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Atlantic Menhaden achieves MSC certification

Washington, D.C. – Atlantic Menhaden caught by Omega Protein have been granted certification today against the Marine Stewardship Council standard for sustainable fishing. The certification comes following more than two years of detailed independent review by conformity assessment body, SAI Global, and extensive stakeholder input.

Atlantic menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*) are small, oily fish that are caught commercially in a reduction fishery and a bait fishery. They appear in estuaries and coastal waters from northern Florida to Nova Scotia. While considered unfit for direct human consumption, menhaden caught via the modern purse seine reduction method are used in fishmeal and fish oil for human and animal nutrition, due to their high natural concentration of healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Menhaden are also valuable as bait for fishermen targeting other commercially valuable species, such as lobster. The Gulf of Mexico menhaden fishery is currently in assessment with Omega Protein and Daybrook Fisheries jointly requesting the assessment.

“Congratulations to Omega Protein on achieving certification,” **said Brian Perkins, Americas Director for the Marine Stewardship Council.** “The certification signifies a dedication not only to sustainable menhaden fishing and to safeguarding marine ecosystems, but supporting the hardworking fishermen, processors, and everyone else who depend on the fishery for their livelihoods.”

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Menhaden is “one of the most selective, and effective fisheries”[i] with minimal bycatch. Between the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, the U.S. menhaden fishery is the second largest in the country by weight, trailing only Alaska pollock. Most recent stock assessments of Atlantic menhaden confirm that neither species is undergoing overfishing or being overfished[ii].

“Omega Protein is appreciative that the sustainable Atlantic menhaden fishery has now been certified against the most rigorous sustainability standards of the Marine Stewardship Council,” **said Omega Protein President and CEO Bret Scholtes.** He continued, “The menhaden fishery has continuously operated in Reedville, Virginia since the 1870s and the population of menhaden remains robust and abundant. When buyers purchase seafood products with the blue MSC label, they can be sure they come from a sustainable fishery that has met the MSC Fisheries standard. This certification will differentiate our fishmeal and oil products from competitors on the global market.”

Stakeholder input is a critical part of the MSC fisheries assessment process and includes an objections process which allows for detailed scrutiny and transparency in the application of the MSC Fisheries Standard. Assessment includes a formal objections procedure to provide an orderly, structured process by which concerns about certification decisions can be lodged, reviewed and resolved, fairly and transparently by an independent adjudicator. The Atlantic Menhaden fishery assessment included several objections from registered stakeholders and involved the oversight of an independent adjudicator to ultimately determine if the determination by SAI Global should be upheld.

The MSC standard was established in 1997 and is the only wild caught seafood standard and ecolabeling program to meet United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) guidelines as well as meet Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI) benchmarking criteria. The standards used to evaluate fisheries have been developed in deliberation with scientists, industry, and conservation groups, and reflect the most up-to-date fisheries science and management practices.

The MSC fishery standards are based on three core principles that every fishery must meet:

1. Sustainable fish stocks: Fishing activity must be at a level which ensures it can continue indefinitely.
2. Minimizing environmental impact: Fishing operations must be managed to maintain the structure, productivity, function, and diversity of the ecosystem.
3. Effective Management: The fishery must comply with relevant laws and have a management system that is responsive to changing circumstances.

The Atlantic menhaden fishery is certified through 2024 and can enter reassessment after the five year period. During the five year certification, the fishery must undergo annual surveillance audits in order to ensure their ongoing compliance with the MSC's requirements.

[i] <https://chesapeakebay.noaa.gov/fish-facts/menhaden>

[ii] http://www.asmfrc.org/uploads/file/55089931S40_AtlMenhadenSAR_CombinedFINAL_1.15.2015-reduced.pdf

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