



Press Release

Draft Standards for Responsible Tilapia Aquaculture Available for Review

First Set of Standards from Aquaculture Dialogues

For Release: Sep 29, 2008

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WASHINGTON, DC: The first set of measurable, performance-based tilapia aquaculture standards created through a transparent and multi-stakeholder process was released for public comment today. They are the first draft standards from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)-initiated Aquaculture Dialogues.

“When finalized, these will be the world’s most robust standards for the tilapia aquaculture industry,” said Jose Villalon, director of the WWF-US Aquaculture Program. “They also will be the most credible standards, as they will be the outcome of three years of open discussions and consensus building among leaders in the tilapia farming industry.”

The draft standards were developed by the Tilapia Aquaculture Dialogue, a group of tilapia producers, seafood buyers, nonprofit organizations, and other tilapia aquaculture stakeholders. The Dialogue is driven by a Steering Committee that includes representatives from Regal Springs Trading Company, Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, New England Aquarium, Aquamar, Rain Forest Aquaculture and WWF.

The standards are designed to minimize the impacts, identified by Dialogue participants, that cause 70 to 80 percent of the problems associated with tilapia farming. This includes chemicals (used to treat diseases or preserve tilapia) being released into the water, non-native tilapia escaping from farms and competing with wild-caught fish, and water being diverted for use on farms.

Comments on the draft standards will be accepted through February 2009. The purpose of the public comment period is to gain input on how to perfect the standards so they are effective and attainable.

“These standards are unique because of the large number of stakeholders who have participated in the Dialogue and the efforts that were made to keep the process transparent,” said Alfonso Delfini of Aquamar. “The public comment period is another way to keep the process open and engage people who want to make tilapia farming more sustainable. Without that, we will end up with standards people will not want to adopt.”

The standards will be posted for two months, in accordance with the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labeling (ISEAL) Alliance’s Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards. The Dialogue participants will have one month to review the comments before posting an updated version of the standards that reflects the comments received. This three-month cycle will be repeated once. Final standards are expected in March 2009.

The standards are based on a set of principles, criteria and indicators also created by the Dialogue participants. The principles are high-level goals for addressing each impact. The criteria provide direction on how to reduce each impact and the indicators address how to measure the extent of each impact.

“It is heartening that a diverse group can come together to work toward a goal of developing a standard to better the industry,” said Michael Tlusty of the New England Aquarium. “This was a learning process and everyone came out with a better understanding and more respect of global tilapia production.”

When finalized, the standards will be given to a standards-holding entity that will use independent third-party certification bodies to audit farms. Third party involvement ensures fair and effective management of the standards. WWF is working with its partners to assess which standards-holding entity – new or existing – to use.

Through the Aquaculture Dialogues, standards also are being created for farmed salmon, trout, pangasius, shrimp, abalone, clams, mussels, scallops and oysters. WWF has initiated similar standards-development processes for wild-caught seafood, forestry products and potatoes.

To read and comment on the tilapia standards, go to www.worldwildlife.org/tilapiadialogue.