



# P M M S P E C I A L

EDITION #1



## *Seal* in spite of *overfishing*?

**WWF requires reforms from MSC**

2018 was not a good year for the MSC. TV and print media throughout Europe have pilloried the seal of approval for quite some time already, especially in the previous year. The seal was founded in 1997 with the support of the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) and the giant consumer goods producer Unilever. As is generally known, it identifies fish and seafood from sustainable fishing on a global level. It is supposed to do so at least – but various marine experts and international scientists constantly criticize the lax awarding and insufficient control of the own standards. Ques-

tionable fishing methods and overfishing of fishing companies having the certificate are in focus of the criticism. However, the non-profit organization Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) located at Berlin has so far ignored each criticism. According to insider information, the organization has an annual licensing income of 17 million euros. **PMM Special** dug deeper and talked to the **marine researcher Dr. Rainer Froese** of the Geomar Helmholtz-Zentrum for oceanology in Kiel. The scientist and ichthyologist doesn't mince his words towards PMM.

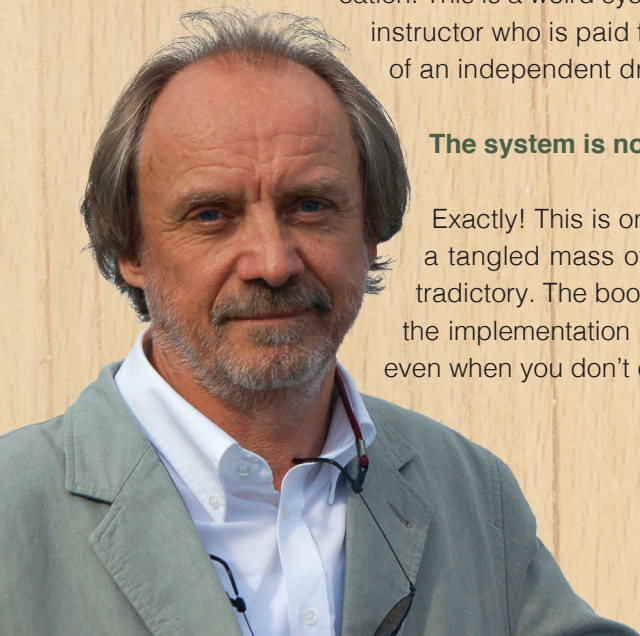


**Mr. Froese, the MSC has proved to be resistant to criticism for a long time. What is the subject of the heated discussions?**

The MSC makes the rules and independent companies working for profit carry out the certification of the fisheries. This means, the certifier is also the auditor and the fishers pay him for the desired certification. This is a weird system, in our opinion. This would be like giving the driving school instructor who is paid for the lessons the authority to issue the driving license instead of an independent driving examiner.

**The system is not independent, isn't it?**

Exactly! This is one aspect. The other one is that the rules are not good. There is a tangled mass of rules, about 100 pages, which are partly redundant and contradictory. The book of rules includes many good points announced in the title, but the implementation rules explain how you can reach the required number of points even when you don't comply with the guidelines.



### Can you put this in concrete terms?

Yes, there are rules which are not good at all. For example, the MSC does expressly permit overfishing, that means you can extract more fish than will regrow. The rules also allow that the fish stock decreases to levels at which replenishment of stocks by reproduction is imperiled. Overfishing is the main point of criticism. The MSC allows that fishing companies overfish the stock, but still get the label.



### Does the organization listen to critics?

A lot of my colleagues have meanwhile given up speaking to the MSC. I personally have not. I think the MSC has positioned itself on the market in the meantime and we would take a major step towards sustainable fishing, if it changed its rules. If all companies bearing the label were really not allowed to overfish, it would have an effect on the managers and eventually also on the fish population. This would finally lead to changes in the oceans. For this, it is necessary to change the rules in a way which eliminates overfishing and to withdraw the seal in case of a breach of the rules.



### Does it refer to the MPAs (Marine Protected Areas) in the whole world?

Since the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1984, the subject of overfishing has been regulated by law. It states explicitly that the natural resources and fish population – of course, this also includes mussels and other animals - in the sovereign territories of the countries, that means in the designated economic zones, must be managed in a way that allows to provide the maximum sustainable yield. Therefore, the fish stock needs to be vast enough to ensure that the fishing industry can make the maximum catch on a permanent base. This is the legal basis accepted by almost all nations of the world. Since 2014, this international law has been valid also in the EU within the framework of the Common Fisheries Policy. Thus, the legal situation is clear. However, this also means that the MSC sets a standard which is lower than the applicable European law or as the international law.

### Which role can play the WWF which was the “obstetrician” of the MSC label?

The WWF has been reluctant to criticize the MSC publicly for a long time. It has held its protective hand over the MSC for years and has tried to solve the problems internally. Nevertheless, the persons in charge were not happy about the constant headlines and, at a certain point, they said it were enough. This became obvious reading the internal documents of the WWF including severe criticism which reached the public via detours. Above that, newly, there are official statements, for example, on the homepage of the WWF. These statements demand that the MSC has to take action, since everybody knows that it cannot go on this way. Now, the MSC officially says that the system needs to change, otherwise it is useless.



**The situation is not easy to unravel, isn't it? What do you suggest?**

Of course, with seal is better than without. This holds true for the end consumer, at least. The MSC sticks to one rule: in case of a collapse of the stock, it withdraws the seal. However, this is a small comfort in my view. Thus, outside observers can assume that the fish stock has not collapsed as long as there is a seal. But the seal does not tell me if the population is perhaps not overfished. Each consumer should actually pay attention to where the product comes from, from which region and the conditions there. This would be a Sisyphean task and unreasonable for the end consumer. This is a job for the retailers and big chains having qualified staff for it. They need to have a close look on it and decide to choose only MSC products which are really not from overfished stocks. Additionally, these players are supposed to put pressure on the MSC and demand, "Change your guidelines. We don't have the time to constantly make sure that everything is fine. A product bearing the seal must not come from overfished populations."

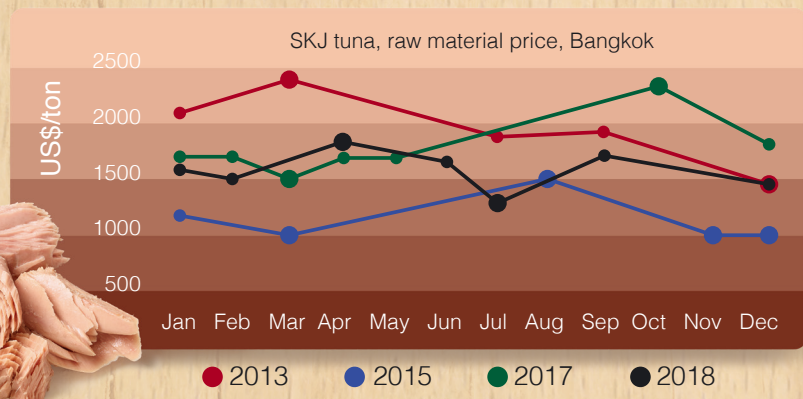
I hope that the big German retail chains work together and summon the persons in charge of the MSC and tell them, "Listen, we sell your products and you make good profit with it. We are not prepared to make this additional effort. Change your rules and withdraw the seal in case of overfishing." Unfortunately, this has not happened so far, but it is still my hope that the day will come.

**Thank you for the interview.**



**SKIPJACK PRICES** *in the ascendant*

The price for frozen Skipjack tuna is increasing again. After some weeks of recession and a low price level in general in the year 2018, Bangkok is currently registering an upward trend. At the end of February, SKJ (from 1.8 kg) reached a price of US\$ 1.475/ton which corresponds to a price increase of 15 percent compared with the end of January. According to market insiders, this indicates that the last year's price drop has bottomed out. Nevertheless, the development remains exciting – the latest reports from the WCP fishing grounds state that the catches are lower than expected due to bad weather. Bangkok fish traders report of a fall in demand on the part of the buyers. However, they are apparently prepared to accept the current rise in prices for fear of further increases. Market experts think that the present price increase is not very strong and that this trend will continue for one or two months. The graphic below (development since 2013) impressively shows how volatile the market is in general.



## Urban Soup - *Convenience is cool*

The currently hippest food concept is situated at Munich – Urban Soup! A delicious, quick soup for take away or for immediate consumption. The creators of Urban Soup Daniel Schmel and Tim Maiwald demonstrate that fast food can be sexy and healthy. PMM met them in the brand new flagship store at the Viktualienmarkt in Munich. After three years of preparation, the two founders start up with three shops in the city. “We have an international concept,” Daniel Schmel explains. “We want to offer healthy alternatives.” Those who taste »Olivia’s Healthy Tomato«, »Creamy Coconut Carrot« or the secret star »Tom’s Tasty Chorizo Sensation« know what he is talking about. The small selection of sandwiches, fruit juices and exquisite types of coffee is also enticing. Cool music complements the offer.

And we are positively surprised that the providers of organic food also use PMM products of the in-house brand Adria. What is important for convenience products? “Availability and quality,” says Daniel, “when a product runs out, our employees need to be able to replace it quickly so that our customers don’t have to wait. And it is great when the olive slices are perfectly cut and the employees don’t have to cut or stone olives themselves. Therefore, we focus on products as convenient as possible to prevent mistakes in the store; and also to wipe out quality fluctuations.”

Enjoy!



Daniel Schmel



Tim Maiwald

Although we consider our sources as reliable, we assume no liability for the completeness and correctness of the information being shown. Photos: npk, Urban Soup.

