



Is the sustainable production and consumption (SDG12) of tuna possible? “Absolutely yes”, affirms Rupert Howes, Chief Executive of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), in an interview with UNRIC on the occasion of the first UN observance of [World Tuna Day](#) .

“Overfishing must be stopped. We know what the problems are and how to fix them. SDG 14 gives us a framework and a path forward to deliver sustainable and resilient fisheries and to secure seafood supplies for this and future generations. All stakeholders need to recognize the urgency of the SDGs and to work in partnership to deliver what is required to make this vision a reality.”

Tuna are incredible fish. They can weigh up to 700 kilos and can accelerate faster than a sports car, but above all they are a significant source of nutritious food, economic development, employment, government revenue, livelihoods, culture and recreation to billions of people in both developed and developing countries.

At present more than 80 States have tuna fisheries and thousands of tuna fishing vessels operate in all the oceans. The global production has increased continuously from less than 0.6 million tonnes in 1950 to above 6 million tonnes in 2010, according to the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#)

. On World Tuna Day, The United Nations wants to highlight the value of tuna and the importance of sustainably managed fish stocks in achieving [the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), but also to raise awareness of the threats tuna populations are facing.

MSC is the world's most widely known and used wild-capture seafood certification and eco-labelling programme and [is consistent with](#) the FAO's standards for responsible fishing. The certification means that the fishing activity is at a level which ensures it can continue indefinitely and which maintains the structure, productivity, function and diversity of the supporting marine ecosystem.



Demand for seafood is increasing and will continue to do so as the global population expands to perhaps 9 billion or more by the middle of this century. "It is therefore imperative to manage these valuable resources sustainably", explains MSC's CEO Rupert Howes. 39% of tuna stocks are overfished ([Report](#)) and the pressure on all stocks will only increase. However, leaders within the tuna industry have already demonstrated that it is possible to fish tuna sustainably.

Nine tuna fisheries – fishing skipjack, albacore and yellowfin – are certified, landing nearly 1 million metric tonnes of tuna. Many of these fisheries, like the PNA skipjack and Maldivian skipjack fisheries, are in the global south.

He also acknowledges the role of the UN in this process: “I am very excited about the potential of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and SDG14 in particular to galvanize support and action to accelerate the transformation we need. This will require action by governments, regulators, the industry and civil society – there is no one solution or silver bullet to address the global challenge of over fishing. Our planet is blue. Seafood provides a significant proportion of animal protein needs for billions of people and for some in the developing world, it can provide the only source of animal protein. If stocks collapse, these protein needs will have to be met from terrestrial farming systems which will put even more pressure on our planet.”

In fact, the MSC itself was founded 20 years ago, as a consequence of the Grand Banks cod fishery collapse. At the time, the Northern cod biomass fell to 1% of its earlier level. The collapse was above all due to massive overfishing. “It was a wake-up call for the industry”, Howes recalls.

What you can do:

Rupert Howes sees a key role for seafood buyers (consumers and restaurants) in transforming the fisheries sector: “Market based programmes are undoubtedly an important part of the solution. Certification allows already well managed fisheries to demonstrate their good governance of our ocean resources to the market. Critically, as demand for certified and sustainable seafood choices increases, other fisheries that need to make improvements are incentivized to do so to meet this market demand – this is good for the environment, for fishers and consumers. We encourage seafood buyers to ask where their seafood comes from. If you see the blue MSC label, you have assurance that it has been independently certified as sustainable and traceable.”

- Did you know about the [UN Ocean Conference](#) from 5 to 9 June?
- Get to know your seafood with this [sustainable seafood guide](#) !

