

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CERTIFICATION AND RATING?

There are some similarities and differences between certification programs and rating systems. Below is a table highlighting some of the key and typical differences between the two types of programs:

- Certification programs offer a chain of custody, traceability standard on sustainability claims, whereas a rating system does not.
- Generally, fishery assessments in certification programs are conducted by independent accredited certification bodies as opposed to scientists selected by the rating system body.
- Wild-capture certification programs offer transparency and stakeholder engagement during the assessment process, whereas rating systems typically do not.

ASSESSMENT ELEMENT	CERTIFICATIONS (e.g. Responsible Fisheries Management, Marine Stewardship Council, Best Aquaculture Practice, etc.)	RATINGS (e.g. Seafood Watch)
Participation of fishery / farm in question	Voluntary, self-identified client, usually a private entity	Selected by assessment organization based on input from associated(or contributing) NGO's and the importance to market(s)
Cost to producers	Yes, paid by fishery client	No cost*
Assessment review	An accredited third party certification body selected by the fishery client	Scientist(s) selected by assessment organization with peer-review process
Transparency of assessment process	Assessment process for wild-capture fisheries are generally made public whereas aquaculture assessments are generally confidential	Generally not public
Stakeholder input for Certification and in program/standard development	Typically solicited during both the assessment and standard development processes	Limited to no opportunity to provide input
Publicly available final reports	Final certification reports for wild-capture fisheries are generally made public. Aquaculture certifications vary on public availability of reports.	Generally made public
Wild seafood assessment methodology	Typically one methodology for all fisheries	Typically one methodology for all fisheries
Traceability system	Typically requires traceability through chain of custody	Not included or required
Eligibility for Certification Claim	Only for companies with chain of custody certification	No chain of custody requirements for sustainability claims
Industry marks/labels	Usually B2B packaging marks available. RFM charges no logo licensing fees; MSC has logo licensing fees	Permitted, but not often used
Consumer marks/labels	On-product marks available, requirements and fees vary, e.g. RFM charges no logo licensing fees; MSC has logo licensing fees	Used by retail partners

*Some assessment organizations offer a fee-for-service assessment

This table has been adapted from FishChoice <https://fishchoice.com/understanding-seafood-ratings-and-seafood-certifications>

