

# **Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) Certification Program**



## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)**

Updated July 2024

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## 1. What is the RFM Certification Program?

The RFM Certification Program is a voluntary and internationally accredited certification assessment of whether a fishery is responsibly managed based on strict criteria. It consists of two seafood certification standards: 1) Fisheries Standard and 2) Chain of Custody Standard.

RFM is a comprehensive program founded on the strongest and most widely acknowledged international standards and practices. Based on United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) criteria, it is accredited under the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 17065) code.

## 2. Why was RFM developed?

The RFM Program was developed and adopted in 2010 as a result of market requests and a desire to have a credible choice in certification programs.

Fisheries certification is now a requirement to sell into most marketplaces. Customers and the Alaska seafood industry felt that having a choice in certification was important. The goal was to create a wild-capture certification alternative that was:

- Independent, third-party and formally accredited;
- Directly based on the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Management;
- Provides verification of responsible fisheries management practices and does not interfere, nor dictate, how to manage fisheries – that is left to the competent fisheries authorities;
- Cost-effective for the supply chain; and
- Provides a consumer-facing eco-label that prioritizes origin, with zero logo licensing fees

\* The FAO documents are available from the FAO website:

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/v9878e/v9878e00.HTM>

## 3. How is RFM the same/different from other certification programs?

RFM shares some key attributes of other certification programs:

- It is a voluntary program;
- It is an independent, third-party verification;
- It has a robust set of criteria for which fisheries are assessed against;
- It offers a consumer-facing eco-label;
- It has a Chain of Custody Standard which demonstrates traceability through the supply chain for those companies who have undergone a Chain of Custody audit.

### Some of the differences to other fishery certification programs are:

- The RFM Logo communicates origin and there are no logo licensing fees; RFM was built on the principle that certification **verifies** good fisheries management and governance, it is **not a substitute** for fisheries management and good governance. Achieving RFM Certification means that if an issue is found, it is managed responsibly (there's a sound fisheries management plan in place).

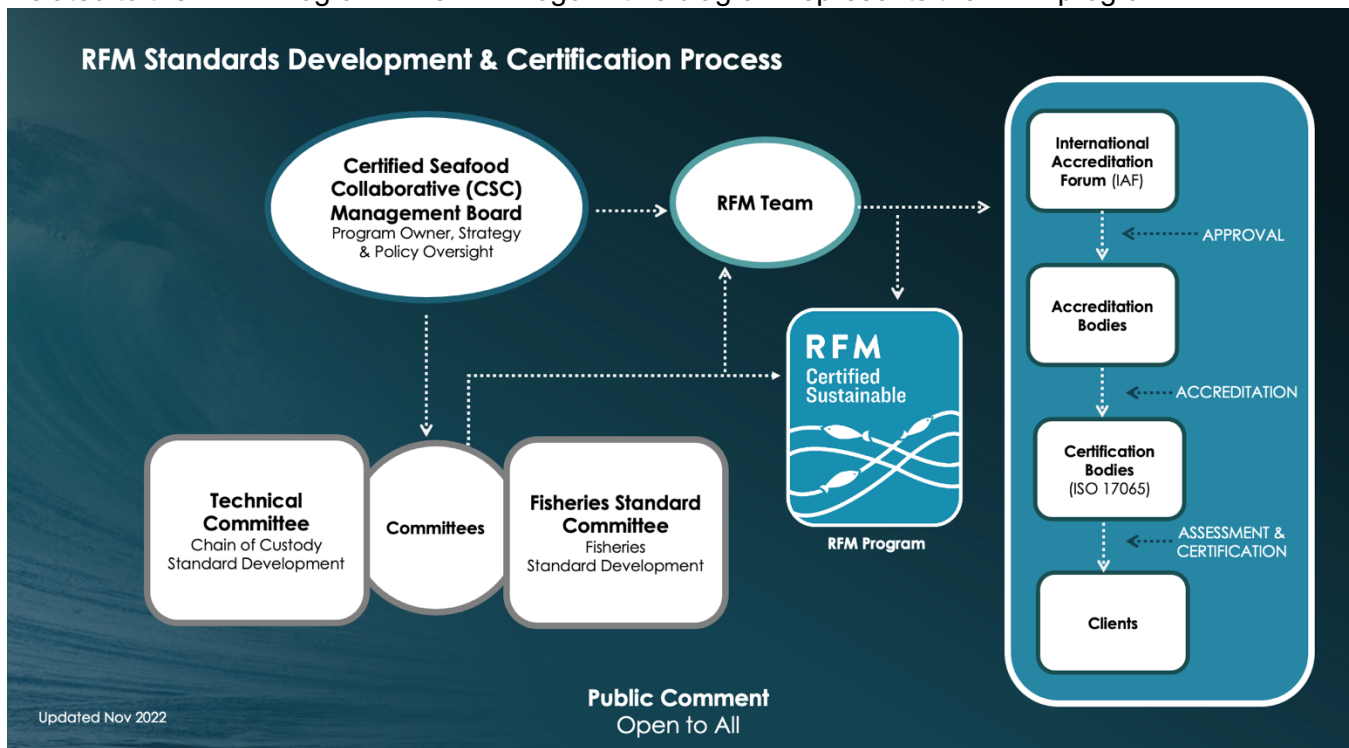
#### 4. What is the value proposition of the RFM Certification Program?

*Our goal is to make certified sustainable and traceable seafood more accessible to all.*

- Provides cost-effective choice in the marketplace for wild-capture fishery certification; Choice drives improvements and cost-savings;
- Customers get assurance at the highest level of market acceptance that fisheries are responsibly managed to meet the fundamental requirements of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Management;
- The RFM logo provides BOTH sustainability and origin identification through a traceable, verifiable system that consumers can trust. Those companies that want to make a product or marketing claim, must go through a Chain of Custody certification process, but do not have to pay for any logo licensing fees to use the recognized RFM logo;
- RFM is verification of responsible fisheries management practices and does not interfere, nor dictate, how to manage fisheries – that is left to the competent fisheries authorities;
- Supply Chain Companies can meet initiatives for a robust, independent 3rd-party, GSSI-recognized certification program and demonstrate responsible sourcing to their customers. The RFM certification program has been formally recognized by GSSI since 2016.

#### 5. Who owns the RFM Certification Program?

As of July 1, 2020, the ownership of the RFM Program transitioned from ASMI to the Certified Seafood Collaborative (CSC). The CSC is the approving body for all standards, strategy, and policy related to the RFM Program. The RFM logo in this diagram represents the RFM program.



The RFM Fisheries Standard Committee (FSC) is an independent expert committee which oversees the ongoing review and development of the Fisheries Standard. This committee includes national and international experts in fishery science, management, and sustainability, including eNGO representation. Current members of the FSC can be found at <https://rfmcertification.org/about-rfm/governance/>

## 6. When did the RFM Certification Program originate?

The RFM Certification Program has been in existence since 2010. The first fishery certified was Alaska salmon on March 11, 2011.

## 7. Has RFM been benchmarked by GSSI?

RFM was the first certification program to achieve recognition by **the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative's (GSSI) Global Benchmark Tool**.

GSSI publicly recognizes seafood certification schemes that meet the GSSI Essential Components grounded in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the FAO Guidelines for Seafood

Certification and Ecolabelling. Through Supplementary Components, GSSI's Tool also outlines the status of existing practices in seafood certification. This helps to make purchasing decisions more efficient by offering greater choice in seafood certification and driving down costs while promoting environmental sustainability.

In 2019, GSSI conducted their Monitoring of Continued Alignment (MOCA) of the RFM Certification Standard and found it to have continued alignment with all GSSI Essential Components and therefore awarded continued recognition of the Standard. In 2023, RFM was re-benchmarked and again achieved GSSI recognition.

To access the RFM Benchmark Report, go to: <https://www.ourgssi.org/gssi-recognized-certification/>

## 8. Why does it matter that RFM has GSSI recognition?

The GSSI Benchmark Tool is an attempt to streamline procurement decisions by making it easy for buyers to see which certification programs have met the rigorous bar set forth by FAO's internationally agreed guidelines.

Through GSSI, members of the seafood supply chain, NGOs, governmental and intergovernmental organizations, and several independent scientists came up with a collective, non-competitive approach to provide clarity on seafood certification and ensure confidence in certified seafood.

This shared solution will make information available across the seafood supply chain to drive change and lower costs:

- **For producers**, it means more options to choose the right scheme for them and reduce the need for multiple audits.
- **For seafood buyers**, it means simpler, more consistent data to guide their purchasing decisions.
- **For NGOs**, it means more open and verified information to help promote environmental sustainability.

## 9. Which fisheries are RFM Certified?

<https://rfmcertification.org/certified-fishery-species/>

FISH SPECIES	GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF FISHERY	GEAR TYPE
<b>ALASKA PACIFIC SALMON SPECIES</b> King/Chinook, Sockeye/Red, Coho/Silver, Keta/Chum, Pink	Region 1: Southeast & Yakutat Region 2: Central Region 3: Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region 4: Kodiak, Chignik, Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Islands	Troll, Purse Seine, Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet Purse Seine, Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet, Fish Wheel Purse Seine, Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet
<b>ALASKA PACIFIC HALIBUT</b>	Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Benthic Longline
<b>ALASKA SABLEFISH (BLACK COD)</b>	Federal and State fisheries Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Benthic Longline, Pot, Non-pelagic Trawl
<b>ALASKA POLLOCK (WALLEYE)</b>	Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Pelagic Trawl, and other gears (Non-pelagic Trawl, Jig, Longline, Pot) from other non-directed pollock fisheries legally landing pollock
<b>ALASKA PACIFIC COD</b>	Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Non-pelagic Trawl, Longline, Pot, Jig
<b>ALASKA FLATFISH COMPLEX</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yellowfin sole</li> <li>• Flathead sole</li> <li>• Northern rock sole</li> <li>• Southern rock sole</li> <li>• Arrowtooth flounder</li> <li>• Kamchatka flounder</li> <li>• Alaska plaice</li> <li>• Greenland turbot</li> <li>• Rex sole</li> </ul>	Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska	Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl, Longline Non-pelagic Trawl
<b>ALASKA CRAB</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red King crab</li> <li>• Blue King crab</li> <li>• Golden King crab</li> <li>• Snow crab</li> <li>• Tanner crab</li> </ul>	Bristol Bay St. Matthew Island Aleutian Islands Bering Sea Bering Sea	Pot Pot Pot Pot Pot
<b>ALASKA ATKA MACKEREL AND ROCKFISH</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Atka Mackerel</li> <li>• Pacific Ocean Perch</li> <li>• Northern Rockfish</li> <li>• Dusky Rockfish</li> </ul>	Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska	Trawl Trawl Trawl Trawl
<b>PACIFIC WHITING (HAKE)</b>	Washington, Oregon, California – FAO Area 67	Midwater Trawl
<b>U.S. GULF OF MEXICO SHRIMP</b> Brown, white and pink shrimp	Federal and state waters of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and west coast of Florida	Otter trawls, skimmers, butterfly nets

## 10. Who are the fishery clients and what is their role?

RFM is voluntary program. If a fishery is interested in being certified they need to be represented by a client or client group. Below are the current clients for the RFM certified fisheries.

- **Salmon, Cod, Halibut, and Sablefish** – [Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, Inc.](#)
- **Crab – Bering Sea Crab Client Group LLC**
- **Flatfish Complex, Atka Mackerel, and Rockfish** – [Alaska Seafood Cooperative](#)
- **Pollock** – At Sea Processors Association [At-Sea Processors Association](#)
- **Pacific Whiting (Hake)** – Pacific Whiting Conservation Cooperative
- **U.S. Gulf of Mexico Shrimp** – [American Shrimp Processors Association](#)

## 11. What are the key areas fisheries are evaluated against in order to meet the RFM Standard?

The RFM Fisheries Standard focuses on **4 Key Principles** for evaluating fisheries:

1. The Fisheries Management System
2. Science and Stock Assessment Activities and the Precautionary Approach
3. Management Measures, Implementation, Monitoring and Control
4. Serious Impacts of the Fishery on the Ecosystem

### **The scope of the RFM Fisheries Standard and Program is:**

*“To establish and maintain a program that provides for independent third party certification of Responsible Fisheries Management, including enhancement practices (but excluding full cycle aquaculture), up to the point of landing, with the main objective being the biological sustainability of the “stock under consideration”, with consideration for conservation, biodiversity and ecosystem integrity; and due regard to social responsibility and the economic viability of the fishery.”*

*“The RFM Fisheries Standard sets out the requirements that must be achieved by North American fisheries operating within the U.S and Canadian 200nm EEZ for Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) Certification. All well-managed North American fisheries are eligible to apply for the RFM Program. The RFM Program has developed a specific Data Deficient tool for fisheries when relevant.”*

## 12. What is the length of a Fishery Certification Certificate and how often are the audits?

Once a fishery is certified to the RFM Fisheries Standard the certificate lasts **five years**. Each certified fishery enters **annual surveillance audits** for continuing certification. Re-certification occur after a period of five years. For information on the assessment process go to <https://rfmcertification.org/about-rfm/how-it-works/>

## 13. How was the original RFM Fisheries Standard developed?

In 2010 ASMI put out an RFP to develop a standards framework and certification system. This work entailed taking the FAO key reference documents and creating ‘auditable criteria’ against which an independent Certification Body could assess an Alaska fishery.

The RFM Standards were created by an independent group of experts composing the Conformance Criteria Committee (now known as the Fisheries Standard Committee).

### **Two standards were developed:**

1. Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management Conformance Criteria (*now known as the Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management Standard*) and;
2. Alaska RFM Chain of Custody Standard.

The scope of the standards included any Alaska fishery, any fish species, all production systems/gear types, geographical locations, and company structures (single units, groupings of sites/boats, small- scale fisheries, subcontractors, product categories, packers, processors, storage and distribution).

The Fisheries Standard Committee (FSC) members are listed on the RFM website. Members are volunteers and are not paid for their time or effort in developing the Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard.

For more information on how the original RFM Fisheries Standard was developed go to <https://rfmcertification.org/fisheries-standard/version-1-2/>

## **14. Who developed the current RFM Fisheries Standard?**

### The RFM Fishery Standard Committee (FSC):

- Dr. William Smoker, Chairman, Independent Fishery Consultant, US/Pacific
- Dr. Tom Pickerell, Executive Director, Global Tuna Alliance
- R.J. (Bob) Allain, Independent Fishery Consultant, Canada
- Suzanne Iudicello, Independent Consultant
- Eric Schwaab, Environmental Defense Fund
- Wendy Norden, Monterey Bay Aquarium

## **15. Is there a multi-stakeholder process for the Standard Development and Fishery Assessment process?**

### *STAKEHOLDER INPUT APPLICABLE TO THE STANDARD OWNER*

Comments related to RFM Standards or RFM Program Management go to the Standard owner, CSC, by submitting online in the Comments, Appeals and Complaints section of the RFM website. CSC has planned official public comment periods for the Standards; however, Stakeholders are welcome to submit information to the RFM Program Manager at any time about the Standard or Program Management. The information will be reviewed for eligibility and forwarded to relevant parties.

### *STAKEHOLDER INPUT APPLICABLE TO THE CERTIFICATION BODY*

Comments regarding fishery certification, re-certification, annual surveillance audits or a specific fishery go directly to the relevant Certification Body (CB). Interested stakeholders can register for comment with the appropriate CB – please refer to the individual fishery assessment notifications and certification reports to identify the CB. <https://rfmcertification.org/certified-fishery-species/>

Comments and information relevant to Standards received outside of official Public Comment periods will be held by CSC until the Standards review activity commences. For more information on the stakeholder process go to <https://rfmcertification.org/stakeholder-involvement/>

## **16. How often is the RFM Program reviewed and updated?**



The RFM program policies and procedures are reviewed on an **annual basis** to ensure their relevance and to verify that they continue to meet the demands of the global marketplace. The reviews include: findings, cause analysis, preventive and corrective actions with deadlines and responsibilities, as applicable. The resulting corrective actions could instigate a revision of the relevant operating policies and procedures, as applicable, with specified time frames.

CSC ensures that this management review is fully documented, is carried out with the involvement of interested parties and directly affected stakeholders, and addresses any relevant issues of concern raised by stakeholders. These could be raised via comments submitted directly to the RFM Program Manager through the available comment submission tool on RFM’s website or during the open public comment periods.

**17. How often is the Fishery Standard reviewed and updated?**

The RFM Standards are reviewed **annually** as a matter of process and procedure. At a minimum, there will be a full review and/or reissue every five years.

**18. Why should a company go through Chain of Custody Certification?**

Companies that have Chain of Custody (CoC) certification can make certification claims on their products, POS materials and/or website. It gives confidence to all buyers of the seafood that it can be traced back through the supply chain to the fishery that was certified as part of the Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) Program.

If a company buys seafood from a certified fishery and wishes to make the certified claim or uses the RFM logo, Chain of Custody certification is required. Every organization that takes ownership of the certified seafood, from the point of first handling after the seafood has been landed, until it is processed into the final consumer product, will need to be certified to the CoC Standard.



**19. What is the cost for Chain of Custody?**

Global Trust/SAI Global, SCS Global Services, and MRAG Americas, Inc. are RFM-approved CBs who perform CoC audits for the RFM Program. The cost of your assessment will vary depending on

the complexity and size of your organization. Single-site audits typically range between \$1,500 - \$2,500. Costs for multi-site audits vary depending on complexity.

Companies who currently have MSC CoC through one of the RFM-approved CBs can do a combined RFM/MSC certification audit and add RFM for **approximately 20% more** (price may vary between a single site vs. a multi-site audit). Each CB can be contacted for a price quote:

<https://rfmcertification.org/chain-of-custody/coc-certification-bodies/>

## **20. How long does it take and what is the length of the Chain of Custody Certificate?**

You should **plan 1-3 months** for the application and audit process. The better prepared you are for the audit can help reduce time and costs. Certificates are valid for three years with annual surveillance. On-going certification is maintained where there is substantive and demonstrable evidence that the applicant remains in compliance with the criteria of the Standard.

## **21. Can a company use the same Certification Body for RFM and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Chain of Custody audits?**

Yes, if your current MSC Chain of Custody audit is performed by any of the RFM approved CBs (Global Trust/SAI Global, SCS Global Services, or MRAG Americas, Inc.). You can add RFM Chain of Custody for **approximately 20% more**. This price may vary depending on single vs. multi-site audits.

## **22. Where can I find a list of RFM Certified Companies?**

Go to <https://rfmcertification.org/chain-of-custody/coc-certification-bodies/>

## **23. How do I sign up for Chain of Custody?**

The first step is to complete an application with one of the RFM-approved CBs. Go to <https://rfmcertification.org/chain-of-custody/application/>

## **24. What is the cost to use the RFM Certified Logo?**

Using the RFM Certified logo is free once a Terms of Use Agreement is signed. There are no logo licensing fees. Companies that go through the RFM Chain of Custody process incur a cost for the audit which is paid directly to the CBs. However, the CSC ensures all participants have free access to the logo.

## **25. How can a company demonstrate to consumers that a product is RFM certified?**

The RFM program has a Certified Logo that can be displayed on consumer packaging, sales sheets, POS materials and on a company's website. This logo is used in conjunction with a company's CoC number to signify that the product comes from an RFM certified fishery. Origin is always called out on the RFM logo. Currently, there is the Alaska RFM logo for all Alaska-certified products and there is the U.S.A. RFM logo for all Pacific Whiting and Gulf of Mexico Shrimp certified products. To use the logo a company must sign a Terms of Use Agreement and then the logo is free to use.

## **26. Are there fisheries from outside Alaska using the RFM Certification model?**

Many other regions of the country and the world also see the value of the Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) Certification model. **Pacific Whiting** achieved RFM certification in July 2022 and the **U.S. Gulf of Mexico Shrimp** fishery gained RFM certification in July 2024. **Iceland**, **Japan**, and more are coming on the horizon and have their own RFM-based certification programs. Each follows the same FAO documents and all programs have been benchmarked by GSSI.