

## **“Keystone dialogue” between scientists and seafood-industry leaders creates breakthrough in ocean stewardship**

Eight of the world’s largest seafood companies have issued a ten-point statement committing to action on ocean stewardship following the first “keystone dialogue” between scientists and business leaders.

Through the “keystone dialogues” – a new approach to engage major international businesses in global sustainability challenges – companies have committed to improving transparency and traceability and reducing illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in their supply chains.

Antibiotic use in aquaculture, greenhouse gas emissions and plastic pollution will also now be prioritized. And the businesses commit to eliminating any products in their supply chains that may have been obtained through “modern slavery including forced, bonded and child labour”.

The statement says signatories “represent a global force, not only in the operation of the seafood industry, but also in contributing to a resilient planet.” It was signed by the two largest companies by revenues (Maruha Nichiro Corporation and Nippon Suisan Kaisha, Ltd), two of the largest tuna companies in the world (Thai Union Group PCL and Dongwon Industries), the two largest salmon farmers (Marine Harvest ASA and Cermaq – subsidiary of Mitsubishi Corporation) and the two largest aquafeeds companies (Skretting – subsidiary of Nutreco, and Cargill Aqua Nutrition).

To implement the commitments the companies plan to create a new initiative - Seafood Business for Ocean Stewardship – that will, for the first time, connect wild capture fisheries to aquaculture businesses, connect European and North American companies to Asian companies and connect the global seafood business to science.

The inaugural dialogue, initiated by the Stockholm Resilience Centre, took place 11-13 November at the Soneva Fushi Resort on the Maldives under the patronage of HRH Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden – Advocate for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The initiative was a unique meeting between CEOs, senior leadership of major seafood companies, leading scientists from the Stockholm Resilience Centre, and advisors including The Honorable Dr Jane Lubchenco of Oregon State University and U.S. Science Envoy for the Ocean – U.S. State Department, Mr Volker Kuntzsch, CEO of Sanford Ltd., Mr Rupert Howes, CEO of Marine Stewardship Council, and Ambassador Magnus Robach, Swedish Ambassador to Japan.

“We depend on a stable and resilient planet for human prosperity. However, science is already providing evidence that we have entered the Anthropocene, an epoch where humanity is now challenging the stability of Earth and its ocean,” the statement goes on to say.

The dialogue is the first between scientists and “keystone actors” a term coined in 2015 by Carl Folke and Henrik Österblom, science directors at the Stockholm Resilience Centre. Keystone species play a disproportionate role in ecosystems. Increasingly, large transnational corporations now play this role, for example, in the ocean and in rainforests.

Österblom led research identifying the keystone actors in the world’s oceans. The team identified 13 transnational corporations controlling 11-16% of wild marine catch and up to 40% of the largest and most valuable fish stocks.

“We invited the leaders of these companies to a dialogue to build trust and develop a common understanding about the state of the ocean,” said Österblom.

“We were delighted so many companies accepted our offer. This shows they are aware of the urgency of the situation and willing to engage in these issues.”

According to related research published by a group of U.S. scientists in 2016, good management of global fisheries could lead to increase in annual catches of over 16 million metric tons and \$53 billion in profit compared with remaining on the current trajectory.

Stockholm Resilience Centre Director Johan Rockström said, “The small concentration of multinational companies means that CEOs are significant leverage points to effectively engage in transforming the entire seafood sector towards more sustainable practices”.

UK-based Forum for the Future’s founding director Jonathon Porritt, said, "It's hugely encouraging to see these leading companies in the global seafood industry making such critical commitments to help protect the world's ocean. This combination of world-class science and inspirational corporate leadership is a powerful one - and I've no doubt we'll need to see a lot more of it over the next few years." The organization was a key supporter of the dialogue.

Myoung W Lee, CEO of Dongwon, one of the largest tuna companies, said, "It's remarkable that seafood companies came together to discuss the sustainability and development of the seafood industry and lay grounds for ocean stewardship. I am honored to have contributed to such a significant, historic event and will ensure that Dongwon does our part to uphold the agreement."

Cermaq CEO Geir Molvik said, “Cermaq is very much engaged in Sustainable Development Goal 14 – life below water – and have encompassed the SDGs in our business strategy. Working with other keystone actors in the global seafood sector is important because it’s only through partnerships we can efficiently pull in the same direction and make significant changes.”

President of Cargill Aqua Nutrition, a major aquafeed company, Einar Wathne said, “This initiative has a truly global perspective, from east to west. That makes me believe that we will have a powerful impact when addressing the challenges we have in our oceans and marine ecosystems, with the UN Sustainable Development Goals as our guideline.”

“Creating more awareness of the opportunities – and business necessities – of managing seafood sustainably should be a key priority for CEOs,” added Jean-Baptiste Jouffray, PhD candidate at the Stockholm Resilience Centre and co-organiser of the event.

The dialogue will now be followed up with additional meetings and dialogue between science and business. A next meeting is already scheduled for next year, where more concrete joint actions will be identified.

*Companies who attended and signed the statement:*

Maruha Nichiro Corporation  
Nippon Suisan Kaisha, Ltd  
Thai Union Group  
Marine Harvest ASA  
Dongwon Industries  
NutraCo (owner of Skretting)  
Cargill Aqua Nutrition  
Cermaq (subsidiary of Mitsubishi Corporation)

***Additional information about this initiative and the science that support it:***

[www.keystonedialogues.earth](http://www.keystonedialogues.earth)  
[www.stockholmresilience.org](http://www.stockholmresilience.org)  
[www.gedb.se](http://www.gedb.se)  
[www.beijer.kva.se](http://www.beijer.kva.se)

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The dialogue was a Stockholm Resilience Centre event supported by Forum for the Future and the Soneva Foundation. The Walton Family Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation funded the dialogue.

**References** <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0127533>

Photographs from the dialogue available on request. Please contact [jean-baptiste.jouffray@su.se](mailto:jean-baptiste.jouffray@su.se)