

# MSC-certified Chinese clam fishery farmed, not wild, says marine biologist

By Mark Godfrey

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A Manila clam (*Ruditapes philippinarum*) fishery in China that has been certified by the Marine Stewardship Council has come under criticism from a marine biologist who claims the clams are raised via aquaculture.

The launch in Chinese Sam's Club outlets of a range of products made with the clams, packaged by Dandong Taihong Food Co., part of the Taihong Food Group, has been hailed by both MSC and the China Aquatic Products Processing and Marketing Association (CAPPMA) as a model for the sustainable development of Chinese fisheries. They have said the company deserves credit for its work in improving management of the fishery, which is located in the Yalu River estuary on the border between China and North Korea.

In an MSC press release, Xing Lianhong, president of Taihong Food Group, described five years of work that went into securing MSC certification of the and said the certification had improved the sustainability of the Manila clam fishery.

"Obtaining the MSC certification is the best way that we can demonstrate our commitment towards sustainability. This is a tremendous achievement for Taihong and for all people who participated in this program. This certification will definitely help us to improve our management and strengthen

the market linkage with both international and local market,” Lianhong said when the fishery was initially certified in September 2021. “Ongoing certification of this fishery will mean that everyone involved can have confidence in its sustainability, safeguarding this precious resource and the marine environment for future generations. It also means that its Manila clams can be sold with the blue MSC label, creating new market opportunities and responding to growing international demand for sustainable seafood products.

But Chinese marine biologist Songlin Wang has called into question the appropriateness of the certification, claiming the fishery is an aquaculture operation rather than a wild fishery. Wang told SeafoodSource he doesn’t believe the MSC’s certification of the fishery is appropriate.

“All the MSC-certified manila clams in Dandong [the northern Yellow Sea] are introduced mainly from hatcheries in Fujian – the southern East China Sea – and the ‘fishing ground’ is legally defined as an aquaculture zone by local government,” Wang said. “The MSC claim is misleading consumers, as most would understand MSC as ‘sustainably wild-caught.’”

It’s not the first time that MSC certifications of Chinese clam fisheries have drawn scrutiny. In 2012, a letter written by the China office of WWF to verification consultancy Intertek Moody’s pointed out potential problems with the sustainability in local waters of a yesso scallop fishery run by Zoneco Aquatic. The certification has since been canceled.

The WWF letter pointed out that “the Sea of Japan, where the Japanese scallop is natively distributed, and the Yellow Sea, where the Japanese scallop has been introduced, are two different eco-regions.”

Sam’s Club, a unit of Walmart, has been an enthusiastic partner of MSC in China, and has steadily increased the percentage of its seafood range that is MSC-certified.

Neither Taihong Food Group nor the Marine Stewardship Council responded to SeafoodSource's request for comment.

*Photo courtesy of Marine Stewardship Council*



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