science.

