

Erasmus University



Rabobank and WWF (B): **Partnering Dynamics behind** the Scenes







Introduction

Gusts of November wind lashed the faces of fishermen on the southern coast of Chile in 2019. The city of Puerto Montt, 900 kilometers south of Santiago, belonged to the second largest salmon production area in the world, a place that was also home to the endemic Chilean Dolphin and a thriving population of blue whale in the Pacific Ocean. This pristine region, surrounded by mountains, lakes and fjords, was one of the few places in the world where salmon bred naturally, and it was the reason why the Chilean salmon industry had grown exponentially since its beginnings in the early 1980s.

The expansion of this industry, however, had brought about environmental and social consequences. Feed and fish waste increased water pollution, inadequate planning and siting created poor environmental and social outcomes for many local fishermen, fish escapes and disease likely harmed endemic species, and insufficient engagement with local communities in the vicinity of salmon farms often created frustration and led to an overall bad reputation of salmon companies.

These concerns had been addressed since 2011 through a unique partnership between the Dutch bank Rabobank and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Chile. Brenda de Swart, head of sustainability at Rabobank Chile, and Ricardo Bosshard, director of WWF Chile, were the two visible faces of this partnership for sustainable salmon farming that had lasted already for nearly a decade.

Nevertheless, by 2020 challenges still remained in the Chilean salmon sector, such as to improve the companies' environmental standards, to expand the number of certified sustainable farms, and to further encourage salmon producers to take into account the interests of local communities. All of these remained points of attention for the partnership, but the majority of effort went toward empowering the culturally, economically and demographically diverse local communities to reach out to the salmon companies. How could Rabobank, WWF and the salmon producers further strengthen their partnership to create positive environmental impact? How could the parties improve their social engagement and empower the local communities to become more proactive stakeholders?

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This case is part of the RSM Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) case series. It is based on field research and is written to provide material for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a management situation.

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Chile and the Salmon Industry

In 2019 the United Nations (UN) estimated that the world's population would grow from 7.7 billion at that time to 9.7 billion in 2050. Although 70% of the Earth's surface is covered by ocean, only 5% of the protein sources for human consumption were produced there. The UN foresaw that if per capita consumption stayed constant and population increased, the demand for protein would double in the next decades. A shortage of land-based protein production options highlighted the importance of expanding sea-based protein sources and supply, with salmon aquaculture (see Appendix 1 of Case A) having much to offer.

The largest farmed salmon producers in the world in 2019 were Norway, Chile, the United Kingdom, and North America (Exhibit 1).

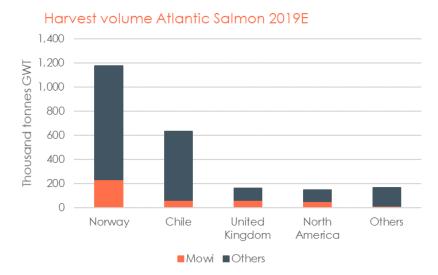


Exhibit 1. World harvest volume of Atlantic salmon 2019

Source: Salmon Farming Industry Handbook 2019, Mowi ASA Note: Mowi (Norwegian) was the largest salmon production company in the world.

In 2019, Chile was the second largest producer of farmed salmon after Norway. According to the Central Bank of Chile the country exported 829,000 tons in 2018 to 70 different locations, mainly the USA, Japan and Brazil, for an equivalent of US\$ 5,157 million.² The salmon sector was a very consolidated industry, with more than 1,000 salmon production licenses issued in 2018, but 90% of the production was done by 15 companies. Salmon was a key component of the Chilean economy, being the second most exported product after copper. The sector employed approximately 70,000 people in the bays of the three most southern Chilean regions: Los Lagos, Aysén, and Magallanes (Exhibit 2).

However, an array of environmental disasters that had occurred since the beginnings of salmon production in the late 1980s until just before the time of this case had badly

damaged the industry's reputation. In 2016, the El Niño weather phenomenon³ hit the south coast of Chile, which raised the ocean temperature and seemingly intensified the red tide^a to unprecedented levels, leading to high fish mortality. At the same time, 9,000 tons of dead salmon were allowed to be dumped into the sea of Chiloé, which created contamination at sea that impeded local fishermen from harvesting and selling their fish. This created a subsequent social and economic crisis of unemployment in the Los Lagos region. In 2018 the escape of 900,000 salmon from breeding cages due to a heavy storm likely caused serious but unknown environmental problems for native species in the surroundings. Other critical environmental and social issues for which salmon companies were frequently criticised were fish well-being and mortality, fish feed and nutrition, the use of antibiotics, and the companies' relationship with local communities. All these issues had been progressively addressed by the partnership through sustainable salmon farming.

Agrupaciones de Concesiones de Salmonidos (ACS)

Atacana

PARAGUAY

Volgaraino

Libertario Ceneral

Bernardo O Rigino

Region

Regio

Exhibit 2. Chile and its 16 regions in 2019 (left) and map of salmon farming at Los Lagos and Aysén regions in 2014 (right)

Source: wikipedia.org (left) and WWF Chile (right)

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^a Phenomenon caused by numerous algal bloom that discolor coastal waters, deplete them from oxygen and release toxins that may cause illness in humans and other animals.

The Salmon Industry and Sustainable Development

The Sustainable Development Goals⁴ (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations (UN) member states in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoyed peace and prosperity by 2030. There were 17 integrated SDGs, together indicating that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. The salmon industry was closely linked to SDG 14, Life Below Water.

SDG 14 aimed to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The UN published the progress of this goal⁵ in 2019 as follows: "The expansion of protected areas for marine biodiversity and existing policies and treaties that encourage responsible use of ocean resources are still insufficient to combat the adverse effects of overfishing, growing ocean acidification due to climate change and worsening coastal eutrophication^b. As billions of people depend on oceans for their livelihood and food source and on the transboundary nature of oceans, increased efforts and interventions are needed to conserve and sustainably use ocean resources at all levels."

Two worldwide initiatives had been launched towards the sustainable production of salmon: The Global Salmon Initiative (GSI)⁶ and the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)⁷. The GSI was a leadership initiative by a group of CEOs from Norway, Chile and Scotland. Launched in 2013, its goal was to improve sustainability, cooperation and transparency in the salmon sector. It had 17 member companies and operations in eight countries, representing approximately 50% of the global farmed salmon sector. They focused on four main areas: promoting high environmental and social standards (ASC certification, see below), sustainable fish feed, biosecurity (disease management), and transparency of the salmon sector. As of November 2019, more than 600,000 tons of GSI production was environmentally certified worldwide. "By agreeing to work pre-competitively to mitigate environmental impacts, the GSI will help push the entire industry toward sustainability at a much quicker rate than would otherwise be possible," ⁸ said Jason Clay, senior vice president of market transformation at WWF.

The ASC was founded in 2010 by WWF and IDH (Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative) as an independent non-profit organisation. ASC was the world's leading certification and labelling programme for sustainably farmed seafood. Its primary role was to manage the global standards for responsible aquaculture. ASC worked with aquaculture producers, seafood processors, retail and food service companies, scientists, conservation groups and consumers to monitor and safeguard the environmental and social integrity of their sea-based food production. As of 2019, 27% of the global farmed salmon volume and 31% of the Chilean farmed salmon volume was ASC certified⁹ (Exhibit 3).

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^b Eutrophication is when a body of water becomes overly enriched with minerals and nutrients, thereby causing an excessive growth of algae that reduces oxygen availability in the water.

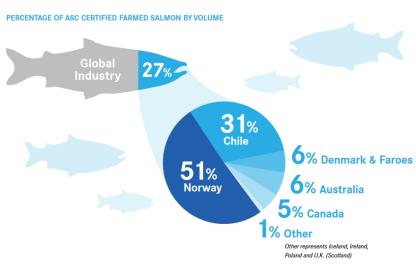


Exhibit 3. ASC certified farmed salmon volume in 2019

Source: www.seachoice.org

According to SalmonChile,¹⁰ which represented 80% of Chile's salmon producers, Chilean salmon companies had been certifying their production simultaneously with several different international standards besides ASC, to comply with production quality and to improve the sustainability and positioning of the sector. In 2018, 68% of Chilean salmon was produced to BAP (Best Aquaculture Practices) standards and 43% to Global GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) standards.

Rabobank and WWF in Chile: Partnering for sustainable salmon farming

Rabobank and WWF joined forces in 2006 in the Netherlands to accelerate the transition towards a more sustainable economy. Without knowing it yet, in 2006 they were already promoting the UN's Sustainable Development Goal number $17^{\rm c}$, which sought to encourage and promote effective cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development.

Following their global partnership agreement signed in March 2011, Rabobank Chile and WWF Chile sat together to start working towards sustainable salmon farming. Never before had a bank and an environmental NGO done this in Chile, and as such they had to find a common language to communicate. Ricardo Bosshard, director of WWF Chile, explained that they wanted to influence the banking sector to redirect the finance stream towards environmentally and socially responsible businesses. "Rabobank was interested [in working with WWF] because it is a cooperative, but it was not easy to work with a bank. WWF's business is to change bad environmental practices, and the banks' business is to lend money. So, we started thinking how we could make the bank understand us."

^c The UN recognises multi-stakeholder partnerships as important vehicles for mobilising and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries.

Quickly after the first meetings, Rabobank stated that a third party – their salmon farmer clients – should be at the table, too. WWF did not agree with this, because it was not the way in which they were used to working. WWF typically identified a problem, sat with a scientist to design a neat mitigation strategy, and then let the producers know what to do. Rabobank, in turn, said they could not continue without the input of their clients, and so the three parties, including technical managers and CEOs of salmon companies, began sitting together at meetings that could last up to two days. "For us, Rabobank's clients were our threats. At the beginning the meetings were very uncomfortable, I thought some people would run away," commented Bosshard with a smile. "Commercial people from Rabobank were scared that their clients would not like this. But, surprisingly, the most confident were the salmon producers themselves. The fact that the bank was present gave them financial reassurance, and they trusted that the bank would provide a buffer against WWF's asking too much of them. So, it was a really virtuous condition to start talking."

Brenda de Swart, head of sustainability at Rabobank Chile, explained that the project had been supervised for a long time from Rabobank's headquarters in the Netherlands because there they already had expertise from many years of working with different NGOs and of participating in green funds for sustainable investments. Rabobank Chile, on the contrary, did not have any experience in working with NGOs, and talking about sustainability with their clients was also new for them. While Rabobank Netherlands had worked with NGOs in line with its cooperative DNA to drive societal change, the difference with its Chilean counterpart was that up until 2011 Rabobank Chile had never considered working directly through and with its clients to drive transformational change, and thus the challenges faced by the Chilean salmon sector offered Rabobank Chile new insights and opportunities.

"Input was requested from our customers," said de Swart, "which was a very good move from Rabobank because NGOs work very much by imposing what they thought companies should do. But that's not how we work. We do nothing without consulting our customers. With us it is about positive customer intimacy, about what must be guaranteed in such a project, what the customers actually needs in the end." Bosshard added that the strategy that came out of those meetings was a great success because the producers accepted it from day one. All parties slowly got to know each other, showing and discussing their objectives and doubts. "It was a change in the way WWF was used to thinking and working. We saved ourselves perhaps three years of work, and we established a baseline of trust," he concluded.

A Partnership in Four Acts

The partnership was developed in four phases over a period of six years. The first phase started in 2011, when the partners co-wrote a white paper that explored their respective positions and objectives on key issues in the salmon industry. WWF wanted to see change among the salmon producers so they could protect ecosystems, Rabobank wanted to see lower risks of societal complaint or environmental destruction, and the salmon companies wanted access to credit at affordable rates

and ways to open new markets. The paper focused on common goals for the three parties, such as: production and market development; risk assessment and sharing; biodiversity conservation; habitat destruction mitigation; pollution mitigation; acknowledging and addressing the social impacts of aquaculture; interaction with local communities, indigenous people and local fishermen; and knowledge sharing through workshops, conferences and events.

In 2012, at the beginning of the second phase, ASC certification for responsibly farmed seafood was introduced and adopted by WWF and Rabobank as the leading certification for the Chilean salmon industry. WWF developed tools for the producers to address those ASC criteria (Exhibit 4) and launched a project of biodiversity, in which they tested hydrophones and buoys to monitor the Chilean Dolphin and created mitigation measures towards the impact on blue whales. Other tools developed were the determination of social criteria, a risk-sharing instrument for the migration of farmed salmon out of lakes, evaluations by the ASC of production and markets, training on and assessment of environmental and social risks, and a strategy to communicate the lessons learned. The first salmon producer to certify one of its farms to ASC standards in Chile was Cermaq in 2014. In October that year, the GSI showed significant advancement towards sustainable salmon farming in its first sustainability report, ¹¹ launched in 2014 in Puerto Montt.

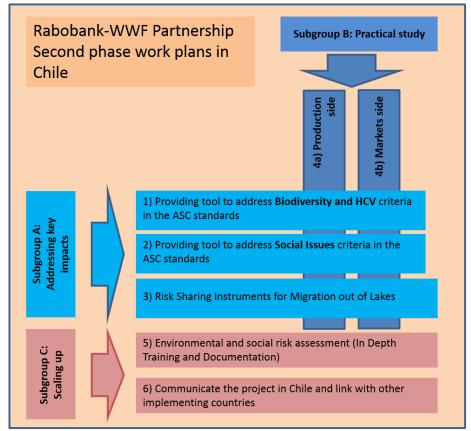


Exhibit 4. Rabobank-WWF Chile partnership plan 2012

Source: WWF Chile

The third phase of the partnership started in 2015 when a public-private agreement about clean production (APL, Acuerdo de Producción Limpia¹²) was signed between the Chilean government, scientific institutions, civil society and salmon companies. The aim of the agreement was the conservation of blue whales and other large cetaceans in the Los Lagos and Aysén regions, and to foster the implementation of sustainable farming and mitigation practices in the salmon sector. The Chilean Minister of Economy at the time, Luis Felipe Céspedes, highlighted "the undersigned salmon companies that have committed themselves to acquiring environmentally and socially sustainable production practices and that progressively certify their production centers at Patagonia Norte as fulfilling ASC standards." WWF developed a questionnaire which was used in the risk assessments of salmon companies to evaluate their sustainable business development and to identify sustainable business opportunities.

After six years of continued work, Rabobank and WWF entered a new phase. They began to focus their partnership on the social aspect of the salmon sector. Together with the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), they implemented a social toolkit (Appendix 2) of responsible relationships between salmon companies and communities in 2017, so that the industry could effectively address the social standards of the ASC label. Cristina Torres, marine programme manager at WWF Chile, explained that achieving ASC certification also meant changing the ways in which companies related to the local communities around the farms. "The social toolkit is a package of approaches, systems, guidelines and practical tools, including training sessions, that served as a resource to guide consistent and effective engagement with communities."

Brenda de Swart commented that Rabobank supported the salmon companies with workshops about the social toolkit for more than a year, explaining why it was important to use it and asking for commitment from all companies involved. The companies responded positively, made public commitments towards social action, did a number of pilots with local communities, and nine of the companies decided to continue working with the CBI at their own expense in the future. "The relationship with communities was a big problem for the companies because it affected their reputation. We have tackled that as a partnership, and this is of enormous importance to the companies. The social toolkit has been used, and it has actually started to take on a life of its own. It has even been given a sequel. So, we are very happy to have been a trigger for positive change within the companies," de Swart said.

The partnership agreement had been extended annually since its initial expiry in 2017. In 2019, the parties continued to work on a new contract called Partnership 2.0. In this new agreement, commented de Swart, the partners would look much closer into the KPIs (key performance indicators), the impact measurement, what the parties wanted to achieve, and what the deeper purpose of the partnership was.

The Impact of Partnering for Sustainability

In April 2019, another result of the partnership came to fruition with a green loan¹⁴ granted by Rabobank and having the environmental and social standards set by WWF. The giant food holding, Agrosuper, signed this green loan with Rabobank to buy AquaChile, the main salmon company of the country and the second largest producer in the world after Norway's Mowi. The loan was the first of its kind in Chile, and it was set in a seven-year agreement with several green conditions, such as a commitment to reduce antibiotic use, increase the number of ASC certifications, and implement an aquaculture improvement programme. Agrosuper, and therefore AquaChile, was aiming to have all its salmon farms ASC-certified in the short term to offer a more transparent view of the farm's impact on biodiversity and the nearby ecosystems. "Agrosuper is committed to the future sustainability of our aquaculture business. What we have achieved and what we are working on is important to us, but it also improves the quality and reputation of Chile's farmed salmon and the global seafood market," affirmed Rafael Prieto, head of corporate sustainability and affairs at Agrosuper.

Ricardo Bosshard added: "Rabobank asked us, WWF, to define the social and environmental criteria and key performance indicators (KPIs) for the green loan, and there, among others, we introduced the request to move [salmon production] away from lakes. This is the work that finally led to AquaChile closing its salmon production in lakes this year." In June 2019, Sady Delgado, CEO of AquaChile, announced that the company had invested US\$ 35 million in land infrastructure to close all of its lake-based production centers in Chile, with the objective to protect those waters. "We believe that fish can grow much stronger and healthier by doing aquaculture on land. The impact on lakes is very hard to measure and can last a very long time... We used to have 22% of production coming from lakes, but today that is 0%. There's no AquaChile salmon in any lake in Chile anymore." 15

Another advancement towards sustainable salmon farming was made known in May 2019, when SalmonChile publicised a 23% reduction in the use of antibiotics in the sector. "This is the largest reduction in the past four years, and we are delighted with the result," 16 said Arturo Clément, executive director of SalmonChile. "It is difficult to say when we will be able to stop using antibiotics altogether, although there is a target date of 2025, but the fact that the trend is continuing downwards is good news." Sady Delgado commented that AquaChile was working towards this goal: "The amount of antibiotics can be reduced by using vaccination, investing in genetics, in nutrition, in biosecurity, in productive models. It will be the consequence of a productive model that takes five years to build."

Towards a Sustainable Future

For Rabobank Chile, WWF Chile, and the salmon companies, the partnership had been successful and powerful in its results, pushing the Chilean salmon industry towards sustainability in a way that did not exist 10 years ago. In 2019, there was an increased awareness of the environmental and social impacts of salmon farming among

companies, salmon workers and Rabobank's workers, and there was an underlying perception of WWF as an ally towards their common sustainable goals. Additionally, WWF had achieved increased influence in the protection of the ecosystems within the Los Lagos, Aysén and Magallanes regions.

"Rabobank wants to achieve impact in society on the issue of sufficient sustainably produced and healthy food for the growing world population," said Brenda de Swart, "but we cannot do this alone. By joining our forces with WWF, we successfully managed to bring sustainability topics on the agenda of the management and into the boards of the Chilean salmon companies." Ricardo Bosshard agreed, affirming that the partnership had changed them all: "The partnership changed the way we worked by forcing us to find common ground with producers and the bank at the beginning of the project... Partnerships are the future, but the irony is that the more different the organisations are, the more potential there is for a bigger gain, but at the same time the more challenging it will be to implement them... The only way you know you've been part of a true partnership is if both parties come out different than when they went into the partnership."

Sady Delgado, representing the main Chilean salmon producer, was also positive about the joint work. "The partnership between WWF and Rabobank was a pioneering initiative. We want it to be expanded in time, and hopefully other banks and other NGOs will join this collaborative way of working, so we can learn much faster from today's success." SalmonChile had a promising view about the future as well, reporting the best biological indicators in the industry's history, with salmon mortality rates down and harvest rates up, as shown in the sustainability report of the Chilean salmon industry 2018 (Appendix 3). Arturo Clément said: "Salmon in Chile is being farmed to consistently high standards, using best practice, lowering stocking densities, higher quality smolts and new strategies to manage sea lice... I believe that with the conservative, stable growth that is planned for the industry, we can have a sustainable future."

Even though the partnering process seemed smooth, the real collaboration between partners did not lack its ups and downs, where concepts like 'accountability' and 'learning' became essential components of a robust partnership. In 2017, the Partnership Resource Centre (PrC) at the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM) and the Impact Centre Erasmus, both of Erasmus University Rotterdam, made a final evaluation of the Rabobank-WWF partnership. The evaluation¹⁷ pointed out that the partnership created knowledge, built expertise, raised awareness and changed attitudes, but it also experienced several challenges throughout its different stages: tension between global ambitions and local execution, building trust between very different organisations, difficulty in getting client commitment, and a lack of resources for upscaling. In the evaluation, both Rabobank Chile and WWF Chile reported that building trust wasn't easy. "It was time consuming to learn to work together and to develop a common language. It also took time to trust experts on both sides to make the right decisions and to find the right moments for company involvement, communication and outreach."

In 2019, both Rabobank and WWF agreed that the main challenge remaining for the partnership was to develop a local toolkit, one that empowered the local communities to reach out to the salmon companies. "We wish the communities to have a constructive dialogue with the companies. They have to have the right tools on both sides to create a win-win situation for both. And that is what we are doing now. There is a lot of confidence indeed, and you have to start with a number of pilots and scale up. You cannot go to all communities at the same time because they are all different," said Brenda de Swart.

In October 2019, Chile experienced the beginning of a social crisis¹⁸ that led to massive protests against inequality throughout the country. Salmon companies were hit hard by the protests as well. Ricardo Bosshard remarked that salmon companies had not paid sufficient attention to the social aspect in their territory and that creating employment was not enough. "The social strategy is a pending point for the partnership. It was a two-fold project: to give companies the tools to interact with the communities [toolkit developed in 2017] and to give local communities the tools to reach back to the companies. Communities need valid representatives to interact with companies, and that toolkit is what we are trying to develop. With the social situation we are living through today in Chile, this is more important than ever. We look for constructive discussions in the territories where companies operate. We need to achieve virtuous consensual relationships."

Addressing the social aspects of the Chilean salmon industry more deeply was one of the main pending points of the partnership, in addition to fostering the expansion of sustainable practices in quantity and quality for the benefit of the surrounding marine environment, the communities inhabiting the vicinity, and the workforce of the salmon companies themselves. The partners were willing to keep working together to strengthen and deepen their relationship towards progress and a sustainable future for all.

Appendix 1: Timeline of the partnership supporting the Chilean sustainable salmon farming

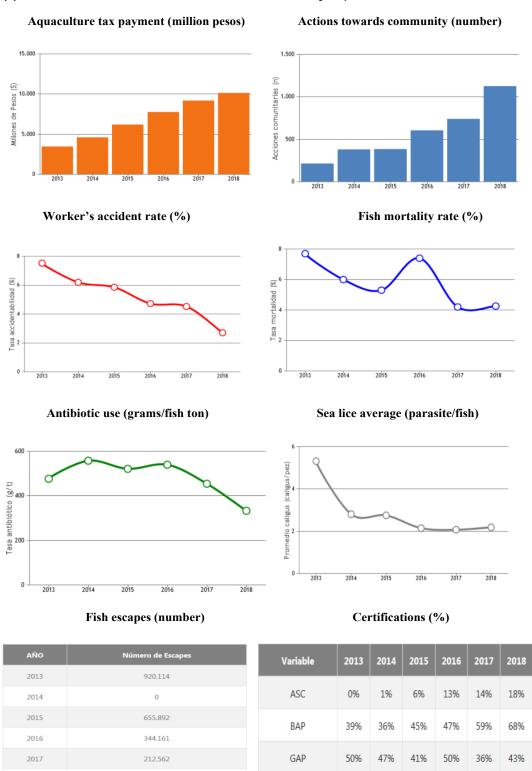
- 2011 Partnership contract signed between Rabobank and WWF in the Netherlands
- 2011 Rabobank Chile and WWF Chile begin working towards sustainable salmon farming
- 2011 White paper (baseline for Rabobank-WWF Chile partnership)
- 2012 Chilean salmon industry recovers from ISA virus that affected the sector in 2008
- 2012 WWF promotes ASC certification in Chile
- 2013 Creation of the Global Salmon Initiative (GSI)
- 2014 GSI launches first sustainability report in Puerto Montt, Chile
- 2014 First salmon producer ASC certified is Cermag, Chile
- 2015 Public-private agreement to protect blue whales and foster sustainable salmon farming
- 2015 WWF develops KPIs for salmon companies to comply with ASC standards
- 2016 Weather phenomenon El Niño affects Chilean salmon industry
- 2017 Implementation of a social toolkit with the Consensus Building Institute (CBI)
- 2017 Partnership contract expires and is renewed annually
- 2018 Salmon companies decide to continue working with the CBI on social issues
- 2019 31% of Chilean salmon volume is ASC certified
- 2019 SalmonChile announces a 23% reduction in the use of antibiotics in the Chilean salmon sector
- 2019 Green loan for salmon business granted by Rabobank and assessed by WWF
- 2019 Chile's largest salmon producer, AquaChile, announces the end of salmon production in lakes in Chile
- 2019 Rabobank and WWF continue to work in Partnership 2.0, with a focus on a toolkit for local communities



Appendix 2: Brochure of the social toolkit 2017

 $Source: \underline{https://seafoodsustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/WWF-ASC-Farmed-Salmon-Social-Toolkit.pdf}$

Appendix 3: Section of SalmonChile sustainability report 2018



Total certificado

77%

73%

69%

69%

74%

84%

47.216

2018

Endnotes

¹ https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_10KevFindings.pdf

² https://www.eldesconcierto.cl/2019/04/05/salmones-en-chile-historias-de-una-industria-polemica-y-millonaria/

³ https://news.mongabay.com/2016/10/the-salmon-crisis-in-chiles-chiloe-island/

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⁵ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg14

⁶ https://globalsalmoninitiative.org/files/documents/GSI_govt-apr23-2019_210x297_ENG.pdf

⁷ https://www.asc-aqua.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ASC_flyer_Need-for_MQ_20nov.pdf

⁸ https://globalsalmoninitiative.org/en/what-is-the-gsi/

⁹ https://www.seachoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Seachoice-ASC-Global-Review-Summary-Online.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.salmonchile.cl/en/home/

¹¹ https://globalsalmoninitiative.org/en/news/global-salmon-initiative-launches-its-first-progress-report-at-aquasur-2014/

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¹³ https://seafoodsustainability.org/supporting-socially-responsible-farmed-salmon-in-chile/

¹⁴ https://thefishsite.com/articles/a-decision-that-could-reshape-the-salmon-market-globally

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¹⁶ https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/aquaculture/antibiotic-use-down-for-fourth-year-in-a-row-in-chile-s-salmon-sector

¹⁷ https://www.rsm.nl/about-rsm/news/detail/12784-rabobank-wwf-partnership-evaluated-by-prc-and-impact-centre-erasmus/

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