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## **CBI Supports Global Aquaculture Standard Setting Process**

[Merrick Hoben](#) May, 2009 CBI Reports - Spring 2009 Aquaculture is the fastest-growing food production system in the world, and the trend is projected to continue. Although the industry provides an important opportunity to supplement the oceans' food supply, it can also cause significant social and environmental impacts if managed improperly.

In 2008, WWF asked CBI to help coordinate a global consensus-based standard setting process that will result in scientific and credible social and environmental performance measures at the farm-site level. Subsequently, CBI has worked with WWF's 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.

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

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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 both challenging and rewarding:

- Incorporating sound science. Linking standard setting to best available science is critical to the dialogues' credibility and implies significant hurdles in effectively managing uncertainty and evolving information.
- 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 dialogue management and joint decision-making a significant task.
- Addressing social impacts. In many ways, social impacts are even more difficult to measure than environmental impacts, but have become equally important to achieving consumer expectations for sustainability.
- Achieving change while maintaining industry fairness. Acceptable standards must leverage the behavior of large industry players while not unfairly excluding small farmers from certification, though their resources for achieving it 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 the entire standard-setting process is essential to maintaining a credible process.

2009 is an important year in the Aquaculture Dialogue process. Several Dialogue species groups will be producing draft standards by December, and finalized by the summer of 2010. For more information, contact CBI Washington DC Office Director, Merrick Hoben at [mhoben@cbuilding.org](mailto:mhoben@cbuilding.org)