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## Helping WWF Create a Global Aquaculture Standard Setting Process

Aquaculture is the fastest-growing food production system in the world, and the trend is projected to continue. Although the industry represents an important opportunity to supplement the oceans' food supply, it can also cause significant social and environmental impacts if managed improperly.

Many NGOs and civil society groups have raised concerns about the potential for untenable harm to water quality resulting from aquaculture, in addition to the spreading of disease, and the promotion of unfair labor practices.

In 2008, WWF asked CBI to help coordinate a global consensus-based standard setting process to create fair and informed social and environmental performance measures at the farm-site level.

CBI began by reviewing the overall process, which had begun several years prior, and is now working with WWF coordinators to improve the quality of decision-making among stakeholders worldwide—including scientists, producers, civil society groups, and NGOs. By providing planning and facilitation services for numerous stakeholder meetings around the globe, CBI has supported six global aquaculture dialogues related to shrimp, salmon, pangasius, tilapia, shellfish, and trout.

Similar to other global standard setting work, the aquaculture dialogues begin with the premise that effective performance measures, supported by diverse stakeholders, can lead to environmentally and socially sustainable outcomes; answer a growing need for aquatic foods; and contribute to food security, poverty reduction, and economic development.

Several factors make this work challenging under time pressure and intense public scrutiny:

- *Incorporating sound science.* Linking standard setting to best available science is challenging and often implies managing uncertainty and evolving information.

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- *Working across regions with geographic, cultural, and production differences.* Key species (such as shrimp) are grown in distinct regions, at different scales, and within differing cultural contexts, making managing dialogues and joint decision-making difficult.

- *Addressing social impacts.* In many ways, social impacts are even more difficult to measure than environmental impacts, but are equally important to achieving sustainability.

- *Achieving change and fairness.* Acceptable standards must leverage the behavior of large industry players while not unfairly excluding small farmers from certification, though their resources may be limited.

- *Connecting to credible auditing and certification.* The standards must ultimately be linked to certification mechanisms that ensure brand value, meet sustainability goals, and achieve consumer confidence.

- *Ensuring effective outreach.* Consistently reaching out to concerned publics over time is essential to maintaining a credible process.

This is a particularly important year in the aquaculture dialogue process. Several dialogue species groups will be producing draft standards by December, which will be finalized by March 2010. For more information, contact Merrick Hoben at [mhoben@cbuilding.org](mailto:mhoben@cbuilding.org). □