

Gulf of Maine Research Institute Branding Program for Responsibly Harvested Seafood from the Gulf of Maine Region

The Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested[®] brand signifies the following:

- *The seafood product was harvested or grown and processed in the Gulf of Maine region and meets criteria regarding sustainability and traceability;*
- *Supply chain participants have made a commitment to the continuous improvement to the Gulf of Maine seafood industry.*

I. Purpose of the Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested[®] Branding Program

This program intends to motivate improvements in the sustainability of our seafood industry by capitalizing on consumer preference for sustainable seafood products from a known origin. For supply chain partners that are part of the Gulf of Maine seafood industry and commit to improving the sustainability of their businesses, participation in this program will enable them to differentiate their products to consumers through the use of the *Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested[®] Mark* (“Mark”).

Market research has demonstrated that consumers are strongly motivated to buy products that have a known origin, particularly if they are local. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, seafood is not differentiated in the marketplace based on its place of origin. Similarly, consumers want to support sustainable seafood options, but are confused by mixed messages around what sustainability is, and they lack access to information regarding their seafood options.

Seafood products that meet criteria outlined in this standard will be able to use the Mark on their packaging, thus enabling consumers to easily identify and support seafood that was harvested from the Gulf of Maine region under specified sustainability criteria (outlined in section IV).

The purpose of this program is to harness demand for these seafood products in order to create an ecologically and economically stronger Gulf of Maine seafood industry. Simultaneously, through increased consumer demand, supply chain partners will recognize the business benefits of providing responsibly harvested seafood, thus motivating further improvement in sustainability.

Sustainability is a complex concept in which the environment and people coexist harmoniously. There are a number of factors that contribute to the overall sustainability of seafood, including fuel consumption, habitat impacts of harvesting, bycatch rates, and waste reduction. This program offers a tool to engage the seafood industry in a process of working toward the ultimate goal of achieving true sustainability by recognizing products that are responsibly harvested, and producers that are investing in continuous improvement.

II. Development of this Standard

This standard has been developed under a set of principles to allow for broad accessibility to the program while ensuring the program's effectiveness in improving the sustainability and traceability of seafood from the Gulf of Maine. The principles that have guided the development of the standard follow:

- The program shall reward and enable efforts to improve traceability and sustainability of harvesting, procuring, or selling seafood.
- The standard shall be applicable to all seafood products, from seaweed to salmon, both wild and farmed.
- The program shall be accessible and relevant to all supply chain participants, including seafood harvesters and growers, distributors, processors, and retailers.
- Participation in this program shall require reasonable, not overwhelming or cost-prohibitive, effort.

The development of this program drew upon existing rigorous standards and efforts developed over the past several years, including the following¹:

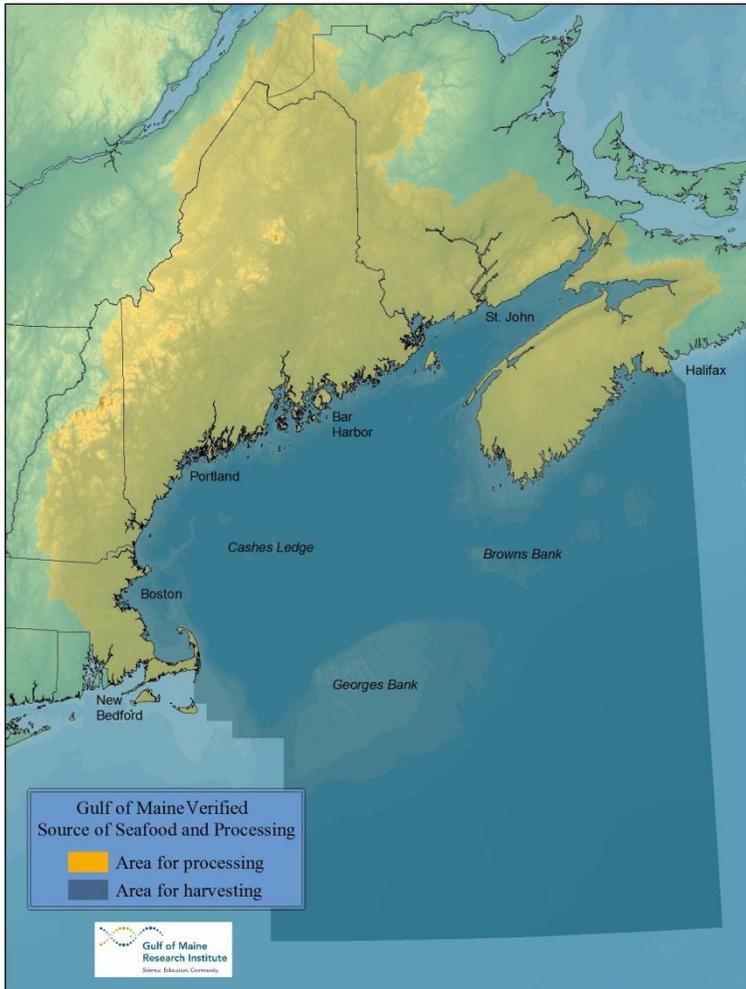
- The United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) *Guidelines for the Ecolabeling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries*
- *FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries*
- The Marine Stewardship Council's (MSC) *Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing, Fisheries Certification Methodology*
- *MSC Chain of Custody Standard*
- World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) *Aquaculture Dialogues*
- Global Aquaculture Alliance's (GAA) *Best Aquaculture Practices Standards*
- Maine Aquaculture Association's (MAA) *Guiding Principles for Responsible Aquaculture in Maine*
- *MAA Code of Practice.*

Development of the standard engaged representatives of fisheries management authorities, the fishing industry, the scientific community, environmental interest groups, fish processors, dealers, and retailers.

III. The Gulf of Maine Region

This program wishes to improve the economic and ecologic viability of the seafood industry in Gulf of Maine region. This place-based program accepts seafood that is harvested from the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, 5Y, 5Ze, and 4X reporting areas and processed within the Gulf of Maine watershed, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick as outlined in the chart below. In cases where a stock's reporting area does not correspond exactly to those mentioned here, GMRI will indicate the appropriate alternate reporting areas in the species reports.

¹ This standard reflects sustainability criteria that were developed to be consistent with these existing resources. Participants in this program are encouraged to work toward the criteria outlined in these documents.



IV. The Standard for Responsibly Harvested Seafood

Products bearing the Mark must meet the following requirements around responsible harvest and traceability.

For *wild* seafood to qualify for participation in the program, the seafood must have been harvested at a level that enables utilization while maintaining its availability for present and future generations. This includes the following:

- Fisheries are managed by competent authorities and have management plans in place that incorporate a science-based approach to ensure sustainability.
- If stock sizes are below management target levels, whether due to natural or man-made causes, management plans are established that enable rebuilding within a specified timeframe.
- Sufficient data exists to determine harvest levels.
- Monitoring and compliance measures are in place to ensure acceptable harvest levels.

- Enforcement exists to ensure that harvesters follow regulations, and to prevent illegal practices and unreported harvest.

For *farmed* shellfish or sea vegetables to qualify for participation in the program, aquaculture operations must have acceptable oversight and limited and reversible environmental impacts. More specifically:

- Aquaculture operations are regulated by competent authorities that have established and acceptable environmental monitoring regulations in place.
- Regulatory oversight ensures that aquaculture operations have limited and reversible impacts on the surrounding habitat, species, and ecosystem structure and function.
- Sufficient data exists to demonstrate that aquaculture operations have limited and reversible environmental impacts.
- Aquaculture regulations include appropriate compliance and enforcement standards.

GMRI shall identify wild and farmed seafood products from the Gulf of Maine region that qualify under this requirement, and maintain a list for reference. To verify a species, GMRI staff develop assessment reports with input and review from GMRI scientists and expert staff. An external review panel of scientists from outside of GMRI contributes to the process by reviewing the verification assessments. Three external scientists provide expert opinion on the accuracy and completeness of every report. The ultimate decision regarding verification of a species rests with GMRI.

GMRI will review fisheries and farms against these criteria on an ongoing basis and as time and resources allow. All wild and farmed products available from the Gulf of Maine will not be automatically assessed. In such cases, GMRI may entertain requests for special assessments.

In addition to the seafood product meeting the criteria outlined above, participants in this cooperative branding program must demonstrate the following:

- The seafood product meets all relevant government regulations regarding its production.
- The seafood product is traceable from the management area or farm in which it was harvested to the point of sale.
- The seafood product was harvested or grown, and processed within the region, which is defined above.

Automatic Qualifiers: There is a broad global effort to improve upon the sustainability of the world's fisheries that involves many organizations and stakeholders. GMRI wishes to acknowledge these efforts and to avoid duplication of effort as much as possible. To that end, fisheries and aquaculture farms in the Gulf of Maine region that have achieved a certification that has been benchmarked by the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI), such as Aquaculture Stewardship Council, Best Aquaculture Practices, or Marine Stewardship Council, will automatically be deemed by GMRI to satisfy the responsible harvest requirements outlined in this section IV.

V. Continuous Improvement

This program intends to reward and enable efforts to improve, or move along a continuum toward, the quality, traceability, and environmental impact of harvesting, growing, procuring, or selling seafood. To that end, the program will encourage participants to identify and implement measurable and achievable improvements to the sustainability of their businesses and the seafood they source. Efforts will be recognized on the web site and in other media as opportunities arise. Annually, participants who have made particularly effective contributions to sustainability will receive special recognition.

GMRI may be available to help participants identify opportunities for continuous improvement. Additionally, GMRI suggests that industry partners review the Common Vision, developed by the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions (CASS; www.solutionsforseafood.org), a partnership of more than a dozen Canadian and U.S. organizations.

The Common Vision describes “a future where environmentally sustainable fisheries and aquaculture (or fish farming) thrive along with the communities that depend on them.” Like CASS, GMRI envisions “diverse and productive fisheries and aquaculture systems that deliver seafood on a continuing basis as well as vital environmental benefits necessary for the well-being of all the world’s inhabitants.”

The Common Vision offers some suggested ways in which seafood industry members can contribute to improving seafood sustainability:

- ***Make a Commitment:*** Commit to developing and implementing a comprehensive, corporate policy on sustainable seafood.
- ***Collect Data:*** Assess and monitor the environmental sustainability of your seafood products.
- ***Buy Environmentally Responsible Seafood:*** Support environmentally responsible seafood choices through purchasing decisions.
- ***Be Transparent:*** Make information regarding your seafood products publicly available.
- ***Educate:*** Educate your customers, suppliers, employees and other key stakeholders about environmentally responsible seafood.
- ***Support Reform:*** Engage in and support policy and management reform that leads to positive environmental outcomes in fisheries and aquaculture management.

There are many ways in which seafood supply chain participants can contribute to the sustainability of seafood. Following are some additional opportunities for participants to contribute to continuous improvement:

- Design a flexible seafood procurement system that recognizes seasonal variations in seafood availability; actively promote products that are in season.
- Encourage or require supply chain partners to contribute toward full traceability by maintaining data from the point of harvest to the point of sale.
- Participate in collaborative research.
- Invest in gear or technology or alter behavior in order to decrease the harvest’s impact on the environment, including reducing bycatch, reducing impacts to ocean habitats, and decreasing fuel consumption.

- Participate in mitigation efforts, such as derelict gear clean ups.
- Take measures to improve the quality of seafood harvested, including boxing and bleeding at sea, and making shorter tows and trips.

This program will strongly encourage continuous improvement efforts that ultimately lead to third party certification of the fishery and chain-of-custody system by entities such as the Marine Stewardship Council and the Aquaculture Certification Council.

VI. Application Process

Any supply chain partner that wishes to participate in this program must first submit an application that describes the product to be considered. The application will include details of the seafood product, proof of traceability, and a description of how the applicant plans to contribute toward seafood sustainability in the coming year.

The Gulf of Maine Research Institute Sustainable Seafood staff will review the information to ensure that the basic requirements have been met. If so, a meeting will be scheduled between the applicant and GMRI to review the applicant's commitment and draft a performance agreement that describes the outcomes toward sustainability to be achieved in the coming year.

VII. Program Participant Annual Review and Traceability Audit

Supply chain partners who wish to maintain participation in the program must agree to an annual review and traceability audit.²

For the annual review, the supply chain partner must submit to GMRI a report detailing how it has achieved its promised improvement toward sustainability. To the greatest extent possible, the report should include quantifiable examples of improvements toward sustainability (e.g., a completed corporate policy regarding seafood sustainability, demonstrated consumer education initiatives, etc.). Further, the report shall include the goals for the following year.

Recognizing that the integrity of this program relies on an uncompromised traceability system, supply chain partners must further arrange, and pay for, an audit of the traceability of their products conducted by a third party acceptable to GMRI. The results of this audit shall be made available to GMRI.

Continued use of the Mark will be contingent on both the annual review and the traceability audit.

VIII. Use of Mark

Once a partner has completed the application and review processes outlined in sections VII and VIII, GMRI will issue a licensing agreement that offers permission to use the Mark developed by this program.

² A supply chain partner that is a sea vegetable farm harvesting and distributing their own product is exempt from submitting an independent third party traceability audit.

IX. Charitable Contributions

Annual charitable contributions from Program Participants will cover expenses associated with implementing this program, in addition to supporting other GMRI seafood programs and projects. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Conducting evaluations of various fisheries and farmed seafood against the standard.
- Brand development, copyrighting, and protection.
- Promotion of the *Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested*[®] program.
- Outreach to industry partners to garner participation and develop strategies that improve seafood sustainability.

Ultimately, charitable contributions may benefit special projects, such as:

- Research on improving the sustainable harvest or farming of seafood.
- Investments in environmentally friendly or energy-reducing equipment.
- Training for harvesters and supply chain members on sustainable practices.

X. Review of the Standard

GMRI will engage the community in reviews of this standard. Reviews will strive to include representatives of fisheries management authorities, the fishing industry, the scientific community, environmental interest groups, fish processors and retailers, as well as consumer associations.

The GMRI Sustainable Seafood Program Manager will provide a point of contact for program-related inquiries and comments. These communications will be logged and will inform the annual review of the standard.

At the end of the second year of the program's implementation, GMRI will seek a third party to conduct a critical review of the program.

Changes proposed as a result of this annual review will be published for comment for a period of one month, after which the revised standard will be published.

If there are changes to this standard, existing program participants will have 12 months to meet the changes.