


# Patagonian Scallop



DATE CERTIFIED	8 December 2006
SPECIES	Patagonian scallop <i>Zygochlamys patagonica</i>
FISHING METHOD	Otter trawl
COUNTRY	Argentina
LOCATION	

The South Atlantic Ocean, within the Argentine continental shelf stretching from the border with Uruguay (in the north) to an imaginary line drawn between the Malvinas Islands and Tierra del Fuego (in the south)

FISHERY TONNAGE 45,000 tonnes

MOST FISHERIES HAVE a history of exploitation behind them, but this one began with a clean slate in 1996 when it was set up as a kind of living experiment in sustainability that could be studied scientifically. Throughout the previous year, the vessel Erin Bruce had completed 15 surveys, authorised by the Argentine government, to evaluate stocks and assess the commercial viability of a scallop fishery in these waters. Then, in January 1996, the government approved the application by two fishing companies for permits to harvest Patagonian scallops in Argentina, under a legal regulation requiring the fishery to be developed in a way that followed the best scientific advice.

“It has been a great opportunity to study a fishery from zero,” says Eduardo Gonzalez Lemmi, President of Glaciar Pesquera SA, one of the two companies (each with two freezer-trawlers) licensed to harvest and process scallops. From the outset, bycatch, mortality and the impact of trawl gear on seabed ecosystems were studied, using 100 per cent observer coverage. “Every time the fleet sails, there is a scientist on board,” Gonzalez Lemmi confirms.

### Modified sustainable practices

On other issues, too, the fishery is progressive. Trawling takes place only in areas where the bottom is known to be flat and featureless. “Ninety-nine per cent of it is sand and mud,” Gonzalez Lemmi says – a habitat less likely to be damaged by gear. The net is towed for only ten minutes, limiting the time in which mortalities can occur – and under size scallops are returned to the water alive within two or three minutes, maximising their chances of survival. Bycatch, too, is “often alive and active after passing through the capture and sorting processes,” the MSC certifiers found. Finally, scallops can only be retained if their shell height is 55mm or more (they are sexually mature at 40mm), protecting future stock. “Normally with this species, most are caught after the first spawning,” Gonzalez Lemmi says. “They then

spawn again at 44mm to 48mm. When we catch them at 55mm, they have already spawned three times. That is a phenomenal assurance of sustainability.”

### MSC certification adds expertise

From the outset, the Argentine Federal Fisheries Council showed “enormous commitment” to strong research, monitoring the scallop biomass in order to develop best management practice. Given all this, how has MSC certification helped? “It obliged us to go even deeper,” Gonzalez Lemmi says. “The level of expertise brought in by the MSC certifier was impressive. These are number one scientists from around the world, recognised people who know what they are talking about. That helped create a positive environment for professional discussion, not ego discussion.”

### New markets

The main gain, however, has been commercial. “We now receive requests from customers in Europe, especially France, that we never expected,” Gonzalez Lemmi says. “That is because of the MSC logo, which is an independent recognition of our sustainable policy and responsible behaviour. For us, it is a big advantage.”

That benefit may grow if the EU lifts its ban on scallops from China, bringing a major player back into the marketplace and requiring other countries to be more resourceful in the way they sell their products. Before the ban, imposed in 1998 after a series of food scares, scallops from China were sold at a price that “did not even cover our costs”, Gonzalez Lemmi says. “We knew there were quality issues in China and sustainability would be hard for them to prove,” he explains. “Then, when we heard about the MSC, we realised certification would differentiate us on the issue of sustainability – so we went for it.” Then, ironically, the EU ban kicked in – but Gonzalez Lemmi knew it wouldn’t last forever. “Now, when China comes back, customers will know our product, like our product and have confidence in it because it is MSC-certified. It gives us a strong tool against the competition that hurt our business badly.”

“ The MSC is important to both Young's and our parent group, Foodvest, and its label lends added reassurance to customers as to the sustainability of the fish concerned. We are proud to sell MSC Argentine scallops, which have proved very popular with British consumers ”

Mark Ventress, Category Director, Young's Seafood

