Title: Aquaculture Certification and the Seafood Trade

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Abstract: The rapid growth in aquaculture production over the last three decades has been one of the fruits of globalisation, as tropical countries have exploited their comparative advantage in the production of high value crops like penaeid shrimp. However, aquaculture is heavily concentrated in coastal areas and it has generated important externalities such as habitat destruction and pollution. This has resulted in much self-inflicted damage, particularly as a result of disease epidemics, and big swings in the fortunes of aquaculture industries in different countries. To an extent, disease problems have now been brought under control by improvements in management and technology, but there are still many threats to sustainable growth in the trade of farmed fish and shellfish. Apart from environmentally unsustainable practices, these threats include: trade barriers resulting from protectionist measures taken, for example, by catfish farmers and shrimp fishers in the USA; food safety scares, e.g. chloramphenicol and melamine contamination; reaction to worker rights issues, e.g. the US government TIP 2008 report highlighting abuse of Burmese refugees in seafood plants; concerns about aquaculture impacts on local communities, e.g. the blocking of traditional access rights, and; consumer concerns over animal welfare. To a greater or lesser degree, aquaculture certification can mitigate all of these threats. The dissemination and implementation of written aquaculture standards and best aquaculture practices, reinforced by independent 3rd part certification, can accelerate the adoption of improved management practices and can address environmental and market concerns, making seafood trade more predictable, and less subject to external shocks.