

The MSC/ WWF-SASSI Sustainable Seafood Symposium

An Overview:

2 March 2016

Welbeloond Boutique Wine Farm

The annual MSC/ WWF-SASSI Sustainable Seafood Symposium was held on Wednesday 2 March at Welbeloond Boutique Wine Farm in Durbanville – this was the fourth time the event was held at this venue. Various stakeholders from all aspects of the seafood supply chain were invited and over 70 people were in attendance, including seafood market leaders, government representatives, media contacts, fishing industry representatives, academics and marine scientists.

The event was opened by the Head of the MSC Developing World Programme, Dr Oluyemisi Oloruntuyi, who provided a brief overview of how seafood market incentives have ultimately led to positive changes in certain fisheries. The first session of the event was then chaired by Michael Marriott, the MSC South Africa Manager.

Jess Schulschenk, a Director at the Sustainability Institute, then gave the key note address, which focussed on the “Future Fit idea” – a concept that highlights the need for environmental sustainability and social responsibility in businesses as a necessary consideration to create the stability required for business to flourish. She also introduced the idea of “co-opetition”, which is defined as “*collaboration between business competitors, in the hope of achieving mutually beneficial results*”.

The WWF-SA Seafood Market Transformation team collaboratively presented highlights from the programme over the previous year, including the 2015 #SASSIstories consumer campaign – key outcomes and lessons learned (presented by Pavs Pillay, the WWF-SASSI Programme Manager), the launch of “Waves of Change” report - the second WWF-SASSI Retailer/ Supplier Participation Scheme Report (presented by Stephanie Rainier, the WWF-SASSI Retail Engagement Officer) and the impact of WWF-SASSI at the fisheries level – specifically in the hake longline fishery as well as the offshore and inshore demersal hake trawl fisheries (presented by Jessica Greenstone, the WWF-SA Marine Science & Policy Lead). This was concluded by Chris Kastern, the WWF-SA Seafood Market Transformation Manager, providing an overview of the WWF-SA Marine Programme vision for 2025.

For the first time at the symposium, a number of WWF-SASSI Retailer/ Supplier Participation Scheme participating companies took part in a panel discussion that was facilitated by the WWF-SA Market Transformation Programme Manager, Tatjana von Bormann. The panellists were Adiel Fortune (International Business Development Manager at I&J), Andre Nel (Head of Sustainability at Pick n Pay), Justin Smith (Head of Sustainability: The Good Business Journey at Woolworths), Roelof Brink (Head of Strategic Sourcing at Ocean Basket) and Dean Stacey (Business Development Director at Breco Seafoods). The focus of the panel was to discuss the benefits and challenges experienced in transforming the individual company’s seafood operations. Major benefits that were noted included the increased collaboration between companies throughout the seafood supply

chain as well as the platforms that internal seafood sustainability initiatives created for addressing issues in other major commodities. The challenges varied across the participants from sourcing sustainable alternatives to correct labelling to the fact that many imported species are not MSC certified or are “Not-assessed” by WWF-SASSI. However, a key challenge that was mentioned by all the panellists was the apparent increased cost of supplying sustainable seafood and the impact that this can have on their businesses. It was also noted by the participants that pressure needs to be placed on key competitors in their sectors (national retailer chains, major restaurant franchises and large seafood importers/processors/ distributors) to start actively and openly work towards improving sustainability in their seafood operations, this was seen as critical in achieving comprehensive market transformation and thereby creating a level playing field in the market.

After a short break, the second session of the event was opened by the chair for this part of the symposium, Pavs Pillay. Dr Oluyemisi Oloruntuyi then gave a comprehensive overview of the work that the MSC is doing in the developing world context, including the increasing number of fisheries that are being certified to the MSC Fishery Standard or that are involved in Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs). She also highlighted the plans for the future, which will focus on increasing capacity and outreach as well as revising the MSC standard and process to make it more accessible to developing world fisheries.

The MSC Southern Africa Communications and Office Manager, Angela McQueen, introduced the MSC traceability campaign, which is due to launch on 16 March. She noted the importance of the initiative, highlighting that, at a global level, up to 30% of all seafood is misrepresented or mislabelled. The aim of this campaign is to recognise the importance of being able to trace a seafood product back to source and inspire people to purchase seafood with the MSC ecolabel on the consumer facing packaging.

Following these presentations, Michael Cohen, a Market Outreach Associate for the International Sustainable Seafood Foundation (ISSF), hosted an open audience discussion. Many points were raised during this facilitated session, some of which have been highlighted below:

- The idea of incorporating a mechanism that supports with the MSC’s engagement with fisheries with little data - such as many developing world fisheries - to take a risk based approach to becoming certified was debated.
- The commercial implications of the increased costs associated with access to MSC certified products was discussed, especially if it pertained to key commodities for the South African market such as hake. Conversely, the opportunities for MSC or ASC certification of other key commodities with environmental sustainability concerns, such as salmon and shrimp, were noted.
- Ensuring an inclusive WWF-SASSI assessment process that does not advantage or disadvantage either small-scale, commercial, local or foreign fisheries was interrogated by attendees. WWF-SA noted the mechanisms and processes in place to ensure consistency across all assessments as well as the efforts have been, and continue to be, underway to engage government, scientists and industry in the assessment process.
- Increasing collaboration between government and industry, especially the retail sector, to address key challenges in ensuring adequate traceability in seafood supply chains was suggested. There was also discussion on cross-sectoral efforts

required to embed sustainable seafood procurement practices comprehensively in the South African market, especially in the major seafood vendors that are currently not actively addressing seafood sustainability. Furthermore, the relevance of implementing transparent and consistent seafood product labelling for both local and imported seafood products was highlighted.

- Concerns that need to be addressed, such as the gaps between small-scales fishers and access to the formal market, were raised. Linked to this was a discussion on the role of the market in creating alternative livelihood opportunities for coastal communities that rely on harvesting marine resources that are currently over-exploited or collapsed.
- There were also calls for alignment between the South African Marine Living Resources Act and the transitory actions required to progress towards sustainable utilisation of marine resources in South Africa. It was suggested that the MSC and WWF South Africa prioritise the incorporation of social aspects into the MSC standard as well as the WWF-SASSI assessment process.

The closing was provided by Theresa Frantz, the head of the Environmental Programmes at WWF-SA. She thanked the presenters and panellists for their robust questions and discussions at the symposium. Theresa then provided an overview of the event highlighting the importance of traceability, and noting many of the struggles that are faced across the seafood sector and therefore collaboration is key, especially since each stakeholder plays a different role in the solution.

To request the presentations, please contact sassi@wwf.org.za.