



Certified Occupation

How certification schemes embellish Morocco's
controversial trade in occupied Western Sahara



A truck on its way to pick up tomatoes at one of the plantations near Dakhla.

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Western Sahara Resource Watch (WSRW) is an international organisation based in Brussels.

WSRW, a wholly independent non-governmental organisation, works in solidarity with the people of Western Sahara, researching and campaigning against Morocco's resource plundering of the territory.

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Executive Summary

European consumers trust certification labels to signal responsible production. In occupied Western Sahara, this report shows they do the opposite.

Across Europe, supermarket shelves are stocked with tomatoes and canned sardines carrying respected certification labels. Behind these labels lies a system that helps Moroccan companies operating on occupied land pass as “responsible”, while concealing violations of international law, EU court rulings and basic truth about product origin.

This investigation documents how dozens of international standards and certification bodies enable Moroccan firms in occupied Western Sahara to access the EU market under false country-of-origin claims. Products from a territory that is legally separate and distinct from Morocco are routinely certified, registered and marketed as “Moroccan”. What EU law defines as mislabelling – and in some cases Food Fraud – is built into the certification system itself.

The business model is simple: Moroccan exporters pay for certificates. Certification bodies issue them. Standard owners license them. Everyone gets paid – and when problems emerge, everyone points elsewhere. Auditors blame standards. Standards blame auditors. Both depend financially on the companies they are supposed to control. Almost no one answers questions. None of the 60-odd companies named in this report responded when asked whether they accept that Western Sahara is not part of Morocco.

Certification schemes that claim to prevent Food Fraud actively reproduce false geographical information in their databases and certificates. Even schemes that advertise protection against mislabelling lead European retailers straight into illegality by

presenting Western Sahara as part of Morocco. Retailers, importers and consumers are systematically misled.

Only two actors broke with this pattern. The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) decided to exit Western Sahara entirely, acknowledging the territory requires heightened human-rights due diligence it cannot guarantee. The certifier LSQA also withdrew. All others either defended their practices or remained silent.

The legal aspect is clear. Under international law, the people of Western Sahara – not Morocco – hold sovereign rights over the territory and its natural resources. Ten rulings from the EU Court of Justice confirm that Western Sahara is not part of Morocco, that Saharawi consent is required for economic activity, and that products from the territory must be labelled as such. Certification schemes ignore these rulings at the point where they matter most: on the certificate itself.

Until certification schemes stop certifying occupied land as if it were sovereign Morocco, consumers should treat their labels with extreme caution. If a certification body cannot even state where a facility is geographically located, every other sustainability claim collapses with it.

Products carrying labels such as Global-G.A.P., GMP+, MarinTrust, Friend of the Sea, FSSC 22000, BRCGS, IFS Food or AWS cannot be assumed to be responsibly produced.

In short: what is marketed as “sustainability” or “safety” or “responsibility” today is, in Western Sahara, a compliance theatre that disguises occupation, normalises illegality and launders contested resources into European supply chains.

The Compliance Theatre

You stand in a European supermarket and hold a can of sardines or a water melon in your hand. The product carries a colourful label - a certificate - indicating that the product is “sustainably” or “responsibly” made. Don’t trust the label.

Any product carrying the labels of IFS Food, MarinTrust, Friend of the Sea, GlobalG.A.P (or GGN), GMP+, FSSC 22000, BRCGS, AWS should not be purchased. This report documents the extent to which these organisations fail to respond to questions about very basic errors undertaken on their certificates, websites or registries. The organisations also mislead consumers about the location of the entities in their registries.

The certification schemes and standards are deliberately aiding and benefiting from Moroccan industries in occupied Western Sahara that are by its core irresponsible.

The structure is impenetrable. To the extent that they actually respond, they blame each other for the grave mistakes committed.

Why certifying?

There are strong commercial incentives for fish exporters and agricultural companies to seek certification. Most importantly, certification is often a prerequisite for access to international markets, as many retailers and importers require certified products as a condition of purchase. For example, a 2023 report by the Norwegian Support Committee for Western Sahara showed that nearly all major aquaculture companies in Norway rely on certification schemes in their sourcing of fish feed.¹ Certification reduces legal and reputational risks for buyers, strengthens consumer trust, improves access to supermarket shelves, and can secure higher prices and longer-term contracts. For exporters, certification also helps navigate complex regulatory regimes in

the EU and other high-standard markets, reducing the risk of inspections, delays or border rejections. Internally, it promotes improved management, traceability and record-keeping. It also serves as a defensive shield in public controversies, allowing companies to point to third-party verification. Increasingly, certification is also essential for access to finance, as banks and investors rely on certified compliance in their due diligence.

Misleading on origin

“Food Fraud” occurs when consumers are given false information about a product’s origin or content. A clear example is when products originating in one country are disguised as coming from another.

Such cases of Food Fraud are openly facilitated by companies whose very purpose is to prevent them. Tools and databases used by EU companies to verify origin information routinely display incorrect country data and refuse to correct known errors. As a result, even retailers seeking to comply with EU law are misled by the very systems designed to assist them. In the case of Western Sahara, under Moroccan occupation, all accompanying certificates reproduce the same false country-of-origin information.

The certificates are paid for by the very actors involved in the injustice: Moroccan exporters and their European business partners active in fisheries and agriculture. Almost none of the companies that publicly promote these certificates are willing to answer questions about them. Two particularly problematic clusters of certification stand out: those relating to food safety and food quality, and those addressing responsibility, environmental and sustainability claims. The certification standards seem unbothered by the principles of international law – and ten rulings of the EU Court of Justice concluding that

Western Sahara is not part of Morocco, that Saharawis are to issue their consent, and that products from Western Sahara must be labelled as such – not as “Morocco”.

Under international law, an occupying power must respect the sovereign rights of the people under occupation over their territory and natural resources. Besides, the preservation of fish stocks and fossil water resources is clearly in the long-term interest of a people under occupation. Yet, in Western Sahara, today’s certification practices serve export-oriented companies of the occupying power without the consent of the Saharawi people and even misname the territory itself in clear violation of its separate and distinct status. The industries are almost entirely controlled by Moroccan interests, and serve the Moroccan government’s settlement policies of the territory.

Against this backdrop, the role of certification companies – many of them European – in facilitating this trade is deeply problematic. Certification is meant to assure legal compliance, safety and sustainability. Yet by systematically locating facilities in the wrong country, these schemes undermine the very legal frameworks they are meant to uphold.

If basic geographical facts are incorrect, the credibility of all other assessed sustainability indicators must be called into question. Said in another way: if the standard organisations are not able to explain where a certified company is located, all other aspects of the certificate appear rather shallow.

The Certification Structure

Certification involves several layers of responsibility. **First**, the standard owner develops and maintains the standard and is responsible for safeguarding its integrity. **Second**, certification bodies operate under licence from the standard owner and are tasked with conducting

independent audits. **Third**, certified companies are responsible for complying with the requirements of the standard.

In addition to these actors, certification bodies are themselves subject to oversight by national accreditation bodies, which assess their technical competence and impartiality. These national accreditation bodies are, in turn, linked through international networks that ensure mutual recognition and harmonisation across countries.

Limited information is available on how much the certification industry earns from certifying Moroccan exporters operating in the occupied territory. Sources suggest quite differing price ranges.² Initial audits are typically costly, followed by lower annual fees. Fees vary by scheme, facility size and scope. The exporting company pays the certification body, which in turn transfers a portion of the fee to the standard owner. MarinTrust is among the schemes that have the fee structure easily found on its website.³

In this way, all actors benefit financially: Moroccan companies gain access to EU markets, while certification bodies and standard owners profit from fees – while overlooking the fact that the facilities are not located in Morocco. The entire certification structure is thus financially sustained by companies operating in an occupied territory, while issuing certificates that contain false geographical information and, as we shall see, enable the circumvention of EU country-of-origin rules.

Not responding

WSRW identified **31 Moroccan companies** operating in occupied Western Sahara that hold – or claim to hold – one or more certificates. All certificates reviewed incorrectly listed the place of operation as Morocco. The companies were identified through searches of corporate websites and social media,

as well as through enquiries in several publicly accessible registries maintained by the standards themselves. Each company was found to hold between one and eight certificates.

In addition, **12 European** importers were identified as relying on these certificates for products sourced from Western Sahara, or as claiming certification themselves.

During the course of the research, WSRW contacted **nine standards and 14 certification bodies**. The report covers schemes addressing sustainability, water use, food safety and legal compliance in farming, fisheries and production processes. It was not always possible to determine which certification body had carried out the compliance audits.

None of the Moroccan companies – all contacted by WSRW over the past year – responded to questions concerning their certification. Of the 12 importers, only two replied. The response rate among certification bodies was slightly higher, with around half providing a reply.

Only three of the nine standards and certification schemes responded to WSRW’s enquiries, despite each non-responsive standard receiving up to four reminders.

During the preparation of this report, one standard and one certification body announced their withdrawal from the territory, while GLOBALG.A.P. and GMP+ International defended their continued engagement. Friend of the Sea, MarinTrust, Alliance for Water Stewardship, BRCGS, IFS Food and FSSC did not respond to WSRW’s questions.

Controversies

Certificates are used to normalise international law violations

- Exporting, trading and importing companies use the certifications to

embellish a controversial trade. The certifications are generally presented on websites, in marketing material and sustainability reports.

Failure to address legal compliance

- Standards do not distinguish between “de facto” control and legal sovereignty, leading to validation of governance structures established under occupation. Standards that require legal compliance generally reference Moroccan law for operations located in Western Sahara. None offer reasoning for applying the law of the occupying power, outside of the territory of Morocco. “Morocco is currently administrating this region”, the Swiss certifying body SGS responded.
- None of the 60-odd companies mentioned in this study has answered the question as to whether they agree with the International Court of Justice, the EU Court of Justice, the United Nations, The African Court on People’s and Human Rights that Western Sahara is not part of the Moroccan territory.
- None of the standards or certifying bodies have answered questions as to whether the Saharawi people have given consent to resource use, despite consent being central to the CJEU rulings on Western Sahara. None of the reviewed companies refer to the Saharawi people’s right to self-determination.
- Some standards require engagement with “local authorities” or “local stakeholders”. In occupied territories, such requirements are deeply problematic, because they are reinforcing structures that maintain the occupation.

False information on certificates

- Every single certificate, and every single filing of establishments or sites in the registries of all standards in this report have filed Western Sahara addresses in the wrong country. This applies to all locations in Dakhla, El Aaiún and Boujdour, and contradicts the UN position and the CJEU rulings that Western Sahara is a territory separate and distinct from Morocco.
- Several certificates refer to Western Sahara waters as part of Morocco’s EEZ. As described later, this is factually incorrect, according to the CJEU.
- No standard, certification body, or involved company has corrected the false geographical description of company facilities in Western Sahara after being contacted by WSRW, whether on certificates, in databases, or in news articles on websites. The only honourable exceptions are ASC and LSQA, which have stated that they will amend their practices.

Transparency limitations

- Several standards (such as IFS Food) do not maintain accessible, public registries of certified entities. Others have restricted such access. The lack of accessible registries leave it impossible for a consumer or client to know whether a certified product is in fact certified under the relevant standard or not, or whether there are factual errors printed on the certificate. This prevents external review and undermines traceability. For instance, WSRW’s complaint to the aquaculture certification scheme BAP – informing the scheme that a Dutch-Norwegian fish feed producer importing Western Sahara products had misled about a BAP certificate – was only possible because BAP

maintains a public registry of certified entities. BRCGS used to have a public registry, open to the public. From 2025, the BRCGS database is only accessible after completing a complex registration process.

- Some schemes (e.g. Friend of the Sea) do not disclose which certification body issued a certificate, making verification more difficult.
- Only some of the standard schemes – and basically none of the audited companies – respond to requests. Standards in general have no clauses on public accountability. GMP+ International encourages the certified establishment to act transparently with stakeholders. Yet, GMP+ certified establishments fail to respond to requests, seemingly without any consequences for the certification.
- Certifying bodies are generally weak in responding to requests. A company like NSF, that owns the certification body GlobalTrust, does not even have email addresses on its website for contacting the company.
- Some food distributors and retailers are not interested in answering questions on false labels and origin information. “Lidl France does not wish to comment on this subject. Thank you for your understanding”, the French retailer wrote to WSRW.
- Some of the standard documents themselves are unavailable for the general consumer or stakeholders, but can only be purchased for a high cost. The BRCGS food safety standard, costs GBP 150 to download⁴ and its related interpretation guideline costs GBP£200.⁵ This makes it nearly impossible for civil society – particularly from low cost countries

where the production sometimes takes place – to know what sort of requirements the companies violating their rights are allegedly adhering to when they obtain a certificate.

Circular accountability gap

- Without guidance from the standardisation organisation on how its standards apply to occupied territories, certification bodies claim that they lack a framework for addressing legal and territorial ambiguities. Meanwhile, the standardisation organisations refer inquiries back to these same certification bodies, creating a circular accountability gap. “The core issue you raise exceeds the capacity of our company to provide an appropriate response. Our entity strictly adheres to the guidelines established by the organisations that set the standards”, the Spanish certification body Acerta wrote to WSRW, regarding a certificate they issued under the GLOBALG.A.P standard. GLOBALG.A.P., in turn, refers back to the certifying body: “Regarding specific certifications, GLOBALG.A.P. relies on a network of independent and accredited certification bodies to assess compliance with both, the GLOBALG.A.P. standards and applicable laws for the production processes”.
- Certifying bodies also sometimes refer to each other. “The classification of species is also provided by MarinTrust in its report of the evaluation of sub-products, which is elaborated previously by another certification body (LRQA, in this case) on behalf of MarinTrust. The certification process involves several certification bodies, each with a different role”, SGS noted as an explanation as to why it errs on geography.



Food Fraud Facilitation

- Certifications intended to prevent Food Fraud (including origin misdescription) themselves contain and facilitate systematically incorrect geographical information. The error in the schemes’ registries and certificates are maintained even after being alerted about it. This means that the European clients, such as retailers or aquaculture companies, may be involved in trade with fraudulently labelled products if they rely on the certification schemes. If they look in a standard’s database of certificates, the information therein will always have filed Western Sahara-based Moroccan exporters in the wrong country. GMP+ International offers a “Possible fraud control plan” to its certified companies, that recommends them to cross check information from suppliers/producers with “the data present in the GMP+ certified company database”. Considering that the country of origin information in the GMP+ company database is erroneous, distributors in Europe may unknowingly take part in marketing products with incorrect origin information, creating potential exposure to mislabeling risks under EU law, in the case they follow the GMP+ Food Fraud control plan by using the gravely erroneous GMP+ country of origin information as point of departure.
- GLOBALG.A.P., a standard for “responsible” farming, actively misinforms its network about EU regulations on country origin, not in line with the one defined by the CJEU. As such, its clients are applying country of origin information to its products that are not in line with EU regulation or international law.

Accepting political positions

- Some entities – such as the cer-

tifying body Bureau Veritas from France – show a profound political approach to the occupation of Western Sahara. Bureau Veritas’ refers to Western Sahara as Morocco’s “Southern Provinces” in disregard of international law, the rulings of the highest court in Europe and French courts. This is not aligned with its role of undertaking checks of legal compliance. The political role of Bureau Veritas seems to have no consequence for the standard organisations. None of them – including BRCGS, IFS Food, FSSC, GLOBALG.A.P. and GMP+ International – answered WSRW’s questions as to how Bureau Veritas can be seen as a credible company to carry out checks on legal compliance in Western Sahara, as long as it has a political position that is contrary to international law. “The political position of Certification Bodies is not part of our scope”, GMP+ International commented.

Narrow definitions of sustainability or responsibility

- Sustainability or responsibility assessments focus on environmental or operational performance, while legality and rights-based considerations are treated as “out of scope”. Some standards – such as GMP+ – clarify that the legality of the fisheries itself is not at all part of the scope of the assessment when branding production of fish feed as “responsible”.

Not following own advice

- During the preparation of this report, two standards, GlobalG.A.P. and GMP+ International, have issued public statements on their websites about the CJEU rulings. The two standards have not followed their own advice, by accepting incorrect information on certificates and in their registries after the publication

of the Western Sahara advice on their own websites.

Not following own standard

- MarinTrust suggests that its standard draws upon the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. This is incompatible with suggesting that Morocco is permitted to fish in Western Sahara waters.
- WSRW has found no evidence of any company informing its certifying body of the legal development in the EU that has affected their export, even though many of the standards set the requirement that certified companies are to alert when legal developments challenge the certificate. WSRW has found no evidence of any certifying body contacting the standard owners on their own initiative. A few contacted the standard owners after WSRW’s communication.
- GLOBALG.A.P.’s so-called “GRASP” assessment on human rights appears to be systematically undertaken in contradiction of the GRASP’s own system, as there seem to neither exist guidelines for certifying bodies to apply to Western Sahara, nor an existing World Bank dataset to check the operation against. As such, no GRASP compliance declaration found on products in Europe can be trusted. MarinTrust facilities are required to undergo a social risk assessment. However, this assessment relies on a Country Risk Rating dataset that does not include Western Sahara as a territory against which performance can be evaluated.

Not clarifying what standard entails

- Rather than correcting the factual errors on its website or answering questions about how its standards are deemed applicable in an occupied territory, one scheme – Friend

of the Sea – asked WSRW to submit a formal complaint through its established procedures. Expecting civil society to initiate a burdensome complaint process simply to rectify clear factual inaccuracies and to obtain basic clarification about the scope and relevance of a standard constitutes an unreasonable shifting of responsibility.

Unclear independence

- One standard is particularly unclear in presenting the independence of the certificate and certifying body: Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS). French agri-company Azura is both an AWS member and has an AWS-certified site. As AWS is a member-governed body, members (including Azura) elect representatives to AWS governance bodies and help steer the AWS Standard. On top of that, AWS established the entity WSAS as its mission-driven conformity assessment body, and AWS governance documents state that an AWS Trustee and the AWS Group CEO sit on the WSAS board. Neither AWS, WSAS or Azura respond to letters.

Outdated public information

- In some instances, companies publish their certificates on their websites, but in most cases they do not. Where certificates are published, they are sometimes expired and no longer valid. Companies also continue to display outdated certification logos that are no longer in use. BRCGS updated its visual identity in 2019 and required certified companies to update their website logos by 2020. Five years later, this requirement has still not been met by all certificate holders. While this issue may not be significant in itself, it complicates consumers’ ability to verify claims and illustrates shortcomings in the follow-up and oversight of certified entities.



Tomatoes with erroneous country-of-origin information in a German supermarket - certified by GLOBALG.A.P.

GGN: 4063061817693
Abgepackt von:
Red Pack Sarl
Nr. 2 Domaine Agricole
Laglalcha cr Lagrifat
Taroudant
80 000 Agadir
Marokko (5383543)
Station Code (102425)
Lot 30-07/ 11077
für: EDEKA,
www.edeka.de



4 311532 580486
Ursprung: Marokko
Klasse: I
Größe :18-25mm

500g EDEKA

Freeriding behaviours

- Companies that undermine the Saharawi people’s rights through purchase or production of goods from Western Sahara, and that even fail to answer letters from civil society about origin, human rights or international law, are able to brand themselves with certification labels from audits elsewhere. In other words, a company can use a certificate of sustainability in location A to greenwash its overall performance and hence brand itself in a positive manner in spite of violating basic Corporate Responsibility in location B. Spanish distributors of frozen fish import products from the occupied territory – that are not certified. These firms still have logos of certificates all over their website and sustainability reports. The reason is that some of their products – that are unrelated to Western Sahara – may be certified. MSC certificates are sometimes used in this way. French fish product importer Seafoodia has a whole range of standards namedropped on its website – such as IFS Broker, MSC, ASC, Friend of the Sea, EcoVadis, Certification Bio, Cosmos – but it is impossible to know which of these, if any, relate to Seafoodia’s proven Western Sahara imports. Merely understanding that a mention of a certificate on a food distributor’s website is not a testament to the company’s practice, but merely to one of its many products, is extremely hard for a consumer to understand.
- German fishmeal importer KMP removed a reference from its website that it was a member of GLOBALG.A.P in early 2025, immediately after WSRW contacted GLOBALG.A.P. about it. The French company Groupe Anima distributes agricultural products from Western Sahara in Europe, while claiming to have BRCGS certified subsidiaries. WSRW was unable to find Anima or its suppliers in the BRCGS registry. Immediately after contacting the company, Anima removed some – but not all – of BRCGS logos certificates from its site.⁶ Whether or not Anima is today falsely or correctly claiming to have some sort of BRCGS certification is impossible to know. After WSRW contacted MSC, fish distributors that had claimed to be part of MSC fisheries projects removed their information. In 2024, the Azura Group claimed to be certified by GLOBALG.A.P., even though it was not found in the GLOBALG.A.P. registry of certified companies. “In response to questions regarding the Azura Group’s claim that it carries a GLOBALG.A.P. certificate, GLOBALG.A.P. contacted Azura and requested the removal of all GLOBALG.A.P. related claims and logos, which Azura have complied with”, GLOBALG.A.P. wrote to WSRW in June 2025.⁷ Skretting Turkey informed on its website that their factory had a certificate of BAP, which they turned out not to have – it was only deleted after BAP intervened.
- Some companies claim to hold certifications they do not possess. It is remarkable that the certification schemes can allow such extent of “freeriding” practice.

WSRW wrote to the following⁸

- Moroccan companies involved in the production/export/distribution of fisheries products:**
Abelta Canning, Alpha Atlantique de Sahara Marocaine, Cibel II, Comptoire commercial et industriel derham (CCID), Conserverie de Oued Eddahab, Conserveries Rio De Oro Sarl, Copelit SARL (including to Tiscop Trading, Tissir Port, Damsa, Pelagic Pro), Dipromer (incl Sepomer), Disma International/Azura Group, Elam Sahara, Delta Ocean, Iglo Fish S.A., KB Fish, King Pelagique (including ERG Conserve SARL, Protein & Oil and Gold Sea Fish Sarl), Laayoune Proteine Sarl, Mogafish, Nouvelle Aveiro Maroc, Nouvelle Conserverie de Boujdour Sarl, Ocean Capital, Oceamic 2, Oued Eddahab Pro, Overseas Proteines SARL, Pelagic Pro II, Proterra SARL, Sahara Octopus, Société de transport, fourniture et consulting Industriel (STFCI), SOCOPO S.A.R.L, SOMATRAPS, Unimer Group, Univela.
- European companies involved in the production/export/distribution of fisheries products:**
3 de pulpo (Spain), Congelats del Nord (Andorra), Discefa (Spain), El rey del Pulpo (Spain), Frigorífics Ferrer (Spain), Merpacifico (Spain), Nuchar (Spain), Seafoodia (France), Köster Marine Proteins (Germany), Gumusdoga (Turkey), Olvea (France), Skretting (Netherlands/Norway)
- Certification initiatives/standards:**
BRCGS, IFS Food, GMP+, Foundation FSQC 22000, ASC, MSC (Marine Stewardship Council), World Sustainability Organization (Friend of the Sea), GLOBALG.A.P., MarinTrust, Alliance for Water Stewardship.
- Certification bodies:**
Bureau Veritas, Intertek (ex-SAI Global), LRQA (Seafood) Limited, LSQA, London Associati Ltd, NSF (Global Trust Certification), SGS, SYGMA Certification SL, TÜV Rheinland, Eurofins Certification, Quality Austria, Kosher Certification, Water Stewardship Assurance Services.
- Other institutions:**
Cofrac Certification, IQNet.

EU Court of Justice in favour of the Saharawi people

The United Nations consider Western Sahara to be a non-self-governing territory without an administering power in place. The International Court of Justice has confirmed that Morocco has no sovereignty over the territory, and that the people of Western Sahara have a right to self-determination and independence – the right to determine the future status of the territory.⁹ In 1988, the UN was able to broker a ceasefire arrangement between Morocco and the Western Sahara liberation movement, Polisario, in which both parties agreed to hold a referendum on self-determination.¹⁰ To that goal, a UN mission (MINURSO) has been deployed to the territory, but it has not been able to organise a referendum as Morocco continues to block any effort that offers a choice beyond integration. In November 2020, the ceasefire collapsed after the Moroccan army seized a section of the UN buffer zone to break up a Saharawi protest.¹¹

While well over a hundred of UN Resolutions, and rulings by the International Court of Justice, the European Court of Justice¹² and the African Court on Human and People’s Rights¹³, all underline that Morocco has no sovereignty or administering mandate over Western Sahara, Morocco continues to militarily control about three-quarters of the territory. Incentivised by its exploitation of the territory’s resources, Morocco has little interest to genuinely take part in the UN-mediated peace process. Meanwhile, the lingering conflict continues to have a high human and humanitarian cost: over 170,000 Saharawis are stuck in refugee camps in neighbouring Algeria, surviving in harsh desert conditions and dwindling humanitarian

aid. Saharawis who live under the yoke of Morocco’s occupation are victims of serious human rights violations that have been reported by the UN Human Rights Committee, UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, in addition to credible international organisations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and others. In 2023, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights lamented the fact that his Office has not been allowed to visit Western Sahara for the previous eight years.¹⁴ Year after year, Western Sahara is ranked among the worst countries and territories in terms of political rights and civil liberties, on par with countries and territories like North Korea, Syria, Afghanistan and Crimea.¹⁵

The status of the territory comes with repercussions for business activities. As established in 2002 by the UN Legal Counsel at the request of the Security Council, any economic activity in the territory would be in violation of international law if not undertaken in accordance with the wishes and the interests of the people of the territory.¹⁶ We also refer to the conclusions of the UN Treaty Body on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹⁷ and of the UN Human Rights Committee¹⁸, which have both emphasised the need of obtaining the Saharawi people’s “consent to the realization of developmental projects and [resource] extraction operations”.

Recent years have witnessed an emerging body of law pertaining to Morocco’s claim to the territory. Since 2015, in ten consecutive rulings, the Court of Justice of the European Union has concluded on the following points as settled:

- The territory of Western Sahara constitutes a territory distinct from that of the Kingdom of Morocco.¹⁹
- Morocco has no sovereignty²⁰ or administering mandate²¹ over Western Sahara.
- Consequently, the waters adjacent to Western Sahara cannot be regarded as part of the Moroccan fishing zone, territorial waters, exclusive economic zone, or any other notion used to describe Morocco’s role vis-à-vis the waters off Western Sahara.²²
- The people of Western Sahara are to be regarded as a third party to the EU’s agreements with Morocco, and that as such, no agreement can affect their territory without their consent, as a corollary of the right to self-determination.²³
- The Court is clear that the right to consent resides with the people of Western Sahara, and not with the population of the territory.²⁴ The Court stipulates that “a majority of the population of Western Sahara is not part of the people holding the right to self-determination, namely the people of Western Sahara. That people, which for the most part has been displaced, is the sole holder of the right to self-determination with regard to the territory of Western Sahara.”²⁵ The Court adds that “there is a difference in that regard between the concept of the ‘population’ of a non-self-governing territory and of the ‘people’ of that territory. The latter refers to a political unit which holds the right to self-determination, whereas the concept of

- ‘population’ refers to the inhabitants of a territory.²⁶
- The Court has firmly established the position of Front Polisario, the UN-recognised representation of the people of Western Sahara to be able to bring cases before EU Courts on behalf of the Saharawi people, and that it has access to the Court to defend their right to self-determination.²⁷
- In Case C-399/22, which specifically dealt with the labelling of products from Western Sahara, the Court again emphasised the separate and distinct status of the territory in relation to Morocco, and concluded that at the stages of import and sale to the consumer, the labelling of the goods from Western Sahara must indicate Western Sahara alone as the country of origin of those goods.²⁸ Since October 2025, the European Commission has sought to circumvent the Court’s interpretation through a delegated regulation introducing alternative labelling rules for products originating in Western Sahara. Compliance with this proposed scheme would not amount to compliance with the Court’s judgment in Case C-399/22. Under the proposed regulation, products would no longer be required to indicate their country of origin at all, but instead only refer to Moroccan regions. The regulation has not yet entered into force.

Setting a good example

During the preparation of this report, WSRW has been in contact with two companies that stood out for their remarkable willingness to act responsibly, engage, and learn - an approach in stark contrast to most of the schemes and certifying bodies mentioned later in the report.

Furthermore, some certification schemes were never involved in Western Sahara in the first place, but have been “name-dropped” there without their involvement, such as BAP and MSC.

ASC (Aquaculture Stewardship Council)

In the still waters of Dakhla Bay, the French-Moroccan agribusiness Azura has spent years farming clams under permits issued by the Moroccan government. The company has benefited from certification by what many regard as the gold standard in aquaculture: the Netherlands based Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC).

That era is now over.²⁹

In December 2025, ASC informed WSRW that Azura “will not be eligible for renewal on expiry and potential new entrants will not be accepted into the programme.”

Azura currently holds an ASC certificate for responsible aquaculture, valid until July 2026.

ASC explained that, “underpinned by the position of the United Nations,” it has determined that operations in Western Sahara require Heightened Human Rights Due Diligence. Since ASC is currently unable to conduct such a process, it will “discontinue programme activities in Western Sahara” until resources allow for proper assessment – or until “the process of self-determination has been completed in the territory”, the company wrote in the letter.

Morocco is actively scaling up aquaculture in the territory, but none of these projects will receive ASC certification.

As of December 2025, Azura Group’s website still falsely describes its clam production site as being in Morocco – one year after WSRW first raised the issue with the company. WSRW first contacted ASC in 2024.

LSQA S.A.

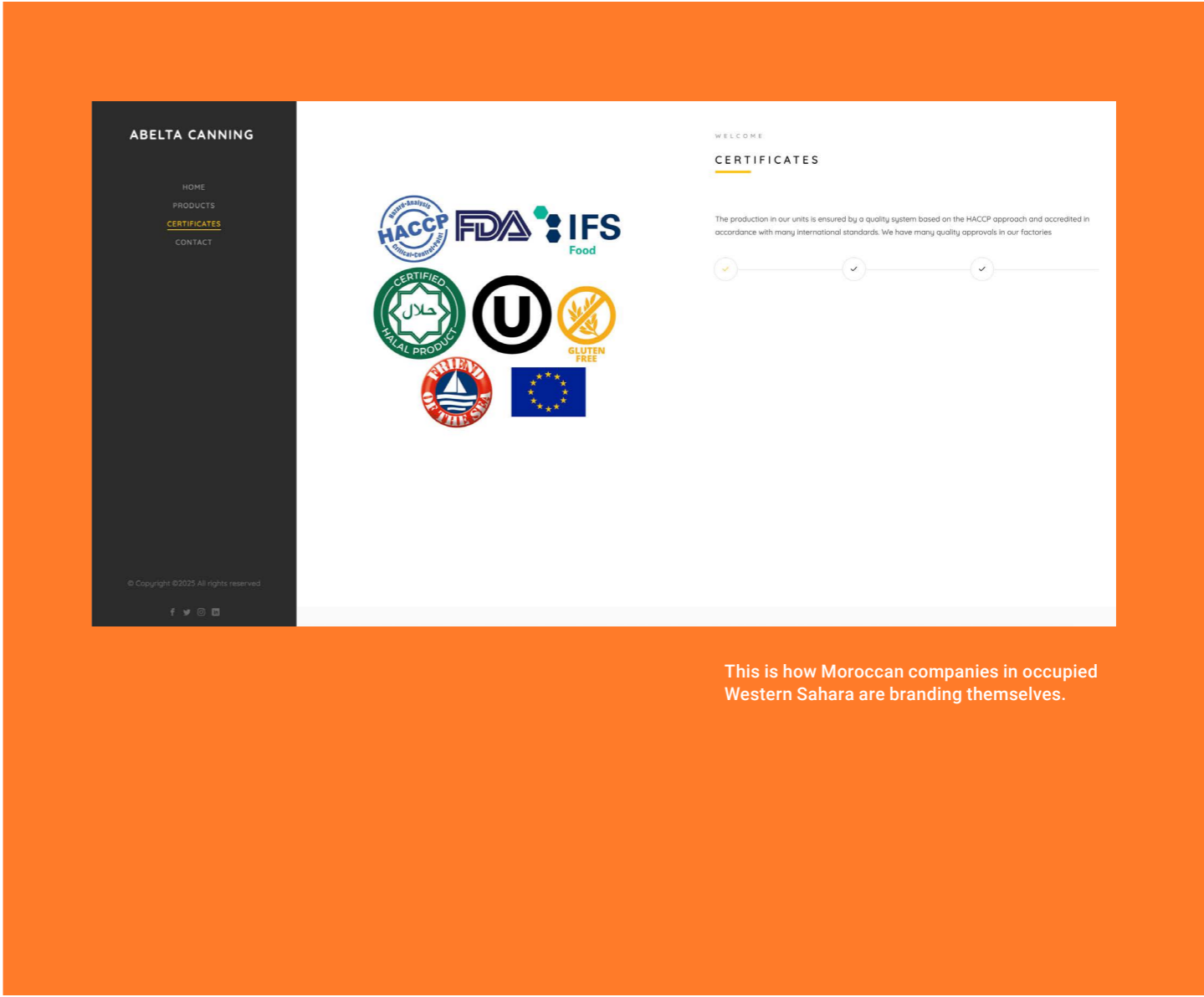
The certification company LSQA announced in 2025 that it had ceased all activity in Western Sahara, where it had previously certified Moroccan producers operating in the occupied territory.³⁰

“We inform you that LSQA has decided to suspend its operations in Western Sahara, [...]. LSQA, in alignment with international norms, considers that it is not possible to proceed with certification in Sahrawi territory without comply-

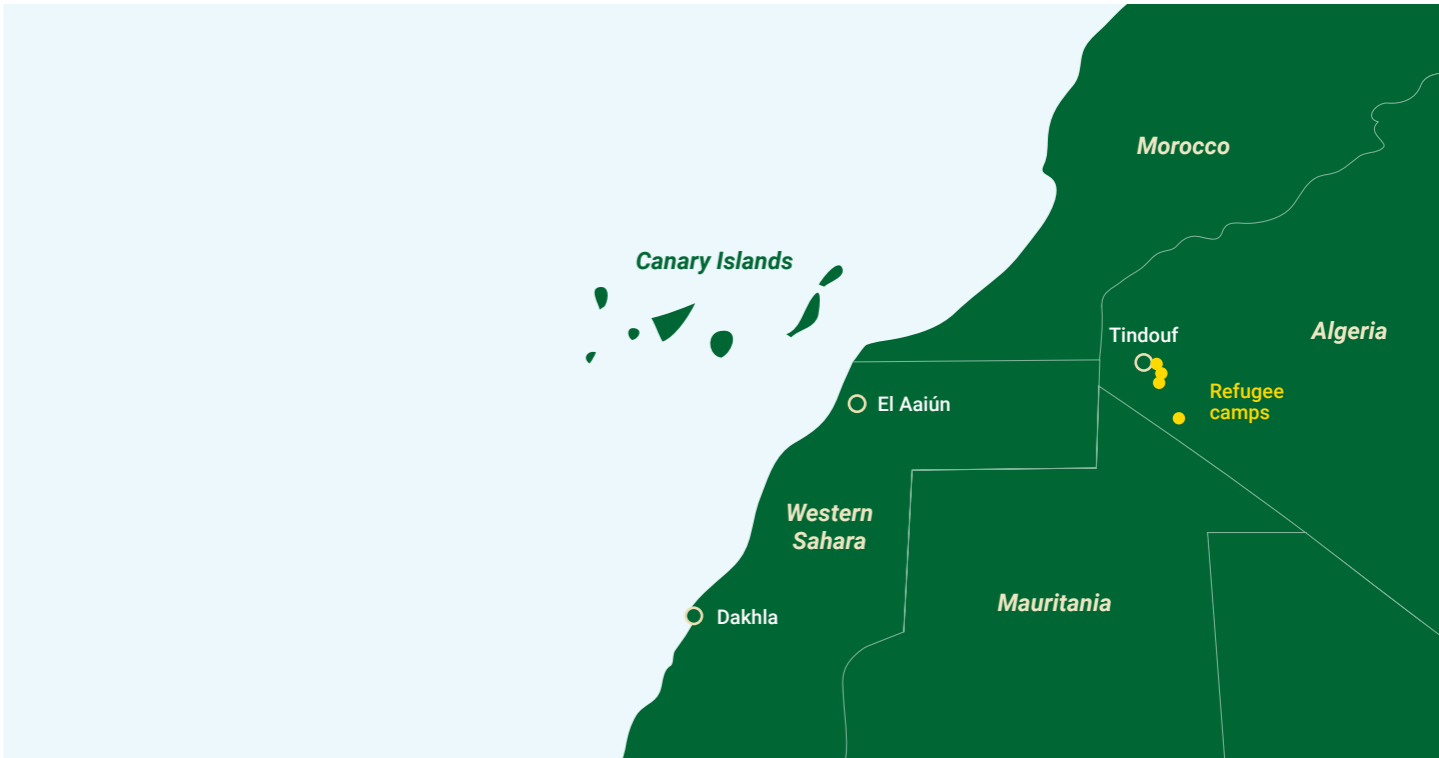
ing with the requirements of the scheme issued by the Sahrawi authorities, providing the necessary guarantees to be able to issue the certification”, the company wrote in a letter to the Saharawi Embassy in Montevideo in July 2025.

In 2024, LSQA had certified the Moroccan agribusiness FMI Nabih Agricole under GLOBALG.A.P’s so-called Integrated Farm Assurance Standard, covering good agricultural practice, traceability, hygiene controls and food safety. FMI has reported exports of tomatoes and melons to Switzerland, Germany, the EU, the UK, Morocco and Russia.

LSQA is jointly owned: 50% by Uruguay’s Technological Laboratory and 50% by Quality Austria. Both LSQA and Quality Austria are members of IQNet, the International Certification Network, whose logos also appear on certificates issued to Moroccan companies in Western Sahara. WSRW wrote to LSQA in 2024.



This is how Moroccan companies in occupied Western Sahara are branding themselves.



Recommendations

To standard owners and certification scheme operators:

- To explicitly recognise Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory, separate and distinct from Morocco, in all standards, guidance documents, databases and public communications, in line with international law and UN positions.
- To immediately review all certifications, scope statements and public listings that include facilities located in Western Sahara, and to suspend or withdraw any certification that has been granted without the express and prior consent of the people of the territory through their UN-recognised representation.
- To ensure that no standard is applied, and no certificate is issued, for operations located in Western Sahara under Moroccan jurisdiction or contractual arrangements.
- To correct without delay all misleading geographical descriptions on certificates, in databases, and on websites where operations in Western Sahara are presented as being located in Morocco.
- To publish full lists of certified entities, including precise geographic locations of certified facilities, in searchable public registries.
- To enforce strict and time-bound requirements for the correct use of certification logos and claims, including sanctions for continued use of expired certificates or outdated visual identities.
- To ensure publicly accessible registries of certifications, including names of certifying bodies.
- To stop issuing advice that places importing companies in a situation where they engage in acts of Food Fraud.

To certification bodies and audit companies

- To refuse to audit, certify or maintain certification of any facility located in Western Sahara unless the express and prior consent of the Saharawi people can be demonstrated.
- To apply enhanced scrutiny in conflict-affected areas, including independent verification of territorial status, ownership structures, and the legal basis for operations.
- To immediately correct all audit reports, certificates and scope statements that misidentify Western Sahara as part of Morocco.
- To not undertake missions to occupied territories unless with explicit consent of representatives of those territories.
- To ensure that auditors are trained in international humanitarian law and the legal framework applicable to occupied and non-self-governing territories.
- To publish audit scope statements and geographic locations in full, so that certification claims can be independently verified.

To national accreditation bodies and international accreditation networks:

- To review the accreditation of certification bodies that have issued certificates for operations located in Western Sahara under Moroccan jurisdiction.
- To clarify publicly how accreditation rules apply in situations involving occupied or non-self-governing territories.
- To suspend or condition accreditation where certification bodies repeatedly fail to respect international law, territorial status or basic transparency requirements.

- To ensure that the use of accreditation marks does not lend institutional legitimacy to certifications linked to violations of the right to self-determination.

To companies operating in Western Sahara or making certification-based claims:

- To disengage from operations in Western Sahara until a lawful process of self-determination has taken place.
- To immediately cease presenting operations in Western Sahara as being located in Morocco in all marketing, labelling, certification claims and digital communications.
- To withdraw any sustainability, quality or certification claims relating to operations in Western Sahara that have been obtained without the consent of the Saharawi people.

To retailers, buyers and supply-chain actors:

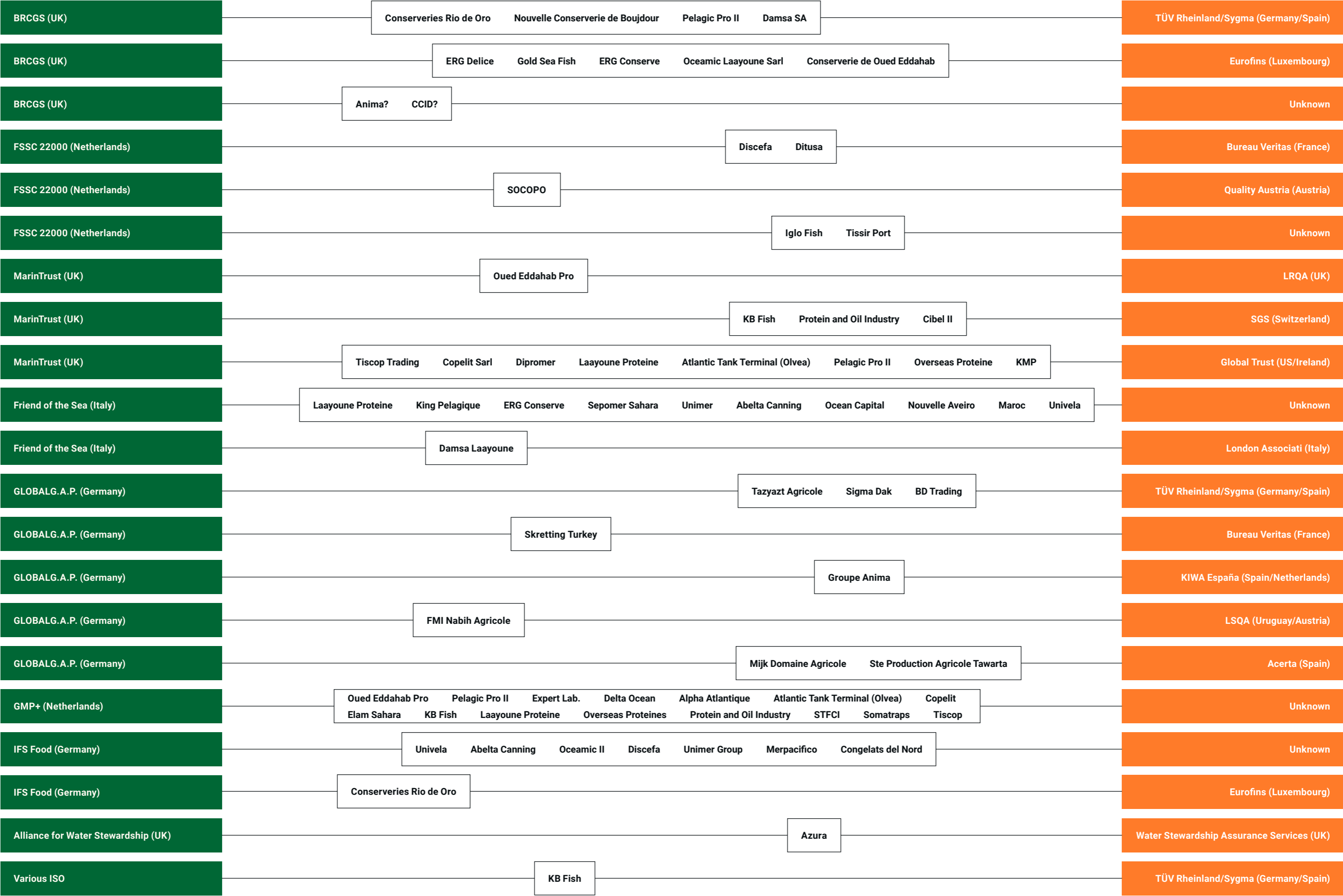
- To conduct enhanced due diligence on all certification claims linked to Morocco, with specific screening for Western Sahara.
- To require full geographic traceability down to facility level for all certified products.
- To no longer seek advice on Food Fraud from standards that issue advice on Food Fraud, as these standards systematically publish incorrect information in its databases.
- To suspend sourcing from suppliers that misrepresent operations in Western Sahara as Moroccan or rely on legally defective certifications.
- To avoid qualifying products connected to Western Sahara as “sustainable”, “responsible” or “ethical” in the absence of Saharawi consent.

To consumers:

- To treat sustainability labels and certification claims relating to Morocco with caution, and to actively demand full geographic transparency from brands and retailers.
- To question marketing claims that rely on private certification where operations are located in occupied or disputed territories.
- To raise concerns with retailers and brands when products connected to Western Sahara are mislabelled or presented as Moroccan.

To the European Union and EU institutions:

- To enforce the judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Union confirming that Western Sahara is separate and distinct from Morocco across all relevant policy domains, including labelling, sustainability claims and due-diligence legislation.
- To ensure that no EU recognition, funding, certification-based facilitation or sustainability framework is applied to operations in Western Sahara under Moroccan control.
- To reject any delegated or implementing measures that undermine or circumvent the Court’s rulings through alternative territorial labelling schemes.
- To provide clear guidance to certification schemes, accreditation bodies and companies on their obligations regarding Western Sahara.



“Sustainability” or “Responsibility” Certifications



World Sustainability Organization (Friend of the Sea)

WSO is an Italy-based organisation that manages the Friend of the Sea (FoS) programme – a set of certification standards covering fisheries, aquaculture, processing, and supply-chain activities.

FoS certificates have been issued both to Moroccan facilities operating in the occupied territory of Western Sahara and to Moroccan companies located in Morocco proper that source fish products from the territory. Friend of the Sea operates several distinct standards, including those for wild fisheries, aquaculture, processing plants, and chain of custody.

FoS regularly updates an overview of which companies are certified, and under which standard.³¹

FoS has certified a series of establishments in Western Sahara, all involved in either fisheries or fish processing activities. They are all, erroneously, referred to as being located in Morocco: Laayoune Proteine Sarl³², Damsa Laayoune³³, King Pelagique³⁴, ERG Conserve SARL³⁵, Sepomer Sahara SARL.³⁶

It has also certified Moroccan companies primarily located in Morocco, but with operations or supply chain in Western Sahara, such as Unimer SA³⁷ (with a subsidiary in Dakhla³⁸), fish processing company Abelta Canning (with a factory in El Aaiún)³⁹, Ocean Capital (exporting octopus from Dakhla)⁴⁰, Nou-

velle Aveiro Maroc (sourcing⁴¹ most of its fish FoS-certified fisheries in Dakhla and Laayoune⁴²), squid distributor Univela Morocco (with agents in Dakhla and Laayoune⁴³, carrying FoS certification⁴⁴).

On paper, the FoS wild fisheries standard is set up to secure legal compliance, for instance:

- "All fishing vessels to be certified, and hence included in the scope of certification, shall be officially registered according to the national system in use." (Paragraph 4.1.)
- It is "essential" that the unit of certification "complies with national and international fisheries regulations." (paragraph 4.5)
- "The organisation provides detailed identification of the origin of products, including vessel name, fishing area and fishing gear, or aquaculture plant and site." (paragraph 1.3)
- "The Auditor shall verify and describe briefly the legal and administrative structure of the fishery management system in force and provide the evidence of compliance with local laws and regulations. (paragraph 5)

However, in practice, FoS blindly accepts that “Moroccan Local Law” applies to operations in the territory, as a certificate of Oceamic Laayoune II in 2015 shows.⁴⁵

Companies that work on Moroccan licences in occupied Western Sahara waters receive praise from FoS:

“King Pelagique Group operates a highly complex fishing and manufacturing business across multiple fish-related categories, so their dedication to sustainability is all the more impressive,” said the Director of Friend of the Sea on its website⁴⁶. “Getting recertified in multiple categories represents a non-trivial undertaking.”

FoS further noted on its website that Friend of the Sea had recertified King Pelagique Group “each year since 2013 for sustainable practices in the production of seafood, fishmeal, fish oil and Omega 3. Based in Dakhla, Morocco, the 1400-person King Pelagique Group specializes in small pelagic fishing.”

WSRW wrote WSO/FOS in 2024,⁴⁷ with follow-up in 2025. Instead of correcting the errors on its website, or to comment on questions on how it interprets its own standards, FOS invited WSRW to submit a formal complaint.

The factual errors that WSRW pointed to regarding the FoS website – for instance about the location of the fisheries of the Moroccan company King Pelagique remain unchanged.⁴⁸

Among the questions WSRW submitted to FoS, that all remain unanswered are:

- Which certification bodies undertook the compliance checks, and whether WSRW could get access to copies of the certificates.
- How FoS interprets the paragraphs of compliance with “local laws” and “national systems” in its wild fisheries standard.
- How FoS interprets “country of origin” identification in the supply chain for fish oil and fish meal products.
- How FoS interprets the legality of the fisheries in the occupied territory, in view of the CJEU rulings, stating that these are not Moroccan waters.
- What it has done to obtain consent of the Saharawis.
- What steps it would take vis-à-vis the certificates, the certification bodies, the certified establishments and the website.

Except in one case, WSRW has not been able to find out which certification body is behind the FoS compliance checks. FoS has also issued guidance for the certification bodies, such as this one on the latest version of Wild Fisheries standard.⁴⁹



Sardines from “Dakhla, Morocco”, certified by Friend of the Sea, observed in a grocery store in Italy, 2025..

GLOBALG.A.P.



GLOBALG.A.P. is a membership-based organisation that aims to assure food safety and sustainability, primarily in the farming sector, but also in aquaculture. It collaborates with producers, retailers, suppliers, and certification bodies. The organisation – which is also a brand and a standard – is owned by the German company Agraya GbmH (formerly Food-PLUS GmbH).

A handful of Moroccan companies operating near Dakhla, in Western Sahara, appear in GLOBALG.A.P.’s certification registry, even though their farms lie in the southern part of the territory that Morocco forcefully invaded in 1979.

Many Moroccan settlers residing in the area work for such companies, which operate under permits issued by Rabat. As a result, they have been able to obtain certificates of “Good Agricultural Practices” (G.A.P.) – allowing them to market themselves as “responsible”.

GLOBALG.A.P. did not answer WSRW’s questions about how it defines a “farming community” in the context of Western Sahara. This is a crucial issue in light of EU court rulings distinguishing between the population of the territory – including the Moroccan settlers that form the farming community – and the people of the territory, the Saharawis, who are traditionally not farmers.

The Court invalidated the EU-Moroccan trade agreements largely based on the EU’s failure to distinguish these two demographic units.

WSRW was in contact with GLOBALG.A.P in 2024 and 2025 and has still not obtained sufficient response to a number of questions in relation to the standard.⁵⁰

In the case that GLOBALG.A.P. means the “local population” near the plantation, it did not respond to whether such

an approach may mean that its otherwise well-meant vision in the case of Western Sahara is ignoring the rights of the Saharawi people.

GLOBALG.A.P. underlined in letters that certified producers must comply with “applicable laws for the production process”. When asked which country’s laws it considers applicable in Western Sahara – and why – it did not explain how it would be possible to interpret the Moroccan government’s regulations, laws, checks or permits to be relevant in Western Sahara, taking into account that the international courts hold that Morocco has no sovereignty and no administering mandate over the territory. Instead, GlobalG.A.P. argued that “an assessment based on established Moroccan law is generally possible if Moroccan law was applicable”. It noted that it had no option but to rely on Moroccan law, as Western Sahara lacks a “ binding legal framework”.

How Moroccan law could apply outside Morocco’s borders was not addressed.

GLOBALG.A.P. avoided clarifying whether the issuance of certificates to Moroccan companies operating in occupied Western Sahara is consented to by the Saharawi people, or whether the right to self-determination is among the human rights that certified companies are expected to respect under the scheme’s standards. Instead, the organisation referred broadly to “the general legal, political, and administrative complexities in the region.” It remains unclear what is meant by “region” – a vague term not used by the United Nations or international courts in reference to Western Sahara, but frequently employed by the Moroccan government to blur the legal status of the non-self-governing territory.

“We certify based on very strict and rigid standards and apply the same standards irrespective of the country or other external factors. Taking our efforts to contribute to the welfare of the farming community so out of context to allege that we are ‘contributing to the ongoing injustice against the Saharawi people’ is neither true nor legitimate.” GLOBALG.A.P. wrote to WSRW.

GLOBALG.A.P. did not explain why it applies the same standards to Western Sahara as it does to farming within internationally recognised sovereign states. Morocco has neither sovereignty over Western Sahara nor any international mandate to administer the territory. Unlike other occupying powers that acknowledge their status – thereby triggering specific obligations and rights under international law – Morocco does not recognise itself as an occupying power. To WSRW’s knowledge, Western Sahara is the only case globally where GLOBALG.A.P. has issued certifications on occupied land. WSRW has found no evidence of GLOBALG.A.P. certificates for alleged “responsible” farming by Israeli settlers in occupied Palestinian territory, or by Russian entities in occupied parts of Ukraine.

Issued statement

After WSRW raised concerns, GLOBALG.A.P conducted an internal investigation, it told WSRW.

“This resulted in a statement on this matter sent to all our Certification Bodies and published on our Website”, GLOBALG.A.P wrote. The statement, published on GLOBALG.A.P’s website on 2 April 2025, reads:⁵¹

“Our attention was recently brought to GLOBALG.A.P certifications in Western Sahara. We would like to share the results of our evaluation related to identifying the origin of products grown in the area. According to Article 73 of the United Nations Charter, Western Sahara remains classified as a “non-self-governing territory”, and recent European Court of Justice (ECJ) rulings have confirmed that trade agreements between the European Union and Morocco do not extend to Western Sahara without the explicit consent of the Sahrawi people. The ECJ has also ruled that products originating from Western Sahara must be explicitly labeled as such and must not be presented as Moroccan products.”

The public statement is a relatively good representation of the particular court rulings and is welcome in view of the failure of the sector to address the issue. A clear omission in the statement is the court’s central finding that Western Sahara and Morocco are “separate and distinct”.

The CJEU granted a twelve-month transition period during which the extension of the EU-Moroccan trade agreement to products originating in Western Sahara will remain in effect.

“Once the transition phase expires, a stable local legal framework is required to be able to continue the GLOBALG.A.P. certification in Western Sahara”, GLOBALG.A.P. stated. “Until then, GLOBALG.A.P.’s instruction to the certification bodies remains in place”, it stated.

However, the CJEU does not suggest that a “stable local legal framework” is a requirement for the Moroccan farming industry to operate in Western Sahara. On the contrary, the Court’s rulings affirm that Morocco has no legal mandate to act on behalf of the territory. What is required for the continuation of trade under EU law is not an administrative framework imposed by Morocco, but rather the consent of the people of Western Sahara. That consent has not been granted – to the certified companies operating on the ground, to the certifying bodies conducting audits there, or to GLOBALG.A.P. itself.

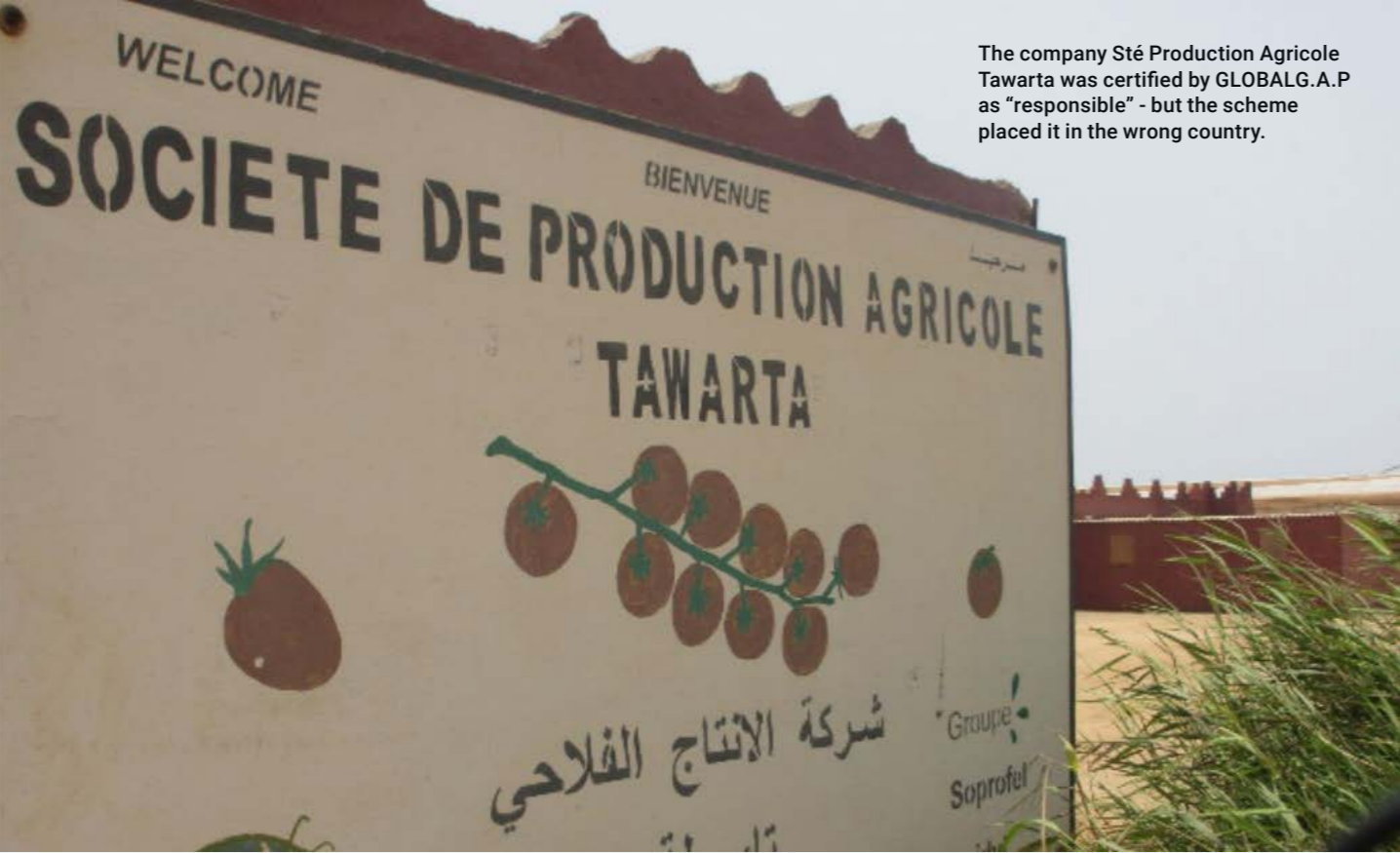
All certificates contain grave errors

Despite its reasonably sound statement on the recent CJEU rulings, GLOBALG.A.P. continues to certify companies in Western Sahara under “Morocco”. All certificates and directory entries for the territory contain this geographical error, giving consumers incorrect information about the country of origin.

“There is no ‘paradox’ in the GLOBALG.A.P.’s practice”, it states. “GLOBALG.A.P. promotes good agricultural practice and responsible farming. This includes compliance with applicable laws for the production process”, it wrote.

In a world where Moroccan laws are applicable in Western Sahara, that may make sense, however the international courts disagree with GLOBALG.A.P. on that point.

In November 2025, the GLOBALG.A.P. became even worse, as it sent out a notice to its network that a new EU regulation had already been implemented.⁵² It has not. By issuing that advice, the organisation has further misled retailers who wish to abide by the EU Court rulings. According to the GLOBALG.A.P. statement, the EU companies are now supposed to give Moroccan regional names to Western Sahara companies. This has indeed been proposed, but it is not in effect, at the time of launch of this WSRW report in December 2025.



The company Sté Production Agricole Tawarta was certified by GLOBALG.A.P as “responsible” - but the scheme placed it in the wrong country.

All GLOBALG.A.P. certificates and directory filings for producers located in the territory of Western Sahara today suggest that the locations of the establishments are in “Morocco”. This is factually wrong. In other words, any European consumer who checks up the GLOBALG.A.P. certificate, the information channels of the certified companies, or the GLOBALG.A.P. registry itself, will for every case receive incorrect information about the home country of the establishment.

WSRW inquired why Moroccan companies in occupied Western Sahara are filed in the GLOBALG.A.P. certification database as in “Morocco”. These include Mijk Domaine Agricole (Acerta, 2024⁵³), Sigma Dak (by SYGMA, 2024⁵⁴), Sté Production Agricole Tawarta (Acerta, 2024⁵⁵), FMI Nabih Agricole (LSQA, 2024⁵⁶), BD Trading (by SYGMA, 2024⁵⁷ and SYGMA 2025⁵⁸), and Tazyazt Agricole (by SYGMA, 2024⁵⁹). The geographical error was maintained in a certificate issued to BD Trading, on 23 May 2025, six weeks after the GLOBALG.A.P published its position on correct labelling of products. The continued certification indicates that the absence of such consent has no apparent consequences for producers, auditors, or GLOBALG.A.P. itself.

GLOBALG.A.P.’s answer reflects an approach whereby it seemingly views it as no other manner that it has to certify Moroccan companies on occupied land, as if avoiding certification of agriculture in the occupied territory altogether is not an option. It responded that “due to the missing binding legal framework in Western Sahara, it is impossible for GLOBALG.A.P. to issue certificates for products originating from Western Sahara based on any local law” and that “This fact may lead to unintentional misrepresentations of Moroccan companies operating in the territory of Western Sahara. [...] Please note that GLOBALG.A.P.’s approach is guided by the practical realities of the current legal and administrative situation. The lack of a binding legal framework and established infrastructure makes it impossible to issue certificates for prod-

ucts originating from Western Sahara. In contrast, Morocco has a legal framework that allows for the certification process to be carried out. The unintentional misrepresentations resulting from this fact do not mean GLOBALG.A.P. are any less committed to upholding International Law and Human Rights. On the contrary, these principles remain our highest priority and are at the core of our mission.”, it wrote to WSRW.

The Moroccan entities in Dakhla have obtained certificates for production of melons, cantaloupe melons, tomatoes, blueberries, and had reported the following countries of destination for its produce: Bahrain, Denmark, the EU, Germany, Hong Kong, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Norway, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom. Countries of Destination means the countries where the product “is intended to be sold.”

Regarding the fraudulent country-of-origin information used by certified (and thus allegedly “responsible”) companies operating in Western Sahara, GLOBALG.A.P. stated that it “rejects responsibility for the enforcement of wrong geographical indications of origin” by those certified entities.

Hard to grasp

According to the most recent certificate issued to BD Trading, the production at this establishment fulfills the requirements of a so-called GRASP (GLOBALG.A.P. Risk Assessment on Social Practice). But does it, really? GLOBALG.A.P. confirmed to WSRW that “to date, no national interpretation guideline for Western Sahara exists”. It is unclear to WSRW how it can be technically possible to obtain a GRASP for a territory for which no applicable national guideline exists – particularly when that territory is, under international law and court rulings “separate and distinct” from Morocco.

WSRW asked GLOBALG.A.P. whether it is of the opinion that the Moroccan GRASP is applicable to the territory Western Sahara, but did not obtain a response.

The GRASP General Rules v1.3-1-I establish that “In cases where a country does not have a GRASP Interpretation Guideline, the applicants (e.g. supplier, retailer, Certification Body) that are asking for the GRASP assessments need to hand in a project plan for the development of such interpretation guideline to the Secretariat”. No such plan has seemingly been submitted. GLOBALG.A.P. did also not respond to how the GRASP General Rules v1.3-1-i can be adhered to, taking into account that a World Bank dataset on Western Sahara which the GRASP is supposed to be understood from, is seemingly nonexistent.

“Community member” of GLOBALG.A.P.
Companies can also associate themselves with GLOBALG.A.P. as “community members”.

WSRW asked what obligations this entail after the French-Moroccan agriculture company Azura advertised such membership.⁶⁰ GLOBALG.A.P. merely said that it “welcomes all members dedicated to responsible farming practices”, without explaining how it determined this for Azura, which is not certified. Azura – the largest agricultural producer operating in the occupied territory – heavily promotes its GLOBALG.A.P. membership in public communications.

For several years, German fish feed producer KMP – the biggest importer of fish meal from occupied Western Sahara into Europe – claimed GLOBALG.A.P. community membership online despite not appearing in the official registry. After WSRW flagged this in January 2025, the reference was removed.⁶¹ KMP nonetheless remains in the GLOBALG.A.P. “focus group” developing the new Compound Feed Manufacturing standard.⁶²

Other “community members” – including the certification schemes/initiatives Intertek SAI Global Assurance, NSF Certification LLC and Alliance for Water Stewardship – similarly certify Moroccan companies on occupied land and issue certificates with false location data, but do not respond to WSRW’s inquiries.

One community member sells Western Sahara products mislabelled as “Morocco” in a range of shops, contradicting CJEU rulings and GLOBALG.A.P.’s own labelling statement.

Chain of Custody (CoC)
In addition to farm certification where the GGN (farm number) comes from, a trader/packer/distributor can also be GLOBALG.A.P certified, through a so-called Chain of Custody (CoC) certificate: This covers handling, documentation, segregation, labelling etc.

A company holding a Chain of Custody (CoC) certificate, for instance a vegetable distributor in Europe, may make GLOBALG.A.P. certified claims on products that originate from GLOBALG.A.P.-certified farms.

A CoC-certified trader can source from both certified and non-certified farms, but must treat them as two separate product streams. The ones that originate from GLOBALG.A.P certified farms can be referred to as GLOBALG.A.P certified, including with relevant GGN reference. Products from non-certified farms cannot be accompanied by such GLOBALG.A.P references or logos.

The French company Anima on its website systematically distributes products from GLOBALG.A.P certified farms in Western Sahara, while misrepresenting the location of the suppliers, both in maps, supplier descriptions. The company specifically explains on its website that the agriculture products from Dakhla are shipped to Europe after packing in the Moroccan city of Agadir. Anima Group’s subsidiary Sofruce is certified under the GLOBALG.A.P Chain of Custody standard. WSRW wrote to Anima in November 2025 about the matter.⁶³ Its certifying body, KIWA España, pointed to GLOBALG.A.P. which issues incorrect advice on its website.

Other controversies

• Fish feed producer **Skretting Turkey** – which uses fish meal from Western Sahara – claims on its website that it is certified in accordance with the GLOBALG.A.P. General Rules, Com-

pound Feed Manufacturing standard.⁶⁴ “GLOBALG.A.P. immediately started investigating the case after being made aware of it by WSRW”, it informed WSRW in June 2025.

• GLOBALG.A.P. did not respond as to whether the ethics, legal compliance, human rights approach or due diligence practices relating to a company’s supply chain is a requirement for certification. When asked, GLOBALG.A.P. wrote that it “recognizes the challenges” related to how certified **establishments in Morocco proper** (such as in Agadir, Tan Tan etc) or in Europe that source products or raw materials for the agriculture and fisheries industry from Western Sahara are to ensure legal compliance in the supply chain. It commented that “GLOBALG.A.P. is actively working with their partners to ensure compliance with applicable laws”. The problem then, is that the “applicable laws” that it refers to are the ones of the occupying power, an approach that then is not responding to the dilemma.

• GLOBALG.A.P. says it is attempting to prevent certified fish meal/oil exporters in Nouadhibou in **Mauritania** from sourcing raw materials from Western Sahara waters.

• When WSRW first contacted GLOBALG.A.P. in 2024, the **Azura Group** falsely claimed to hold GLOBALG.A.P. certification, even though it was not found in the GLOBALG.A.P. registry of certified companies. GLOBALG.A.P. asked Azura to remove the claims, which it did, as WSRW was informed in June 2025.

Marine Ingredients Certifications Ltd (MarinTrust)

Marine Ingredients Certifications Ltd is a London-based company that manages the MarinTrust Standard, which is an initiative of and a tool to certify the practices in the fishmeal and fish oil industry.

The following entities are found to be MarinTrust certified under the two standards: a) MarinTrust Standard for Responsible Supply of Marine Ingredients Version 2.0. and b) Marine Ingredients Responsibly Supplied Chain of Custody Standard (Issue 1.1 and 2)).

On the one hand, exporters in Western Sahara: Tiscop Trading⁶⁵ (by GlobalTrust, 2023), Copelit S.A.R.L.⁶⁶ (by GlobalTrust, 2022), KB Fish⁶⁷ (by SGS, 2022), Laayoune Protein⁶⁸ (by GlobalTrust, 2021), Protein and Oil Industry⁶⁹ (by SGS, 2022), Atlantic Tank Terminal (by GlobalTrust, 2022⁷⁰ and 2025⁷¹), DIPROMER⁷² (by NSF, 2020), Oued Eddahab Pro⁷³ (by LRQA, 2025), Pelagic Pro II⁷⁴ (by GlobalTrust, 2025), Overseas Proteine⁷⁵ (by GlobalTrust, 2025). All the Moroccan certified establishments are listed on the certificates as being in "Laayoune, Morocco" or "Dakhla, Morocco". This is all incorrect.

When facilities of these exporters are certified, it entails that importing companies in Europe can greenwash their operations, by referring to such certificates as some sort of approval of responsibility. Skretting Norway wrote to WSRW in 2020, regarding the imports into Turkey of fish meal from Western Sahara that the fish meal they imported from Western Sahara at the time "is fully IFFO RS certified, meaning the fishery has been audited against responsible practices criteria, specifically sourcing, manufacture and supply."⁷⁶ IFFO RS is the former name of MarinTrust. WSRW was in contact with Skretting in 2025.⁷⁷

The German fishmeal importer Köster Marine Proteins obtained MarinTrust Chain of Custody certificates for responsibly supplies in 2018, 2022 and 2024, all issued by GlobalTrust⁷⁸.

The aspect of false representation of geography on the MarinTrust certificates does not only apply to the Western Sahara land territory, but also to its waters. The certificate to the company Protein and Oil Industry (by SGS, 2022⁷⁹) suggests that the catches landed at a factory in Dakhla originate from the Moroccan EEZ. This claim is most likely inaccurate: WSRW is not aware of any instances, ever, where fish caught within Morocco's EEZ, which extends no further south than the 27°40'N parallel, has been landed at the port of Dakhla, located roughly 450 kilometers further south.

MarinTrust's standards specifically states – that it "draws upon" the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). However, in the context of Western Sahara, this reference seems largely symbolic. UNCLOS grants sovereign rights over fisheries and Exclusive Economic Zones to the recognised coastal state. As ruled by the European Court of Justice in 2018 (C-266/16, paras 66–69) Morocco is, however, not the "coastal state" of Western Sahara within the meaning of UNCLOS, meaning it does not have the recognised sovereign rights over Western Sahara's waters.

By certifying fisheries in Western Sahara as "Moroccan", MarinTrust effectively disregards the requirement under UNCLOS that the legitimate coastal authority must consent to resource exploitation.

WSRW reached out to all MarinTrust certified companies regarding their MarinTrust certifications. The only company to acknowledge contact was Atlantic Tank Terminal's parent company in France, Olvea. However, Olvea did not answer any questions relating to the MarinTrust certificate.⁸⁰

WSRW first contacted MarinTrust on 29 November 2024⁸¹, receiving confirmation of receipt on 2 December 2024. Yet, no response has been provided since, despite repeated reminders.



Below are some of the unanswered questions WSRW has sent to MarinTrust regarding its standards and certifications. Sources quoted in these questions are all found via WSRW's letter to MarinTrust.⁸²

Regarding MarinTrust and international law:

- One of the certificates to an establishment in Western Sahara, explains that the waters from where it is sourcing its raw material constitutes the "Moroccan EEZ". The MarinTrust certificate relating to Cibel II in Agadir, refers to European Pilchard originating from similar "A", "B" and "C" zones within the "Moroccan EEZ". As known, Zone A is offshore Morocco proper, Zone B is off-shore both Morocco and Western Sahara, stretching south to the 27° N latitude, whereas Zone C is only offshore Western Sahara. We see no other logical explanations to these references than it is in MarinTrust's opinion that the Moroccan EEZ extends into Western Sahara. On what legal basis has MarinTrust come to such a conclusion?
- The MarinTrust Standard Version 3 mentions in its introduction that it "draws upon the following normative documents: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. 1982". If Morocco is neither the sovereign power nor the administering power over the non-self-governing territory of Western Sahara, and in light of the 2018 CJEU ruling on fisheries in the territory (paras. 67–69), how can Morocco's issuing of fishing licences for the waters off Western Sahara be seen as in line with the MarinTrust Standard, namely that the Standard draws upon the UNCLOS?
- MarinTrust has, during the years 2019–2024 finalised a series of reports assessing sustainability of the stocks in "Morocco". These reports make no distinction between the waters of Morocco and Western Sahara, and

state that the "Country of origin of the product" is Morocco. Around half of the establishments mentioned in the document are in Western Sahara. Why is the data from Western Sahara presented as being of Morocco?

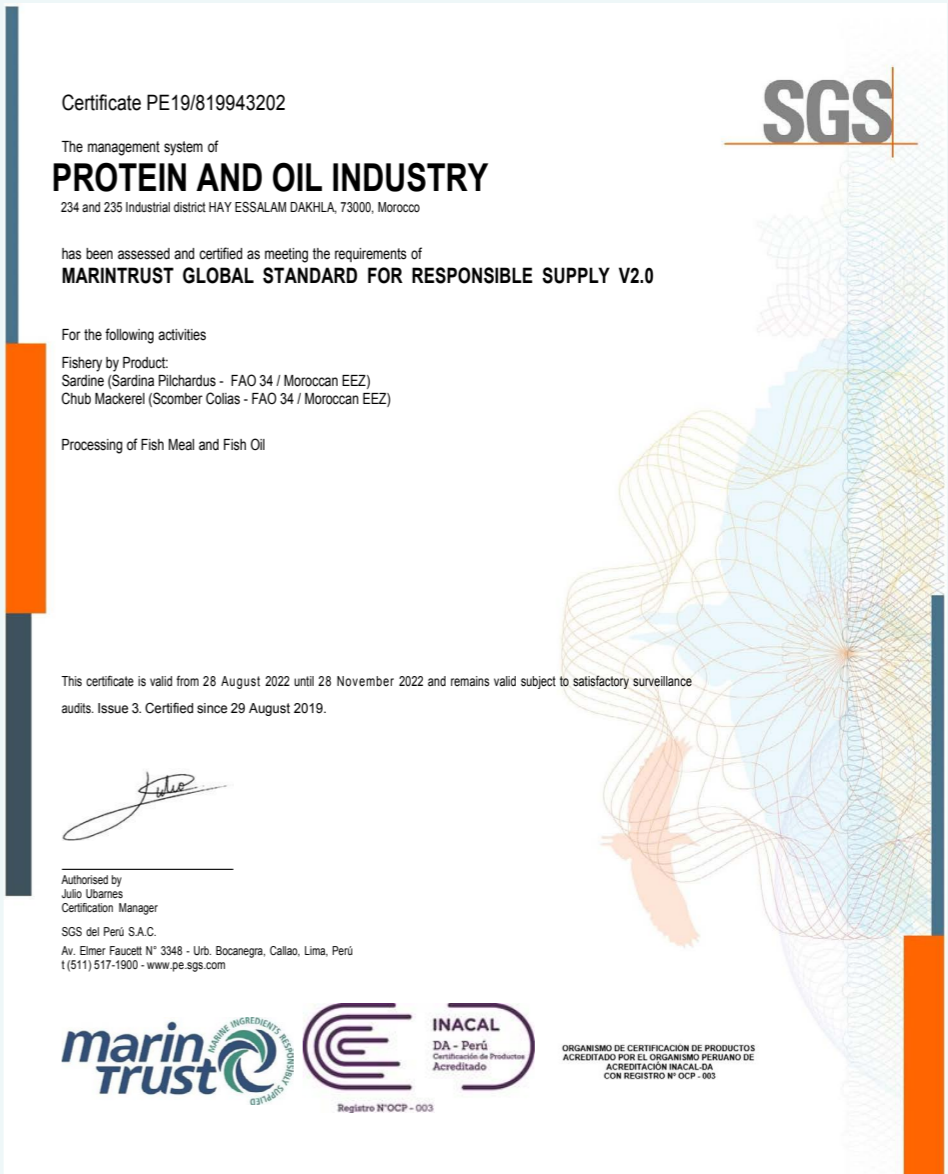
Regarding the certification/standard:

- Taking into account that all MarinTrust allows certificates claiming that sites in Western Sahara are located in "Morocco", has Global Trust, Intertek/SAI or SGS ever informed MarinTrust that the physical address of establishment is incorrect, through placing the cities of El Aaiún and Dakhla within the country of "Morocco"?
- In the Global Standard for Responsible Supply of Marine Ingredients version 3.0, under the point "Eligibility criteria" it is established that: "To be eligible to apply for certification, facilities shall: [...] be legally licenced in the country of operation. Meet the legal obligations that are in place for the jurisdiction(s) where marine ingredients are produced and supplied". Does MarinTrust agree that the country of operation of the establishments in El Aaiún and Dakhla is in fact not Morocco? If that is the case, how can it be seen as in line with the Standard that the place where marine ingredients are produced and supplied is located outside of the internationally recognised borders of the country that issued the licence to operate?
- In terms of social accountability, the Responsible Supply of Marine Ingredients version 2 requires applicants to "have a documented policy that demonstrates compliance with their national legislation to ensure that their marine ingredient products are manufactured in compliance to all relevant employment, welfare and safety requirements as stated in this sector". Which national legislation does MarinTrust consider to be applicable in Western Sahara?

- In terms of reporting and recording of material, the Standard requires that recording of raw material includes proof of authorisation to engage in the specific fishing activity. Does MarinTrust accept authorisations accorded by the government of Morocco to be legally valid in occupied Western Sahara?
- The Standard for Responsible Supply of Marine Ingredients, version 2, contains provisions on “responsible sourcing of legal, regulated and reported fishery material and avoidance of material sourced from IUU fishing activity”. The Standard defines illegal fishing as “operating in a country’s waters without permission”. All fishing in the waters offshore Western Sahara takes place on the basis of licences accorded by the Moroccan government, which has no sovereignty, jurisdiction of administering mandate over Western Sahara or its waters. The provisions on responsible traceability further emphasise the importance that MarinTrust attaches to legally sourced material, in containing requirements that compliant marine ingredients are to be traced back to an approved fishery material, and that avoidance of IUU fishing should be demonstrated. If not IUU, how does MarinTrust qualify the legal nature of the Moroccan fisheries operations in Western Sahara?
- On what legal basis, according to MarinTrust, does the supplier of raw materials in Western Sahara sell fish caught in Western Sahara to the certified establishments?
- The MarinTrust certificate of the facilities of Nouvelle Ougala in Tan Tan, South Morocco, establish that the raw materials are supposed to originate from the "Moroccan EEZ". What is done, if anything, to ascertain that the raw materials that are transported to the factory Nouvelle Ougala, either by sea or by land, originate from the Moroccan EEZ, and not from south of parallel 27°40'N?
- Have measures been taken vis-à-vis the certified companies in South Morocco to ascertain that they agree with the interpretation of the CJEU and of the United Nations that the Moroccan EEZ does not extend into the waters offshore Western Sahara?
- The provisions on responsible manufacturing practices require packaging and labelling to display the country of production. Does MarinTrust accept that the certified companies in Western Sahara, include Morocco as the country of production on packaging and labelling?
- The Global Standard for Responsible Supply of Marine Ingredients Version 3.0, paragraph 2.11.2.1, establishes that facilities that are sourcing whole fish, need to ascertain that the "facility shall complete and document the results of the MarinTrust Social Responsibility Risk Assessment for all vessels". From what we understand, this is done based on data from the "Social risk assessment guidance for facilities", and, particularly, the Country Risk Ratings of Annex 2. As long as the territory of Western Sahara - which according to the CJEU, ICJ, African Court of Human and Peoples Rights - is not enlisted with a Country Risk rating, how is this measured? If applying the risk data for Morocco on Western Sahara, why is that done that way?
- The Standard contains requirements on community engagement. It expects the applicant to have a written evaluation of the potential impacts of direct operations on the local community. How does MarinTrust evaluate a written application by an applicant in occupied Western Sahara, that concludes a positive impact on “the local community” (which are in Western Sahara are in majority Moroccan settlers) against the wider impacts of certifying a business operation that runs on the back of illegal fishery in a territory under occupation, against the will of the people of the territory?
- In terms of community engagement, “regular engagement with local community representatives and organizations” is expected. What relevance does this have in Western Sahara, where the denial of the right to freedom of assembly for Saharawis is well documented, and where the local community representatives are likely to be Moroccan, and not Saharawi (as Saharawis are a minority in their own land, and openly identifying yourself as Saharawi puts you under police surveillance)?

Regarding credibility of the scheme:

- Does MarinTrust consider it relevant to correctly reflect the country in which the certified establishments are located on its website?
- Does MarinTrust consider it relevant that its certificates correctly reflect the country in which the certified establishments are located?
- Does MarinTrust qualify incorrect country-of-origin as a matter of Food Fraud?



All certificates misstate the country of operation. In the MarinTrust certificate issued by SGS to the Moroccan company Protein and Oil Industry, SGS also incorrectly attributed Western Sahara’s maritime waters to Morocco’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), contrary to international law.



Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS)

“Azura Group has received the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) Certification for its horticultural sites in Agadir and Dakhla cities in Morocco. The AWS Standard aims to drive social, cultural, environmental, and economic benefits at site and catchment levels”, the French-Moroccan agri-company Azura mentioned in a press release.⁸³

The “certification highlights Azura's commitment to water stewardship and represents a step towards addressing water-related challenges in the horticulture sector in Morocco”, the Scotland-based Alliance for Water Stewardship stated.⁸⁴

Azura obtained the certificate for having been found to meet the requirements of the AWS Standard. The certificate was issued after the conformity assessment body Water Stewardship Assurance Services (WSAS) carried out an audit, including onsite visits to six of Azura's eight farms in Dakhla in occupied Western Sahara.⁸⁵

The AWS Standard – owned by the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) – is a framework that companies, farms or other water users can follow to use water responsibly. It is a standard that Azura now actively refers to in the marketing of the controversial production taking place in the occupied territory.

Controversy

Azura's production is rather controversial, massively producing tomatoes on Moroccan permits in occupied Western Sahara, for exports to the international market.

The 2024 AWS certification audit report correctly informs that “Azura is a private Franco-Moroccan family group created in 1988”. However, at no point

does the report put in question how a Franco-Moroccan family could have the right to undertake industrial farming on a piece of land that is neither part of France nor Morocco. To the contrary, it makes statements as “Over more than 30 years, it has become one of the leaders in cherry tomato production, with 1 200 hectares crops Morocco.”

There is no reference in the report to the real location of the plantation – which is in the territory of Western Sahara. It never addresses the ten CJEU rulings, nor takes the rulings' findings into account. To the contrary, the audit report outlines that Azura has a system set up “for local legal requirements and also the requirements for exporting to Europe.” It is not known what Azura has done to obtain Saharawi consent, nor to label the products in the correct manner in accordance with the EU case law on labelling of products from the territory.

The auditors treat the production as if the Moroccan government has a legal right to the territory. See for instance this fascinating segment:

“During the audit process it was discovered that there were many more stakeholders which are relevant to the site than those of which were presented as having been identified. Missing stakeholders: – ONEE: Office National de l'Electricité et de l'Eau -Branche Eau (National Office for Electricity and Water- Department of Water) – CRI: Conseil Régional de l'Investissement (Regional Investment Council) – Ministère de l'équipement et de l'eau: Ministry of Equipment and Water – Regional representative – Ministère de l'Intérieur: Ministry of Interior- Regional representative – Ministère de la transition énergétique et du développement

– durable- Ministry of energy transition and sustainable development-Regional representative – Agence Nationale des Ports: National Agency for seaports/ they are in charge of the implementation of Dakhla port”.

But the WSAS report auditors seem to have had the faintest idea of where they undertook the Azura audit.

- The facility is placed in the wrong country. The Dakhla site is not in Morocco. This error is systemic in all AWS's references to the Azura facility.⁸⁶
- The site address is wrong. The “Site details” explain that the location of the site is “Km 39 Route de Tiznit, Tin Mansour, Province Chtouka Ait Baha, Morocco”. That is in fact the address of Azura's site in Agadir, not the site in question where the onsite visit took place. The registered address is 1200 kilometer drive from the facility that was inspected.
- The report states that “The facility is in the Sakia El Hamra region”. This is incorrect. Morocco's illegal administrative division of the occupied territory and inclusion into the Moroccan administrative system (occupying powers are not allowed to treat an occupied manner in such a manner), entails that two such regions cover Western Sahara: “Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra” to the north and “Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab” to the south. The “Sakia El Hamra region” mentioned in the AWS report is neither the location of the Azura's facility in Dakhla nor the one in Agadir. It is a region one has to drive through on the way from the incorrect site address and the actual facility.

The audit report notes that the site has "provided a comprehensive presentation of the current state of water governance in Morocco as a whole, who the main agencies are and the state of water in the country." Western Sahara is not part of the country of Morocco.

With reference to the water that Azura is currently using, the report notes that "the strategic management of the resource is led by the government". WSAS did not respond why it believes the government of Morocco has any authority to use the ground water of the territory of Western Sahara, or how it believes Morocco can grant such water use permits to Azura.

Most of the original inhabitants of Dakhla sought refuge abroad after Mauritanian and later Moroccan military forces occupied the peninsula in 1975 and 1979, respectively. Today, this population lives in refugee camps in Algeria. On 23 June 2025, UN agencies operating in the camps issued a press release highlighting the alarming rise in severe malnutrition. Meanwhile, the maps shown in the WSAS audit report indicate that the water of the “Sahara Aquifer” remains insufficiently mapped. Notably, parts of the aquifer's eastern boundary align closely with the 2,000+ km landmine barrier constructed by Morocco in the 1980s. Given that some of Dakhla's original inhabitants continue to rely on pastures east of this barrier, on land not under foreign occupation, WSRW asked WSAS what safeguards exist to ensure the refugees from Dakhla are not deprived of vital water resources as a result of Morocco's and Azura's water management activities on their lands, but did not obtain a response.

Same family

The ties between the conformity assessment body Water Stewardship Assurance Services Ltd. (WSAS) and the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) – the body that developed the AWS Standard – seem tight knit.

WSAS is spun out from AWS to handle audits specifically under the AWS system. WSRW asked WSAS how this close relationship may undermine the perception of independence needed for such a body, without obtaining a response.

AWS and WSAS are indeed separate legal entities and the WSAS website notes that its board is “majority independent”.⁸⁷ However, WSAS is wholly-owned by AWS.⁸⁸ The latter has “significant control” over WSAS, and the right to appoint or remove directors.⁸⁹ WSAS and AWS have overlapping boards and are located at the same physical address in Scotland. It is not clear what sort of governance, funding or oversight of WSAS still remains with AWS.

In most third-party certification systems, the standard-setter (in this case AWS) must be separate from the certification/audit body (in this case WSAS), as well as from the company under audit (in this case Azura). This separation is essential for credibility, transparency and neutrality, and to avoid that the standard owner both controls the rulebook and the referee.

In addition to holding an AWS certificate, Azura is also a “member” of

AWS.⁹⁰ This membership grants Azura the right to participate in the voting process related to the revision of the AWS Standard, as well as in the nomination and election of members to the AWS Board and Technical Committee, which oversee the standard.

In its letter to AWS CEO Adrian Sym, WSRW asked what steps AWS would take vis-à-vis Water Stewardship Assurance Services, the Azura Group, and the issued certificate, as a consequence of WSRW’s concerns. This letter was never responded to.

The AWS CEO Adrian Sym is also a board member of WSAS. In a separate letter, WSRW asked Adrian Sym whether any other board members of WSAS had been informed about the letter WSRW sent to the CEO of AWS, Adrian Sym. The question was not responded to.

WSRW asked WSAS board member Mr. Sym whether the company’s management had been guided by AWS leadership – where Mr. Sym serves as CEO – regarding how the Standard should be interpreted in the context of illegally occupied land. Mr. Sym did not respond to the question.

WSRW wrote to AWS in 2024⁹¹ and to WSAS in 2025⁹² but has not since obtained a response. WSRW wrote to Azura on 2 December 2024⁹³ without obtaining a response.

CERTIFICATION REPORT
Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS)



Audit Number: AO-000994

SITE DETAILS

Site: **Maraissa - Dakhla**
Address: Km 39 Route de Tiznit, Tin Mansour, Province Chtouka Ait Baha, MOROCCO
Contact Person: Emily Andre
AWS Reference Number: AWS-000544
Site Structure: Single Site

CERTIFICATION DETAILS

Certification status: **Certified Core**
Date of certification decision: **2024-May-08**
Validity of certificate: **2027-May-07**



Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)

DMarine Stewardship Council (MSC), a certification scheme for sustainable fisheries, has made it clear that it has not certified any fisheries in Moroccan, Mauritanian, or Western Saharan waters. As such, products bearing the MSC Chain of Custody certification cannot originate from these areas.⁹⁴ This is positive.

But Spanish food distributors give another impression. The MSC name and label are repeatedly used by such companies to lend credibility to their trade in fisheries products from Western Sahara. Some claim to be in the process of obtaining certification, others say they are “supporting” or “collaborating” with MSC. What they all have in common is that they are free riders: their imports from Western Sahara have no connection to MSC certification, yet their marketing strongly suggests otherwise.

The practice is clearly misleading for consumers.

The MSC Chain of Custody certification is strictly related to the product itself and to the process in which it was made,

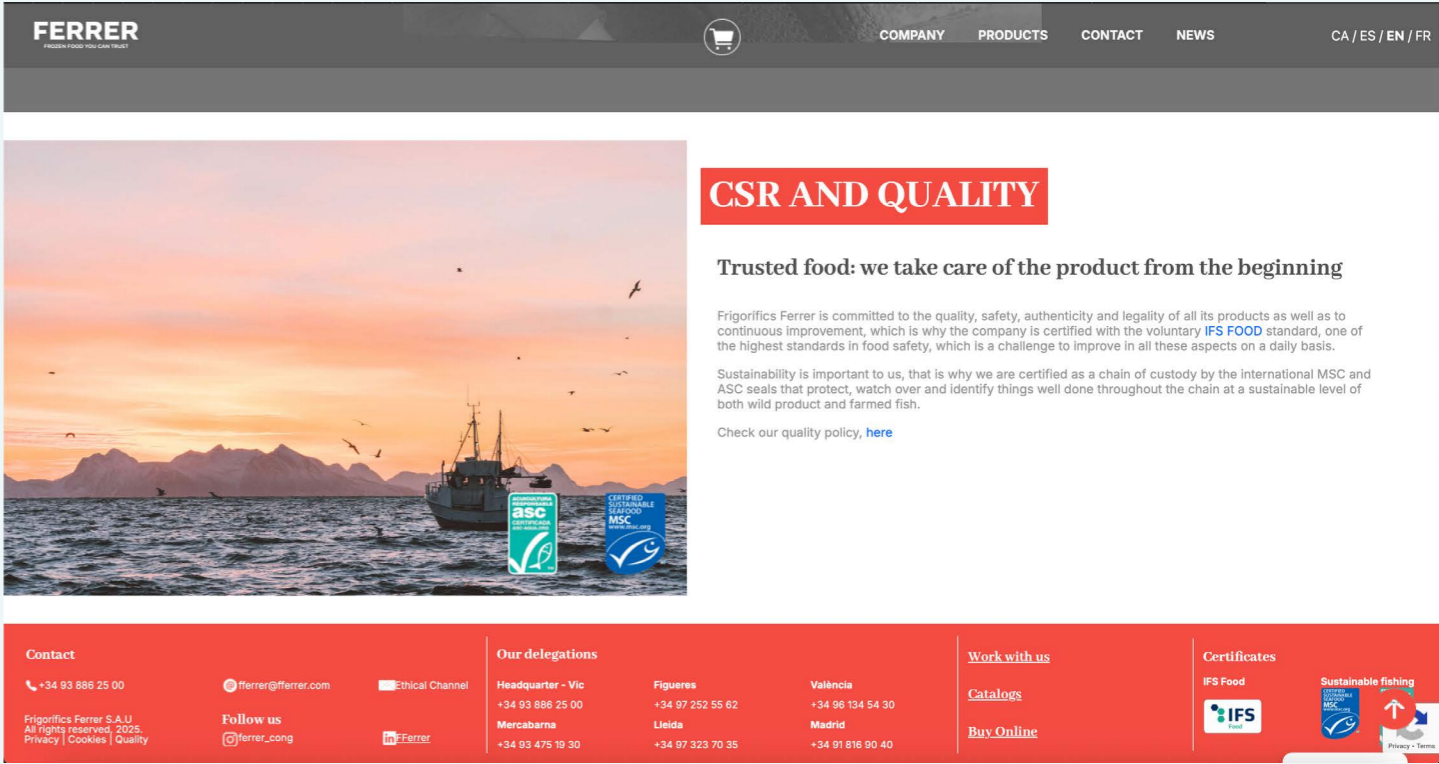
with a focus on the environment: primarily on maintaining healthy fish stocks and minimizing environmental impact.

MSC does not, however, assess a company’s conduct outside of the certified product line. Nor does it assess a company’s human rights practices or environmental harms linked to other operations, or how a certified company behaves in other parts of its supply chain. In this way, a company that has one single product line MSC-certified, can use the brand to embellish its entire company.

Spanish fish distributors such as Ferrer, Nuchar and Discefa, 3 de Pulpo, which all source fish products from Western Sahara, strongly suggest in its external communications websites that it is the entire company that is MSC-certified, while they are not. Also Moroccan companies Unimer and Sahara Octopus refer to MSC certificates, while it is not clear what this entails. None of the companies responded to WSRW enquiries.⁹⁵ So, what is MSC doing to address this “MSC-washing” of products arriving in the EU market originating from

Morocco’s illegal fisheries operations in Western Sahara waters? WSRW was in contact with MSC in 2024–2025 over the matter.⁹⁶

- MSC did not respond to most questions about the above-mentioned companies using its name while simultaneously trading in products from Western Sahara.
- WSRW asked MSC how it assesses the risk that granting a certificate to a company’s operations in – or imports from – Location A could be used to normalise or greenwash unsustainable practices by the same company in or from Location B. MSC did not respond, but commented that “The MSC’s Global Licensing team monitor label and trademark use and everything using the label requires approval at a product level [WSRW’s emphasis]. This helps to prevent mislabelling and to ensure integrity. The team would also investigate if the label were used incorrectly.”



- According to Moroccan media, the Moroccan fish industry association COMAIP has been actively exploring MSC certification for the sector to open up for new international markets after the CJEU ruling⁹⁷. MSC did not respond to WSRW’s inquiry regarding whether it has engaged with COMAIP.

Interestingly, MSC did comment on one company: the Andorran firm Congelats del Nord, which describes its octopus imports on its website as coming from “Dakhla, Morocco.” This geographical mislabeling is consistently used throughout the site.⁹⁸ The company also claims to operate its own processing facility in Dakhla.

On the same webpage, just below that statement, the Andorran company claimed: “We are part of a Fishery Improvement Project with the MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) to further provide sustainability options to the fishing industry.”⁹⁹ However, this was not accurate.

“We can find no record of Congelats del Nord listed as a FIP, as an MSC certified fishery or with MSC chain of custody certification. We have written to them querying the reference to MSC on their website”, MSC informed WSRW. A few days later the Congelats del Nord website had been revised to read: “We are part of Fishery Improvement projects, working towards Marine Stewardship Council Standards, to further provide sustainability options to the fishing industry.”¹⁰⁰ As if that makes much of a difference.

WSRW asked whether MSC, given its non-political mandate, would consider contacting Congelats del Nord again to make clear that MSC’s name should not be used in a context where the company is misleading its clients, by falsely and fraudulently stating an incorrect country of origin for its products, in disregard of principles established by international courts and the United Nations. MSC did not respond.

The MSC sets two standards – a Fisheries Standard which sets environmen-

tal requirements which fisheries must meet to become certified and a Chain of Custody Standard – a supply chain standard – which ensures that only seafood from certified fisheries bears the MSC blue ecolabel. Each of the two standards come with an easy-to-use searchable registry.¹⁰¹

MSC is vocal about its commitment to preventing Food Fraud. Misrepresenting a product’s country of origin clearly constitutes fraudulent behavior. However, it remains unclear to WSRW whether such conduct disqualifies a company from obtaining MSC certification for its various products.

Food Safety and Quality Certifications

BRCGS (British Retail Consortium Global Standards)

The UK company BRCGS, a short for Brand Reputation through Compliance – Global Standards, presents itself as one of the world's leading food safety certification schemes. Owned by LGC ASSURE, it provides audits intended to reassure retailers and consumers about product hygiene and quality.

Although BRCGS claims to guarantee food safety, its own standards are paywalled and cannot be publicly scrutinised. Even companies promoting BRCGS certification may not actually hold valid certificates.

WSRW has identified nine establishments listed in the BRCGS certificate directory¹⁰² under "Morocco", that are in fact located in occupied Western Sahara – a fundamental error for a standard that is meant to verify compliance with national food safety legislation.

Neither the certification bodies responsible, nor the companies involved, replied to WSRW's letters.

The Moroccan fish exporting companies found in the BRCGS directory – all filed in the wrong country – include: ERG Conserve¹⁰³ (by Eurofins, 2024), Oceamic Laayoun E II Sarl¹⁰⁴ (by Euro-

fins, 2025), Conserverie de Oued Eddahab¹⁰⁵ (by Eurofins, 2025), ERG Delice SARL¹⁰⁶ (by Eurofins, 2025), Gold Sea Fish SARL¹⁰⁷ (by Eurofins, 2025), Conserveries Rio de Oro SARL¹⁰⁸ (by SYGMA Certification SL, 2025), Nouvelle Conserverie de Boujdour SARL¹⁰⁹ (by SYGMA Certification SL, 2025), PELAGIC PRO SAS¹¹⁰ (by SYGMA Certification SL, 2025) and Damsa SA¹¹¹ (by SYGMA Certification SL, 2024).

Also the French agricultural distributor Anima Group advertised that its supply chain was BRCGS certified. Yet WSRW was unable to locate any of its suppliers or reported subsidiaries in the BRCGS directory. After WSRW asked for documentation, Anima quickly scrubbed most of the BRCGS references from its websites – without any explanation.¹¹² As of December 2025, one unexplained BRCGS reference¹¹³ remains online.

Another peculiar case concerns the Moroccan seafood company Comp-toire Commercial et Industriel Derham (CCID), based in Dakhla. In February 2024, SYGMA Certification issued a BRCGS certificate to CCID with the incorrect country designation "Morocco." The certificate expired in February 2025 and CCID's listing was

later removed from the registry – yet CCID still displays an outdated pre-2019 BRCGS logo on its website¹¹⁴ and LinkedIn page.¹¹⁵ WSRW contacted the company in 2024 but received no reply.

Although the BRCGS directory provides names of certified companies and their auditing bodies, it offers little clarity about what the certification actually requires. The Global Standard for Food Safety, Issue 9, costs GBP 150¹¹⁶ and the interpretation guideline another GBP 200¹¹⁷ – placing key information out of reach for journalists, civil society, and consumers. Until October 2025, the certificate registry was public. It is now behind a login system limited to "companies" reducing external oversight.

BRCGS itself remains seemingly unwilling to clarify any of these issues. WSRW wrote in 2024¹¹⁸ and in 2025 – both via email and via an online form – without receiving any response. WSRW believes that a certification scheme unable to explain its own certificates – or correct basic errors about the country where a factory is located – cannot credibly claim to guarantee safety, accuracy or trustworthiness.



IFS Management GmbH (IFS Food)

The German initiative IFS Food claims on its website to help "companies increase the trustworthiness of their products" and is intended as a safeguard against food fraud, risks in fact enabling deceptive practices.

A IFS label on a product is, however, no guarantee against misleading origin declaration, in spite of what the IFS label was set up to avoid.

IFS Management GmbH is a German company responsible for developing and maintaining the International Featured Standards (IFS), which are designed to ensure quality, safety, and regulatory compliance across the food, retail, and logistics sectors. These standards are particularly important for companies seeking to meet both customer expectations and legal requirements through certification.

One of its flagship programs, the IFS Food Standard – currently in its latest iteration, Version 8¹¹⁹ – focuses on certifying food manufacturers and processors.

The IFS Food label is used by the French agricultural company Azura, as well as as by a number of Moroccan and Spanish companies involved in the distribution of fisheries products from the territory, as Univela Morocco (which has agents in Dakhla and Laayoune), Abelta Canning (which has a factory in El Aaiún), Oceamic II in El Aaiún, Spanish octopus distributor Discefa, Unimer Group (which receives most of its landings in Laayoune and Dakhla ports), Spanish importing company Merpacífico and the Andorran company Congelats del Nord. All these are referring to the wrong country of operation or origin, which is a paradox, considering the IFS Food scheme is set up to avoid Food Fraud.

The only complete IFS Food certificate WSRW has found online pertaining to



the IFS Food standard, is one issued to the Moroccan company Conserveries Rio de Oro SARL by the French certification company Eurofins.¹²⁰ According to this IFS Food certificate, the Moroccan company is listed as being located in "Morocco," which is factually incorrect.

A number of companies openly trading fish products on the EU market in violation of the CJEU ruling of 4 October 2024 on labelling are doing so while displaying the IFS Food logo – despite the fact that the logo is intended to represent a safeguard against Food Fraud. In this way, the IFS Food brand is indirectly facilitating the sort of practices through its association with these companies.

None of the companies making claims of being IFS Food certified responded to WSRW's letters, making it impossible to determine whether their claims of an IFS Food connection are genuine or fabricated. Congelats del Nord incorrectly referenced a different certification scheme – MSC – on its website and was required to remove this reference after being contacted by MSC in 2024. There is no way to find out if Congelats del Nord may also mislead about IFS Food certificate.

IFS Food does not have an open registry of certificates as some other standards have. It did not clarify what measures it has taken to prevent goods from certified factories being marketed in the European market as originating from "Morocco." It has not clarified how the expected legal compliance can be checked, nor what country's laws apply to the territory.

WSRW requested copies of the certificates from IFS Food and all identified companies referencing IFS Food, but received no response.

IFS Food did not respond to inquiries about whether it has criteria to assess the legality of fisheries processing under international law.

The IFS standard paragraph 4.4 Purchasing, states:
4.4.1 "A procedure for the sourcing of raw materials, semi-finished products and packaging materials and the approval and monitoring of suppliers (internal and external) shall be documented, implemented and maintained. This procedure shall contain, at a minimum:
• raw materials and/or suppliers' risks
• required performance standards (e.g., certification, origin, etc.)..."
4.4.2 "The purchased materials shall be assessed, based on risks and suppliers' status, for food safety, product quality, legality and authenticity...."

Among the above-mentioned companies, all claiming IFS certification, some are based in Morocco proper. These source raw materials from Western Sahara. IFS Food did not respond to how these establishments are to ensure legal compliance in the supply chain, or how the products that are exported from Western Sahara into Morocco are labelled correctly.

IFS Food did not respond to inquiries about what, if any, measures have been taken to ensure that food distribution companies accurately label their products.

WSRW wrote to IFS in 2024, with three reminders, but received no reply.¹²¹





GMP+ International

The world’s largest certification scheme for “safe and sustainable animal feed” does not check whether its certified fish feed companies source from illegal fisheries in occupied Western Sahara, where exploitation violate the Saharawi people’s right to self-determination.

The GMP+ system, run by the Dutch-based GMP+ International B.V., aims to prevent hazards in the feed supply chain, ensuring safe and sustainable feed animal and human consumption. Its stated mission is “to enable every company in the feed chain to take responsibility for working in a safe and sustainable way.”¹²² It offers “uniform international standards to produce safe feed and a growing set of international standards for sustainable feed”.¹²³

Asked whether it had assessed the compatibility of its certifications in Western Sahara with the Saharawi people's right to self-determination, or with its own sustainability claims, GMP+ International replied that such issues fall outside its scope.¹²⁴

“The activities of GMP+ International focus on feed safety and specific sustainability topics. Legality of fishery practices or fishery permits do not fall under the scope of GMP+”, it wrote to WSRW.

As a result, Moroccan companies operating in the occupied territory routinely obtain sustainability certificates, all of which are incorrectly listed in the GMP+ registry as being located in “Morocco”. On 22 April 2025, GMP+ International

published a statement on Western Sahara on its website.¹²⁵

“The CJEU ruling is related to the EU-Morocco trade agreements regarding fisheries and agricultural products, and the labelling of products from Western Sahara. While GMP+ International does not take a position on legal or political matters outside the scope of feed certification, we want to ensure that you are aware of this development. If you are operating in or working with companies in this region, this ruling may be relevant when assessing certification applications and company registrations. For more information, we encourage you to consult official sources or legal advisors”, the organisation wrote.

Less than two months after the publication of the statement, on 17 July 2025, GMP+ International accepted yet another certificate in the territory – again misfiled as located in “Morocco”, in contradiction of the EU court rulings. One year after WSRW first flagged the erroneous country entries, they remain unchanged.

As of November 2025, the GMP+ database listed 15 Moroccan-flagged companies that are actually based in Western Sahara. Together, they constitute nearly the entire Moroccan multi-million-euro fishmeal and fish-oil industry. They are:

Alpha Atlantique de Sahara Marocaine (GMP058119), Atlantic Tank Terminal (GMP011127), Copelit (GMP031036), Elam Sahara (GMP059994), KB Fish

(GMP008469), Laayoune Proteines (GMP007430), Overseas Proteines Sarl (GMP014473), Protein and oil industry (GMP050256), Société de transport, fourniture et consulting Industriel (STFCI) (GMP013819), Somatraps (GMP057658), Tiscop Trading Sarl (GMP009318), Oued Eddahab Pro (GMP061776), Pelagic Pro II (GMP061636), Expert Laboratoire Analytic Maroc (ELAM) (GMP061900), Delta Ocean (GMP050506).

Their certificates fall under five “scopes”: Production of feed materials, storage and transshipment of feed, laboratory testing, road transport of feed and trade in feed.

GMP+ International has also certified Köster Marine Proteins GmbH (KMP), Europe’s leading importer of fishmeal, based in Bremen. The two licences issued to KMP are both under the GMP+ Feed Safety Assurance Module 2020, for scope of “Affreightment of sea transport” and “Trade in feed”, and both expire in May 2026. KMP proudly advertises the GMP+ licences on its website¹²⁶, but has not answered any of the seven letters from WSRW.¹²⁷

One year after the CJEU ruling, Moroccan companies sourcing fish from illegal fisheries on Moroccan licences – and misreporting their origin – continue to hold the GMP+ certificate.

Passing on the responsibility
GMP+ International states that company addresses are registered by the Certification Bodies based on information

supplied by the companies themselves, and that the Certification Bodies are responsible for assessing compliance with GMP+ requirements.

GMP+ International stated it cannot share further details regarding specific certificates, and that certification and correct registration is the responsibility of the Certification Bodies .

It also confirmed that it “has not discussed CJEU decisions of October 4th with Certification Bodies or certified companies”, though it pledged on 13 December 2024 to “bring the situation in the Western Sahara to the attention of our Certification Bodies, including the recent CJEU’s rulings”.

Yet false “Morocco” entries appeared both before and after that promise: on 9 December 2024 and 24 January 2025.

Offers Food fraud advice
A Moroccan company in occupied Western Sahara only needs to submit incorrect country information to be misregistered.

Neither the certifying body nor GMP+ International appear to follow up the errors further. Users of the GMP+ registry will encounter false geographical information. It is as if the 4 October 2024 rulings, including on accurate country-of-origin labeling, and the “separate and distinct” status of Morocco and Western Sahara simply do not exist.

The Moroccan companies can then,

through their own communication channels, not only misrepresent the country they are based in, but do so alongside the logo of the leading label for “safe and sustainable animal feed” in the world.

To questions as to whether GMP+ International agrees with the international courts and the United Nations that Western Sahara is not part of Morocco, the company responded that “GMP+ International is a private company with limited liability under Dutch law. We comply with the regulations that apply to our business operations.”

The misrepresentation of a product’s country of origin constitutes acts of Food Fraud. GMP+ International itself refers to “False declarations of geographic (...) origin” as examples of Food Fraud¹²⁸, and provides a “Possible fraud control plan” to its certified companies¹²⁹, advising them to cross-check information from suppliers/producers with the GMP+ certified company database. But because that database contains wrong country of origin information, European distributors may unknowingly market products with incorrect origin information, risking non-compliance with EU law.

After the 2024 CJEU rulings, products from Western Sahara must be labelled “Western Sahara”, not “Morocco”.

For the 15 Moroccan firms that are incorrectly listed in the GMP+ registry, the issue is not the product itself, but

the exporters’ false claim about where they actually operate.

Lack of transparency
None of the 15 Moroccan GMP+ certified companies in the occupied territory have responded to WSRW; only the French mother company of Atlantic Tank Terminal, Olvea, replied – without addressing questions relating to its GMP+ certificate, or providing a copy.

This seemingly contradicts GMP+’s own principle of “encouraging transparency and involvement with multiple stakeholders” in its F0.0 Introduction on the GMP+ FC scheme 2020. GMP+ International did not say whether sanctions await non-communicative certified companies. “It is a company’s responsibility to engage with and reply to queries of third parties”, it stated. It did not explain how WSRW could obtain answers from the certified German company KMP.

GMP+ International also declined to identify the certifying bodies that GMP+ International itself has stated to be responsible for the 15 Moroccan establishments in Western Sahara and for KMP in Germany, making it impossible to question these certifying bodies about the gravely erroneous registrations. GMP+ International did not answer whether the certifying bodies had travelled into the occupied territory as part of their audits.

Which legislation?

In the scheme’s paragraph 4.1., "F0.1 Rights and Obligations" it is stated that "A company must be a legal entity and must have a legal business registration at the competent authority in the country in which it is based."¹³⁰ The GMP+ Feed Safety Assurance Module 2020, R1.0 – Feed Safety Management Systems Requirements paragraph 4.1, reads that the certified company “must comply with the applicable feed legislation. This relates to feed legislation: a. in the country in which the certified company is located; b. in the country where the feed is marketed.[...] In all of the above cases, it is the most strict requirement which is applicable for GMP+ certified companies.”¹³¹

From an EU law perspective, which affirms that Western Sahara is not part of Morocco, Moroccan feed legislation and safety controls in Western Sahara are irrelevant. GMP+ International did not clarify which national legislation it considers applicable in Western Sahara, nor in which country it believes the 15 Moroccan establishments are located.

It underlined that it is “a company’s responsibility to comply with relevant (feed) legislation”.

GMP+ certified companies must “have a legal business registration at the competent authority in the country in which it is based”. The certified companies do not have that – unless one chose to ignore the rulings of the international courts. GMP+ International does not respond how a Moroccan business registry could be relevant in view of the EU case law.

The same apparent failure to adhere to its own legal expectations appears under the Standard’s §8.5. Hazard Control, 8.5.1.1. It states that "The GMP+ certified company must keep documented information up-to-date about all feed materials, feed additives and processing aids as far as needed

for identifying hazards and do a risk assessment (see §8.5.2.2). The following information must be documented: [...] d. place of origin (provenance); [...] k. legal requirements (see §4.1)..." GMP+ International did not clarify what country of origin that companies in Western Sahara are supposed to file.

In addition to certifying companies operating directly in the occupied territory, GMP+ International also allows certification of companies registered in Morocco proper that source raw materials from fish stocks in Western Sahara. GMP+ International has not explained how these Morocco-based companies ensure legal compliance within their supply chains.

Some of the companies that brand themselves as GMP+ certified are clearly selling products from Western Sahara as if they were from Morocco. GMP+ International did not respond to what checks are taken, if any, to ascertain that the certified distributors are not including in its supply chain products that originate from Western Sahara, or that are incorrectly labelled, in violation of the EU case law.

According to GMP+ International, the certification will demonstrate that the companies “meet all requirements and conditions for the assurance of feed safety. By applying safe practices across the entire feed chain, companies contribute to safer feed, worldwide”. It states that the companies will thereby “meet market requirements for working more sustainably and responsibly. By using a responsible production process, companies contribute to more sustainable feed, worldwide.”

Its feed certification (GMP+ FC) scheme consists of two modules: GMP+ Feed Safety Assurance (GMP+ FSA), and GMP+ Feed Responsibility Assurance (GMP+ FRA). Companies can be certified for one or both modules.





Foundation for Food Safety Certification (FSSC 22000)

FSSC 22000 certification scheme for food safety management systems. It is designed to ensure that organisations in the food chain can demonstrate their ability to manage food safety and meet applicable regulatory requirements. The standard is based on existing ISO standards and includes additional requirements specific to the food industry, integrating the ISO 22000.

The scheme is managed by the Dutch organisation Foundation FSSC 22000, which oversees the certification scheme's development and operation. The foundation is responsible for maintaining the scheme's integrity, ensuring compliance with Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) standards, and promoting the certification worldwide. The standard itself, and guiding documents, can be downloaded from the FSSC 22000 website.¹³²

The foundation manages a registry in which all certified establishments are listed.¹³³ 91 of these are in "Morocco". Three organisations in "Laayoune, Morocco" have been issued a certificate, in the category of "CI - Processing of perishable animal products": Iglo Fish S.A. (Scheme: FSSC 22000. COID: MAR-1-3835-024172)¹³⁴, SOCOPO S.A.R.L. (Scheme: FSSC 22000. COID: MAR-1-3835-351003)¹³⁵, Tissir Port S.A.R.L. (Scheme: FSSC 22000. COID: MAR-1-3835-250907)¹³⁶

A series of pictures on the Facebook page of SOCOPO shows what seems to be representatives of the certification body Quality Austria visiting the SOCOPO facility in the occupied territories in relation to the FSSC 22000

certificates in 2022, 2023 and 2024¹³⁷. SOCOPO systematically refers to being in "Morocco" on its website. As of December 2025, the SOCOPO certificate had disappeared from the FSSC 22000 registry, but SOCOPO remains informing on its website about its FSSC 22000 certificate. WSRW is not aware of the reason behind this discrepancy. Tissir Port is part of the Copelit group, which systematically misrepresents the location of its operations.¹³⁸

In addition, FSSC 22000 certifications are given to companies that are involved in purchases from the occupied territory, such as the Spanish company Discefa¹³⁹ (a wholesaler and distributor of "Moroccan octopus (Dakhla)"¹⁴⁰) and Discefa's mother company in the US, Ditusa.¹⁴¹

WSRW wrote to FSSC in November 2024¹⁴², and another four times in 2024 and 2025.

FSSC did not respond to questions regarding the certificates themselves, including the geographical references on the certificate and the certifying bodies, details of the travels of the certifying bodies into the occupied territory, details about the FSSC Code of Ethics, what legislation FSSC considers applies to Western Sahara.

Chapter 2.5.2 of the FSSC Scheme Version 6.0 2023 establishes that a) "the organization shall ensure that finished products are labelled according to all applicable statutory and regulatory requirements in the country of intended sale, including allergen and customer specific requirements." The certified

organisations furthermore need to comply with the FSSC 22000 Additional Requirements.¹⁴³ These requirements include specific paragraphs on Food Fraud, which includes references to country-of-origin misinformation. According to the CJEU ruling of 4 October 2024, produce from Western Sahara cannot be labelled as from Morocco, but has to be labelled as from Western Sahara. FSSC did not respond to what steps, if any, the Foundation is taking to stop the false labelling of products, incorrect geographical references on the certificates, incorrect geographical references on the FSSC website, and why it uses Moroccan COID codes for establishments in Western Sahara.

It did not respond to what has been done, if anything, relating to the Spanish company Discefa's misrepresentation of the country of origin of its products.

FSSC did not respond to questions relating to its Code of Ethics, dated 2022. The first sentence in the document reads "FSSC applies strict conduct and compliance principles to provide trust and deliver impact". According to the code "Businesses commit to the following principles: [...] Supporting and respecting the protection of internationally recognized human rights".

FSSC did not respond to questions as to whether the issuing of certificates to Moroccan companies in occupied Western Sahara or to European companies that source from Western Sahara is something that the Saharawi people have consented to.



As of December 2025, the Moroccan company SOCOPO, based in El Aaiún in occupied Western Sahara, claimed to hold FSSC 22000 certification, issued by Quality Austria, although it did not appear in the standard's official registry.

Specialised certifications

Some certificates are highly specialised. Certain products from occupied Western Sahara are certified under for instance **gluten-free** or **halal** labels. Others are certified as compliant with Jewish **kosher** dietary requirements. The Orthodox Union – one of the biggest Orthodox Jewish organisations in the United States – manages a kosher certification service that certifies food, ingredients, and facilities as kosher, meaning they meet Jewish dietary laws¹⁴⁴. This Kosher Certification System is labelled with a U symbol on a blue background¹⁴⁵. The label is found on the website of the Dakhla based company Conserveries Rio de Oro.¹⁴⁶ WSRW wrote to the Orthodox Union in 2024¹⁴⁷, with a reminder in 2025, without obtaining a response.

Certification and Inspection Bodies

Acerta Certification
Has certified Mijk Domaine Agricole (under GLOBALG.A.P, 2023)¹⁴⁸ and Sté. Production Agricole Tawarta (under GLOBALG.A.P, 2024)¹⁴⁹.

WSRW wrote Acerta in 2024.¹⁵⁰ Acerta replied that the issue “exceeds the capacity of our company to provide an appropriate response. Our entity strictly adheres to the guidelines established by the organisations that set the standards.”¹⁵¹ Acerta wrote that it would raise the matter with GLOBALG.A.P. and review it internally, “including with our delegation in Morocco”. WSRW wrote Acerta again twice in 2025, receiving no further response.

KIWA España
KIWA España, owned by Dutch company KIWA N.V., issued a GLOBALG.A.P. Chain of Custody certificate for French food distributor Groupe Anima in December 2024.¹⁵² A CoC certificate relies on the premise that Anima’s suppliers in occupied Western Sahara are themselves certified as “responsible”.

Both the standard and the underlying supplier certificates fail to list the correct country of origin. GLOBALG.A.P. has so far not explained why it evaluates agricultural practices in Western Sahara against Moroccan legislation, given that the territory is not part of Morocco under international law.

As a result, GLOBALG.A.P.’s Chain of Custody system is in the case of Western Sahara compromised at its core: Anima Group is required to ensure its traceability records are “accurate”, yet the certificates underpinning those records contain basic factual errors.

WSRW asked KIWA España how traceability can be reliable when the underlying GLOBALG.A.P. supplier certificates misstate the production’s country of origin.¹⁵³

KIWA España responded that it “works daily to guarantee the integrity, independence and technical rigour of our certification processes” and that operators comply with “legal requirements” and GLOBALG.A.P. rules.¹⁵⁴ But the reply makes clear that KIWA applies whatever legal framework GLOBALG.A.P. instructs – even if it is the wrong legal framework.

In other words: if GLOBALG.A.P. insists on treating Western Sahara as Morocco, KIWA España accepts it.

KIWA also confirmed that Anima “has already been informed of the need to ensure the proper identification of the production areas located in Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab on its website.” Anima implemented the change on 19 November.

LRQA (Seafood) Ltd
LRQA (Seafood) Limited is the seafood-specialist arm of Lloyd’s Register Quality Assurance (LRQA). LRQA is now a separate company, not part of Lloyd’s Register itself.

It offers certification audits against a series of standards, such as MSC, GlobalG.A.P., BRCGS and IFS.

LRQA issued a licence for Moroccan fish oil fish meal producer Oued Eddahab Pro in El Aaiún for adhering to MarinTrust’s Responsible Supply of Marine Ingredients Standard for Responsible Supply Version 3.0¹⁵⁵ in 2025. In 2024, LRQA carried out a certification for MarinTrust in relation to mackerel fisheries off Morocco.¹⁵⁶ The study included a number of Moroccan companies based in Western Sahara, sourcing fish from Western Sahara waters. Yet, it claimed that the country of “origin of the product” is “Morocco”. Similar studies were made regarding sardines in the territory in 2022¹⁵⁷ and in 2023¹⁵⁸.

Somewhat paradoxically: While certifying Moroccan companies on occupied land and failing to correctly refer to the correct country they are operating in, LRQA is also involved in due diligence and risk-analysis solutions covering food safety, environmental impact, and social responsibility. Equally seemingly without irony, the company brands itself as contributing to “Build consumer trust through compliance, supply chain transparency and proactive risk management”.¹⁵⁹

WSRW wrote to LRQA on 26.06.2025¹⁶⁰ and on 01.11.2025. No response obtained.

SGS S.A.
SGS S.A., headquartered in Geneva, provides inspection, verification, testing, and certification services across a range of sectors, including food safety, quality assurance, and environmental protection. Through these activities, the company has repeatedly collaborated with Moroccan industries operating in occupied Western Sahara.

In 2022, SGS’s Peruvian subsidiary certified the Moroccan company Protein and Oil Industry as compliant with the MarinTrust Global Standard for Responsible Supply. One of the certificates, valid during 2022, claimed the firm sourced its sardine and chub mackerel from the “Moroccan EEZ”¹⁶¹.

This is highly questionable. Morocco’s EEZ extends no farther south than 27°40’N, while Dakhla – where the company operates – is roughly 450 km further south, in occupied Western Sahara. WSRW is not aware of any instance in which fish caught inside the Moroccan EEZ has been landed in Dakhla.

SGS has not clarified whether it considers the waters off Dakhla to be part of Morocco’s EEZ. The EU Court of Justice is crystal clear that Western Sahara waters are not part of the Moroccan EEZ.¹⁶²

SGS wrote to WSRW on 2 December 2025, describing its involvement as a “limited and concise role of a certifying body”.¹⁶³

Ironically, while SGS is blindly accepting incorrect address information from the Moroccan companies on MarinTrust certificates, it states that it is by its nature “not making designations as to geopolitical boundaries”.

“SGS has no intention to take any position on this ongoing conflict. We therefore contest your statement that SGS would have acted grossly negligently”, it wrote.

Upon writing on the SGS letter head that the Dakhla-based company is located in Morocco, SGS shifted responsibility to the audited companies, the scheme owner MarinTrust and other certification bodies.

“As a certification body, SGS conducts audits in accordance with the MarinTrust Standard and the information provided in the official MarinTrust application form by the applicant and as approved by MarinTrust. In this form, the classification of authorized FAO zones and species is provided and the applicant chose FAO 34. The classification of species is also provided by MarinTrust in its report of the evaluation of sub-products, which is elaborated previously by another certification body (LRQA, in this case) on behalf of MarinTrust. The certification process involves several certification bodies, each with a different role”, the signatureless SGS letter commented.

A new SGS certificate was issued to Protein and Oil Industry later in 2022, valid from 29 August that year until 28 August 2025¹⁶⁴, replacing the erroneous “Moroccan EEZ” claim with the technical term “FAO 34”, a designation that could refer to waters off either Morocco

or Western Sahara. It is unclear why SGS issued two certificates for the same standard, to the same company, in the same year.

Another SGS-issued MarinTrust certificate – for the Moroccan company CIBEL II, based in Agadir – states that the company sources sardines from “FAO 34, South Zone (Zone C) / Moroccan EEZ.”¹⁶⁵ The certificate, valid until 2027, therefore contains a serious geographic inaccuracy, as the Moroccan EEZ does not extend into FAO 34 Zone C.

Such a claim directly contradicts international law: Morocco’s EEZ does not extend into Western Sahara, as reaffirmed by the European Court of Justice in its 4 October 2024 ruling. It’s paradoxical that a certificate meant to ensure “responsible supply” misrepresents the origin of the fish it certifies.

However, SGS is not only misidentifying maritime zones; it also fails to recognise land borders.

The company lists Dakhla as part of Morocco, though it is located in occupied Western Sahara. Misrepresenting a product’s country of origin amounts to Food Fraud, yet MarinTrust certificates continue to enable exporters in the territory to make false origin claims. MarinTrust has ignored WSRW’s repeated requests for clarification.

Its failure to correctly identify the country in which it operates, raises serious questions about SGS’s ability to conduct the legal compliance checks required by the MarinTrust’s responsibility standard.

In 2022, SGS del Perú S.A.C. also issued a MarinTrust certificate under the same standard to KB Fish SARL, based in El Aaiún, Western Sahara, stating that KB Fish’s sardines come from “Central Zone (Zones A + B)” and the “South Zone

(Zone C)” of FAO Fishing Area 34.¹⁶⁶ To clarify: Zone A lies offshore Morocco proper, Zone B spans waters off both Morocco and Western Sahara (down to 27° N latitude), and Zone C covers only the waters off Western Sahara.

WSRW asked SGS whether KB Fish is required to separately manage, assess, and report on products sourced from Western Sahara versus Morocco, a distinction required under international law.

“In accordance with the established MarinTrust certification procedure, the information related to the fishing areas is declared directly by the applicant company in the official application form, which is then approved by MarinTrust [...]. Specifically, the standard mandates the collection of Key Data Elements (KDEs) including vessel identification, species, catch areas, fishing method, and dates. During the audits, SGS verifies that facilities maintain records of these elements throughout their supply chain”, it wrote.

“SGS’s role is to audit compliance with these traceability requirements as defined in the MarinTrust Standard based on the information provided by MarinTrust to SGS in the application form. It does not fall within SGS’s remit to determine whether KB Fish assesses different geographic areas in distinct manners.”

The SGS statement suggests that SGS has misunderstood the core issue, namely that Moroccan companies – such as KB Fish – declare their location as being in Morocco, and that this declaration is then accepted by MarinTrust.

In addition to these above issues, SGS also conducts activities that directly or potentially relate to the territory¹⁶⁷, through vehicle inspection operations and facilitation of trade. When asked about the legal basis for performing

inspections in Western Sahara under an agreement with the Moroccan government, SGS did not address the legal question, stating that “as Morocco is currently administrating this region and residents and businesses in the region require the same road safety standards as elsewhere”. A map previously published on SGS’s website depicting Western Sahara as part of Morocco was removed in 2025 prior to SGS’s reply to WSRW.¹⁶⁸

SGS has certified several facilities in southern Morocco, including Nouvelle Ougala in Tan-Tan.¹⁶⁹ Its certificate explicitly states that the raw materials originate from the “Moroccan EEZ”. WSRW asked SGS how Nouvelle Ougala verifies that its inputs – transported by sea or land – originate from the Moroccan EEZ rather than from Western Sahara waters. SGS provided a notable explanation: “During the audit, the traceability of raw materials is assessed based on official landing documents, lists of authorized suppliers, and transport and production records. This verification does not involve determining the political boundaries of fishing zones, but rather confirming their correspondence with FAO codes and the operational descriptions included in the official application form approved by MarinTrust.”. In other words, the political boundaries that SGS itself formulated on the certificate are, according to SGS, outside the scope of its audit work. “It is not the objective of the audit, nor are we authorized, to verify the client's position with the interpretation of the CJEU”, SGS added.

The German fishmeal importer KMP relies on SGS to certify its fishmeal both at the source in Latin America and upon arrival in Bremen.¹⁷⁰ SGS clarified that its role is limited to products of Peruvian origin and that it has “no information for products from other countries”. KMP, the largest European importer of fishmeal from Western Sahara in recent years, has not responded to WSRW’s letters.

SGS confirmed that it also provides GMP+ certification in Western Sahara..

WSRW and the Swiss organisation terre des hommes wrote to SGS on 28 November 2024,¹⁷¹ and again on 14 June 2025 and 9 November 2025.

Bureau Veritas S.A.

The French company Bureau Veritas offers a broad range of certification, inspection, and testing services across multiple industries, focusing on compliance and quality management.

The company has a strong political position on the conflict that fails to reflect the legal status of the territory established by its own national courts.¹⁷²

In 2024, the Director General of Bureau Veritas North Africa took part in a business delegation to Dakhla. According to the Moroccan media he “expressed his ‘admiration’ for the region's enormous development potential, especially in the field of green energy, emphasizing that many French actors are interested in investment opportunities in this part of the Kingdom's territory.”¹⁷³

It is highly unusual to observe companies come with such strong statements supporting the occupation as we see on the website of Bureau Veritas, specially from companies that specialise in legal and standard compliance.

In 2021, Bureau Veritas officials visited Western Sahara to take part in a business event in partnership with Moroccan authorities.¹⁷⁴ Bureau Veritas Maroc wrote on its own website that it had visited Dakhla for a Morocco-organised event to attract businesses. “This initiative is part of the development plan of the southern provinces, Dakhla-Oued Eddahab and Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra, launched in 2015 by His Majesty King Mohammed VI and which is reflected on the ground by a program of investment and several structuring projects”, Bureau Veritas claims¹⁷⁵.

The examples of Bureau Veritas involvements are numerous: Undertaking of inspections of oil importers in Dakhla and El Aaiún (2023)¹⁷⁶, co-hosting an event by Moroccan exporters in Dakhla (2025)¹⁷⁷, providing technical services to the Bir Anzarane wind farm, near Dakhla (2025)¹⁷⁸

In 2025, Bureau Veritas issued a certificate for sustainable aquaculture with erroneous geographical details¹⁷⁹, suggesting that the city of Dakhla is located in Morocco.

The Spanish company Discefa, a wholesaler and distributor of “Moroccan octopus (Dakhla)”¹⁸⁰, claims to have an ISO22000/FSSC22000 Bureau Veritas certification.¹⁸¹

Spanish importer 3 de Pulpo writes that it uses "The Dakhla Octopus differs from the rest for its excellent quality, with a diet based on clams and crustaceans. Dakhla Octopus, fished and frozen daily with artisanal techniques, is the most prestigious Moroccan variant of octopus worldwide" and that the octopus has been caught “in Morocco”.¹⁸² The website is illustrated with the logo of Bureau Veritas, claiming that the certification body had issued an ISO 22000 certificate.

WSRW and its French partner association APSO wrote to Bureau Veritas about its political position-taking on the occupation of Western Sahara in 2024, and has still not received a response.¹⁸³ The factually wrong articles suggesting that Western Sahara is part of Morocco have so far not been removed from the company’s website.

NSF International (Global Trust Certification Ltd)
NSF International is a US-based food certification company. In 2021, its subsidiary, NSF Certification Ireland Limited, acquired Global Trust Certification Limited, an Irish firm specialising in seafood certification.

Global Trust has issued MarinTrust and ASC certificates to companies in Western Sahara.

WSRW contacted NSF on 29 November 2024¹⁸⁴, 13 June 2025, and again via NSF’s website on 9 November 2025, without receiving any response.

All the following certificates list incorrect locations placing Western Sahara sites inside “Morocco”:
Laayoune Proteine (under MarinTrust Standard for Responsible Supply of Marine Ingredients Version 2.0, 2021)¹⁸⁵, Copelit S.A.R.L (under MarinTrust Standard for Responsible Supply of Marine Ingredients Version 2.0, 2022)¹⁸⁶, Tiscop Trading, (under MarinTrust’s Marine Ingredients Responsibly Supplied Chain of Custody Standard Issue 2, 2023)¹⁸⁷, Atlantic Tank (under Marine Ingredients Responsibly Supplied Chain of Custody Standard Issue 1.1., 2022)¹⁸⁸, DIPROMER (under MarinTrust – Marine Ingredients Responsibly Supplied Chain of Custody Standard Issue 1.1., 2020)¹⁸⁹, Overseas Proteine (under MarinTrust’s Marine Ingredients Responsibly Supplied Chain of Custody Standard Issue 2, 2025)¹⁹⁰, Azura Aquaculture (under ASC Bivalve Standard, version 1.1, 2019)¹⁹¹. Lastly, the German fishmeal importer KMP (under Marine Ingredients Responsibly Supplied Chain of Custody Standard Issue 1.1, 2022).¹⁹²

The MarinTrust Standard Version 3 states that it “draws upon” the” United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. 1982”¹⁹³. NSF did not respond how UNCLOS can legally underpin fisheries in Western Sahara waters, given that Morocco is neither the sovereign nor the administering power over the non-self-governing territory, and in light of the 2018 CJEU ruling (paras. 67–69) on Western Sahara fisheries.

NSF did not answer whether it had ever informed MarinTrust that the physical addresses of the above-mentioned establishments are incorrect, nor

whether they travelled to the occupied territories as part of the MarinTrust certification process.

In the MarinTrust standard¹⁹⁴ establishes that: “To be eligible to apply for certification, facilities shall: [...]

- be legally licenced in the country of operation
- meet the legal obligations that are in place for the jurisdiction(s) where marine ingredients are produced and supplied.” In terms of social accountability, the MarinTrust Responsible Supply of Marine Ingredients version 2 requires applicants to “have a documented policy that demonstrates compliance with their national legislation to ensure that their marine ingredient products are manufactured in compliance to all relevant employment, welfare and safety requirements as stated in this sector”. NSF has not clarified whether it believes the country of operation to be “Morocco”, whether the production sites’ location outside Morocco’s internationally recognised borders is compatible with the Standard, or which laws it considers applicable in Western Sahara.

In terms of reporting and recording of material, the MarinTrust Standard requires that recording of raw material includes proof of authorisation to engage in the specific fishing activity. NFS did not respond whether it accepts Moroccan authorisations as legally valid in occupied Western Sahara. The MarinTrust Standard for Responsible Supply of Marine Ingredients, version 2, defines illegal fishing as “operating in a country’s waters without permission”. The people of Western Sahara, through their government in exile, have not permitted any of the fishing activities in their waters, carried out under licences issued by the Moroccan government which has no sovereignty, jurisdiction or administering mandate over the territory or its waters. The provisions on responsible traceability further emphasize the importance that MarinTrust attaches to legally sourced material, in containing require-

ments that compliant marine ingredients are to be traced back to an approved fishery material, and that avoidance of IUU fishing should be demonstrated. NSF did not comment on how it views the legality of Moroccan fisheries in Western Sahara or of the sales of Western Sahara fish to certified establishments.

The MarinTrust standard (para. 2.11.2.1) requires facilities sourcing whole fish to “complete and document the results of the MarinTrust Social Responsibility Risk Assessment for all vessels”. From what we understand, this is done based on data from the "Social risk assessment guidance for facilities", and, particularly, the Country Risk Ratings of Annex 2.¹⁹⁵ NSF did not clarify how this is done, considering that Western Sahara is not enlisted with a Country Risk rating.

The MarinTrust Standard also contains community-engagement requirements. NSF did not respond to any of WSRW’s questions on this aspect.

TÜV Rheinland and Sygma Certification SL

TÜV Rheinland audits management systems (such as ISO 9001, ISO 14001, FSSC 22000), products, and processes across many industries, including food, energy, manufacturing, and healthcare. In Western Sahara, the German company certified the Moroccan fish exporting company KB Fish for ISO 14001 (environmental management), ISO 45001 (occupational health and safety), and ISO 9001 (quality management), listing the firm as based in “Laayoune, Morocco” – thereby applying Moroccan law in a territory outside Morocco’s recognised borders.¹⁹⁶ The certificates noted that the company is based in “Laayoune, Morocco”.

WSRW has urged TÜV Rheinland to stop facilitating controversial exports, and to use United Nations maps when determining territorial jurisdiction.¹⁹⁷ TÜV Rheinland replied that it “must use company data” from the Moroccan commercial register and, as a matter of

policy, “refrains” from taking positions on international law or political issues.¹⁹⁸

WSRW responded that assisting an operator licensed by an occupying power is inherently political, and that ignoring international law, CJEU rulings, and UN maps – while placing Western Sahara operations within Morocco – is itself a political act.¹⁹⁹

And the end of the dialogue?

TÜV Rheinland on 8 January 2025 responded that “we will not be making any further comment”.²⁰⁰ In other words, a German company involved in auditing Moroccan companies for legal compliance, and who has ‘Precisely. Right’ as its slogan, fails to relate to UN maps and EU Court rulings that are clear in Western Sahara not being part of Morocco.

Since this correspondence took place, KB Fish is no longer certified and its certificates have been removed from the TÜV Rheinland registry. However, from June 2025 TÜV has certified two other Moroccan companies in Western Sahara: the Moroccan maritime agency COMATAM’s local branch in El Aaiún²⁰¹ and the Moroccan bus company CTM²⁰² in El Aaiún.

In March 2025, TÜV Rheinland acquired the Spanish certification body **Sygma Certification SL**, which has issued several certificates for sites in Western Sahara – though all wrongly listed as in “Morocco” – in relation to the BRCGS²⁰³ and GLOBAL.G.A.P standards:

Comptoire Commercial et Industriel Derham (under BRCGS, 2024)²⁰⁴, Damsa SA (under BRCGS, 2024)²⁰⁵, Nouvelle Conserverie de Boujdour SARL (under BRCGS, 2025)²⁰⁶, Pelagic Pro SAS (under BRCGS, 2025)²⁰⁷, Tazyazt Agricole (under GLOBALG.A.P., 2024)²⁰⁸, BD Trading (under GLOBAL-G.A.P., 2024)²⁰⁹, Sigma Dak (under GLOBALG.A.P, 2024)²¹⁰. WSRW wrote Sygma in 2024.²¹¹

Sygma responded that it has no policy on geopolitical situations and that, as an independent certification body, it does not issue statements on political matters. It argued that the certified operators are registered in the Moroccan commercial and health registries; therefore, Morocco appears on certificates and in the BRCGS Directory. Sygma said multiple certification bodies do the same, and that it had asked the scheme owner for guidance to establish a common approach. It added that it is aware of the CJEU ruling of 4 October 2024 and is “taking the relevant measures”.²¹²

On 29 December 2024, WSRW asked²¹³ how Sygma could conduct a so-called GRASP assessment. GRASP (GLOBAL-G.A.P. Risk Assessment on Social Practice) is an add-on to add-on to GLOBALG.A.P. IFA (Integrated Farm Assurance), helping buyers to assess a farm’s level of social responsibility. There are clear rules on how a GRASP assessment is to be made, including that the certifying body is supposed to check the certified establishment against a GRASP interpretation guideline.

It is likely no such guidelines exist, raising questions about the validity of the GRASP assessments published on the GLOBALG.A.P. website.

During the six months following the December 2024 correspondence, Sygma issued new certificates in Western Sahara, for locations listed in “Morocco”, both for BRCGS²¹⁴ and GLOBALG.A.P.²¹⁵ WSRW wrote again on 14 June 2025 in relation to these additional erroneous country of origin certifications.²¹⁶

Sygma replied that it would “not be making any further comment on this matter”.

Eurofins Certification

Eurofins is a French company involved in testing and certification for the food safety and quality assurance processes, including in the seafood industry.

The following establishments have been found to be certified by Eurofins, under the BRCGS and IFS Food standards: ERG Conserve²¹⁷ (under BRCGS, 2024), Oceamic Laayoun E II Sarl²¹⁸ (under BRCGS, 2024), Conserverie de Oued Eddahab²¹⁹ (under BRCGS, 2025), ERG Delice SARL²²⁰ (under BRCGS, 2025), Gold Sea Fish SARL²²¹ (under BRCGS, 2025), Conserveries Rio de Oro SARL²²² (under IFS Food, 2022).

WSRW wrote Eurofins on 29 November 2024²²³ and 14 June 2025, and 10 November 2025. No reply has been received.

Quality Austria
Quality Austria focuses on quality management and compliance with various international standards. As a certification body, Quality Austria provides various services, including training, auditing, and certification for different sectors.

At least two establishments in Western Sahara have been identified with Quality Austria certificates. Mogafish and SOCOPO. Both companies carry the logo of Quality Austria on its website or certificate.

Representatives of Quality Austria have for several consecutive years visited SOCOPO's factory in El Aaiún, documented on the latter's Facebook page.²²⁴ SOCOPO received the FSSC 22000 V6 and the ISO 45001 certification following the Quality Austria visit. Mogafish in "Dakhla Maroc" obtained ISO 22000:2018 in 2022, a certificate valid until 29 May 2025.²²⁵

WSRW and the Austrian-Sahrawi Society wrote to Quality Austria on 29 November 2024²²⁶, with a reminder 14 June 2025, without obtaining a response.

London Associati Ltd
London Associati Ltd is specialised in conducting audits for companies seeking certification under the Friend of the

Sea standards – as well as to the “sister” certification of FOS developed by the “World Sustainability Organization”.

London Associati Ltd registered in Italy. It was registered as a UK company until 2023.²²⁷ The company is founded and run by a Dr. Pierluigi Monticini.²²⁸ The company took part in the issuing of three Friend of the Sea certificates to Damsa Laayoune in “Laayoune (Maroc)”²²⁹

WSRW wrote the company in 2024,²³⁰ with a reminder in 2025. No response was obtained. WSRW asked about its understanding of the Friend of the Sea standard, and what other possible certifications it has issued in the territory.

Intertek (ex-SAI Global)
The UK company Intertek uses the brand Intertek Inform – formerly Intertek SAI Global Standards.

The Australian company SAI Global Ltd²³¹, which was acquired by Intertek in 2021 was the one certifying the fishmeal and fish oil producer Laayoune Protein in accordance with the MarinTrust standards. Certificates were issued both in 2019²³² and in 2020.²³³ SAI Global also issued the MarinTrust certificate to German fishmeal importer KMP in 2018.²³⁴

On top of that, Intertek carries out testing and inspections for clients in the petroleum and petrochemical sector, providing services to Moroccan ports in El Aaiún and Dakhla.²³⁵

WSRW wrote to Intertek about these matters in 2024²³⁶ and 2025, without obtaining a response.

The company reveals a disturbing relationship to corporate responsibility elsewhere. A shocking report from 2025 shows how Intertek reportedly acted against workers rights when, paradoxically, undertaking a social audit for a client in Thailand.²³⁷



The above-mentioned certification bodies (e.g. Bureau Veritas, SGS, Eurofins, KIWA, SAI Global/Intertek) are the ones that carry out the audit of the Moroccan entities, and that issue certificates themselves.

These certification companies are, in turn, validated or approved by what are called accreditation bodies, that ensure the certification companies' compliance with international norms (like ISO 17065 or ISO 17021 etc.). During WSRW's correspondence with the standard organisations and the certification bodies, some have responded that the certification bodies are operating in line with the relevant accreditation body.

In France and Austria, these entities would be called Cofrag and Akkreditierung Austria respectively. There are also international networks that provide international recognition and harmonisation such as IQNet and International Accreditation Forum.

Cofrac Certification
The French national accreditation body responsible for the accreditation of organisations that provide certification services. Cofrac is the French entity that has issued Eurofins the “accreditation certificate”.²³⁸ As a result, the Cofrac logo appears on all certificates issued by Eurofin – including the one for Conserveries Rio de Oro SARL.²³⁹

Cofrac is also mentioned on the website of agriculture company Azura, which has production sites in Dakhla. Azura informs that “100% of the analyses carried out on our products comply with European regulations. They are conducted by an independent external laboratory certified by Cofrac.”²⁴⁰

Cofrac's role is to accredit certification bodies like Eurofins to demonstrate their compliance with international standards. Specifically, Cofrac expects Eurofins to comply with the standard

called NF EN ISO/IEC 17065:2012.²⁴¹ The introductory paragraph of this standard establishes that “the value of certification is the degree of confidence and trust that is established by an impartial and competent demonstration of fulfillment of specified requirements by a third party.”

WSRW wrote to Cofrac in 2024.²⁴² Cofrac responded²⁴³ that it has “neither the competence nor the legitimacy to respond to your questions, which are mainly of a diplomatic or legal nature.”

Cofrac declined to disclose which other entities in Western Sahara carry a Cofrac logo on certificates containing inaccurate and fraudulent country-of-origin information. Cofrac did not respond to questions as to what steps it will take to rectify the erroneous documents that carry Cofrac's name. Cofrac did not respond to WSRW's questions regarding the external laboratory that is said to carry out the checks of the Azura products that originate in Western Sahara. A concluding letter was sent by WSRW to Cofrac on 25 December 2024²⁴⁴.

IQNet Ltd
A Swiss-based international certification network offering a range of management system certifications worldwide, with a focus on quality, environmental management, and occupational health and safety. LSQA and Quality Austria are members of the IQNet network.

Two establishments operating in Western Sahara – SOCOPO²⁴⁵ and Mogafish²⁴⁶ – display the IQNet logo on their websites. In addition, the Moroccan company Tiscop/Copelit refers to IQNet via a third-party fish trade website.²⁴⁷

The IQNet references on the SOCOPO website derive from certifications issued by Quality Austria, which is a full member of the global IQNet network of certification bodies. As a consequence,

when Quality Austria certifies a company, that company is generally entitled to display the IQNet “certified management system” logo alongside the Quality Austria logo. WSRW and terre des hommes schweiz wrote to IQNet in 2024 without obtaining a response.²⁴⁸

International Accreditation Forum (IAF)
The logo of IAF appears on the certificate of the Moroccan company Mogafish in “Dakhla, Maroc”.

Quality Austria is accredited by the Austrian accreditation body Akkreditierung Austria, which is part of the Austrian Ministry of Labour and Economy. As such, also the official Austrian stamp ends up on the same certificate. And not only that: because Akkreditierung Austria is, in turn, a member of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), the IAF logo also ends up on the certificates. This does not mean that IAF or AA have certified anything – yet, both institutions lend a sense of legitimacy to the incorrect certificate.

WSRW has not yet been in contact with Akkreditierung Austria or the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) as to whether Quality Austria's failure in reflecting the right geography is in line with what could be expected from such a body. The Government of Austria does not recognise Western Sahara as part of Morocco.

Notes

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<https://techni-k.co.uk/ifs/alternative-gfsi-schemes-to-brcgs/>

³ <https://www.marin-trust.com/factory-standard/get-certified>

⁴ <https://www.brcgs.com/product/global-standard-food-safety-issue-9/p-13279/>

⁵ <https://www.brcgs.com/product/global-standard-food-safety-issue-9-interpretation-guideline/p-12227/>

⁶ WSRW, 22.11.2025, BRCGS fails accountability test, <https://wsrw.org/en/news/brcgs-fails-accountability-test>

⁷ WSRW, 29.08.2025, GLOBALG.A.P. brands settler farms “responsible”, <https://wsrw.org/en/news/globalgap-brands-settler-farms-responsible>

⁸ The WSRW letters to Moroccan companies and European importers in 2024-2025 are to be found here: <https://wsrw.org/en/news/moroccan-companies-silent>

⁹ International Court of Justice, Western Sahara, <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/61>

¹⁰ The “settlement proposals” are included in the Report of the UN Secretary General on Western Sahara of June 1990, available here: https://minurso.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsq_report_18_june_1990.pdf

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¹² The Rulings for cases T-512/12, T-180/14, C-266/16, T-275/18 and combined cases T-344/19, T-356/19 and T-279/19 can be accessed at the site of the EU Court of Justice, <http://curia.europa.eu>.

¹³ African Court on Human and People’s Rights, 22.09.2022, Ruling on Application N° 028/2018 <https://www.african-court.org/cpmt/storage/app/uploads/public/632/e0f/3ad/632e-0f3ad580e748464681.pdf>

¹⁴ OHCHR, 07.03.2023, Global update: High Commissioner outlines concerns in over 40 countries, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/03/global-update-high-commissioner-outlines-concerns-over-40-countries>

¹⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores?sort=asc&order=Total%20Score%20and%20Status>

¹⁶ UN Security Council, 12.02.2002, Letter dated 29 January 2002 from the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the Legal Counsel, addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2002/161, <https://undocs.org/S/2002/161>

¹⁷ UN Economic and Social Council, 22.10.2015, Concluding Observations on the fourth periodic report of Morocco, E/C.12/MAR/CO/4*, §6, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fMAR%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en

¹⁸ UN Human Rights Committee, 01.12.2016, Concluding Observations on the sixth periodic report of Morocco, §10, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/MAR/CO/6&Lang=En

¹⁹ Judgment of 21 December 2016, EU:C:2016:973, §92, and reiterated in the Judgment of 27 February 2018, EU:C:2018:118,

§62, Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:833, §163, Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:839, §85 and Judgment of 4 October, EU:C:2024:835, §134.

²⁰ Judgment of 10 December 2015, EU:T:2015:953, §241. Considered a settled matter in subsequent rulings.

²¹ “Account must also be taken of the fact that the Kingdom of Morocco does not have any mandate granted by the UN or by another international body for the administration of that territory, and it is common ground that it does not transmit to the UN information relating to that territory, such as those provided for by Article 73(e) of the UN Charter.” Judgment of 10 December 2015, EU:T:2015:953, §233. Considered a settled matter in subsequent rulings.

²² Judgment of 27 February 2018, EU:C:2018:118, §67-85. Considered settled in subsequent rulings.

²³ Judgment of 21 December 2016, EU:C:2016:973, §104. Reiterated and refined in subsequent rulings.

²⁴ Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:833, §180-181. Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:835, §152-153.

²⁵ Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:833, §157. Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:835, §128.

²⁶ Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:833, §158. Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:835, §129.

²⁷ Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:833, §96-138, Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:835, §70-109.

²⁸ Judgment of 4 October 2024, EU:C:2024:839, §89.

²⁹ WSRW, 04.12.2025, ASC withdraws from occupied Western Sahara, <https://wsrw.org/en/news/asc-withdraws-from-occupied-western-sahara>

³⁰ WSRW, 11.11.2025, Uruguayan-Austrian certification firm withdraws from Western Sahara, <https://wsrw.org/en/news/uruguayan-austrian-certification-firm-withdraws-from-western-sahara>

³¹ <https://friendofthesea.org/wp-content/uploads/FOS-Approved-Customers-&Suppliers-&Retailers.pdf?new>

³² <https://friendofthesea.org/company/laayoune-proteine-sarl/> Or download: https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/1970/673f2d0d9c2df_FoS_Certificate_LaayouneProteine_website_21.11.2024.jpg

³³ <https://friendofthesea.org/damsa-sa-laayoune-macro-european-sardine-chub-mackerel-atlantic-mackerel-atlantic-chub-mackerel/> Or download: https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/1969/673f2c6832562_FoS_Certificate_Damsa2022.jpg

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³⁵ https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/1979/673f3422d318b_FoS_Certificate_ERGConserve_website21.11.2024.jpg

³⁶ <https://friendofthesea.org/company/sepomer-sahara-sarl/> Or download: https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/1972/673f2e10577e2_FoS_Certificate_SEPOMER_website21.11.2024.jpg

³⁷ <https://friendofthesea.org/company/unimer-sa/> Or down-

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³⁹ <https://frozenardinesexport.com/about.html>, <https://atcanning.com/certificates.htm>

⁴⁰ <https://oceancapital.ma/en/our-quality-commitment/>

⁴¹ https://www.climate-expert.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Case_Study_Summary_AVEIRO_EN.pdf Or download: https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/1978/673f33b1ede96_NouvelleAveiroMaroc_GIZ_found2024.pdf

⁴² <https://friendofthesea.org/company/nouvelle-aveiro-maroc/> Or download: https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/1980/673f3484cb9e4_FoS_Certificate_NouvelleAveiro_website21.11.2024.jpg

⁴³ <https://univela-morocco.com/about/> Or download: https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/1976/673f3208e673d_UNIVELA_website_21.11.2024.jpg

⁴⁴ <https://univela-morocco.com/products/seafood/squid/> Or download: https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/1977/673f326fd0fe_UNIVELA_website_21.11.2024b.jpg

⁴⁵ https://friendofthesea.org/wp-content/uploads/Oceamic-Laayoune-IL_2015_corrective-actions_Oceamic-Laayoune-Wild-CARs.pdf Or download: https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/2034/674b-25cef40a9_FriendOfTheSea_Oceamic_2015.pdf

⁴⁶ <https://friendofthesea.org/king-pelagique-group-earns-multiple-sustainability-recertifications/> Or download: https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/1975/673f3111e4aed_FoS_Statement_KingPelagique_29.11.2019.jpg

⁴⁷ WSRW letter to FOS, 29.11.2024, https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/2057/674ed-1d8ae8e2_WSRW-FriendOftheSea_29.11.2024.pdf

⁴⁸ Friend Of the Sea, 29.11.2019. <https://friendofthesea.org/king-pelagique-group-earns-multiple-sustainability-recertifications/>

⁴⁹ <https://friendofthesea.org/wp-content/uploads/FOS-Audit-Guidance-ver-2.pdf>

⁵⁰ WSRW letter to GLOBALG.A.P., 30.11.2024, https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/2048/674ecb23b29f5_WSRW-GlobalGAP_30.11.2024.pdf GLOBALG.A.P. letter to WSRW, 27.12.2024, https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/2775/692d6448a22f2_Globalgap-WSRW_27.11.2024.jpg WSRW letter to GLOBALG.A.P., 01.01.2025, https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/2810/69454e394abe3_WSRW-GlobalGAP_01.01.2025.jpg WSRW letter to GLOBALG.A.P., 14.06.2025, https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/2811/69454ed-5d1eea_WSRW-GlobalGAP_14.06.2025.jpg GLOBALG.A.P. letter to WSRW, 18.06.2025, https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/2409/68528093068a7_GlobalGAP-WSRW_18.06.2025.jpg

⁵¹ GLOBALG.A.P, Technical News for Certification Bodies, Issue

1/2025, available at: https://documents.globalgap.org/documents/250402_Technical_News_CB_2025_01_en.pdf

⁵² https://documents.globalgap.org/documents/251105_Technical_News_CB_2025_03_en.pdf

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⁵⁵ https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/wsrw/feature-images/File/2112/677118ec65fff_GlobalGAP_Acerta_Tawarta_certificate_29.12.2024.jpg

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International Court of Justice, 16 Oct 1975