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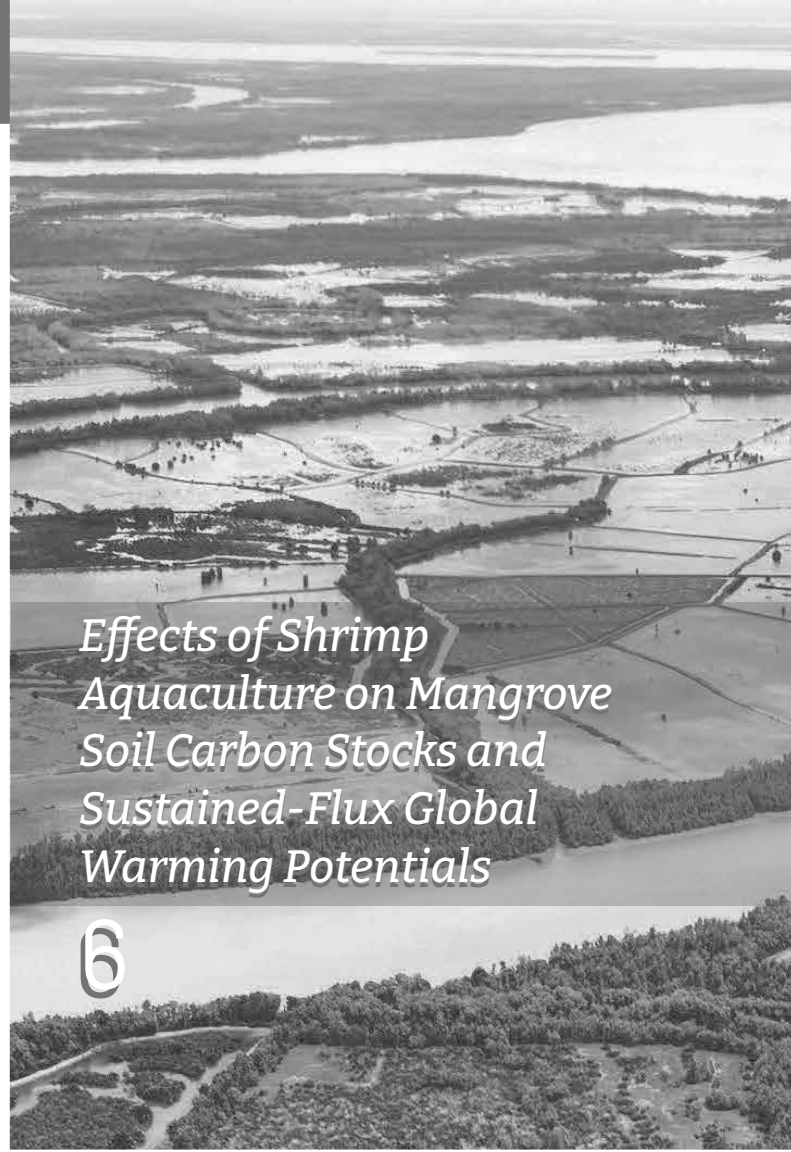
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# FAO Puts Seafood Consumers at the Centre – Why That Changes Everything

*The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has quietly made a move that could reshape the global seafood sector – if industry, regulators and consumers are paying attention. In its newly released Medium-Term Plan 2026–29 and Program of Work and Budget 2026–27, FAO identifies consumer awareness as one of four global “priority triggers” needed to transform agrifood systems. That might sound like bureaucratic language, but for seafood it represents a significant shift: consumers are no longer treated as passive end-users, but as active drivers of system-wide change.*

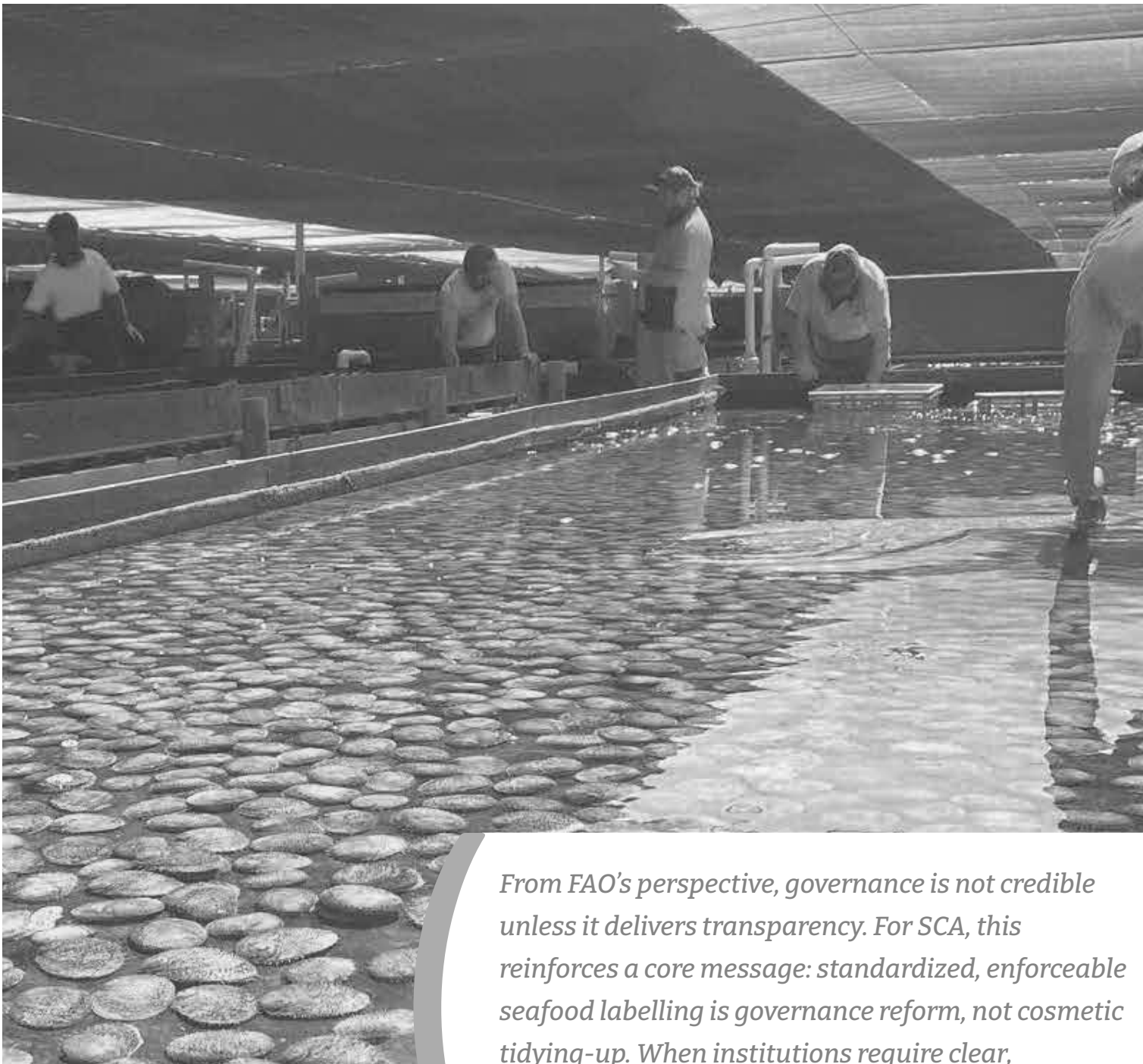
\* By Seafood Consumers Association

For decades, seafood policy and market structures have been largely producer- and trader-centric. Consumers sat at the end of the chain, expected to trust labels, menus and marketing with limited ability to verify what

they were buying. FAO’s new framing challenges that model – and creates a clear mandate for reform in areas that seafood consumers have long raised: standardized naming, origin labelling, traceability and fraud prevention.

For organizations like the Seafood Consumers Association (SCA), this is not a theoretical development. It aligns squarely with the practical reforms needed to restore trust, reward honest fishers and build a transparent, accountable seafood system. Im-





Farmed Abalone in Australia.

*From FAO's perspective, governance is not credible unless it delivers transparency. For SCA, this reinforces a core message: standardized, enforceable seafood labelling is governance reform, not cosmetic tidying-up. When institutions require clear, consistent naming and origin disclosure, they move the system from "trust us" to "show us".*

portantly, it also presents Australia with an opportunity to lead.

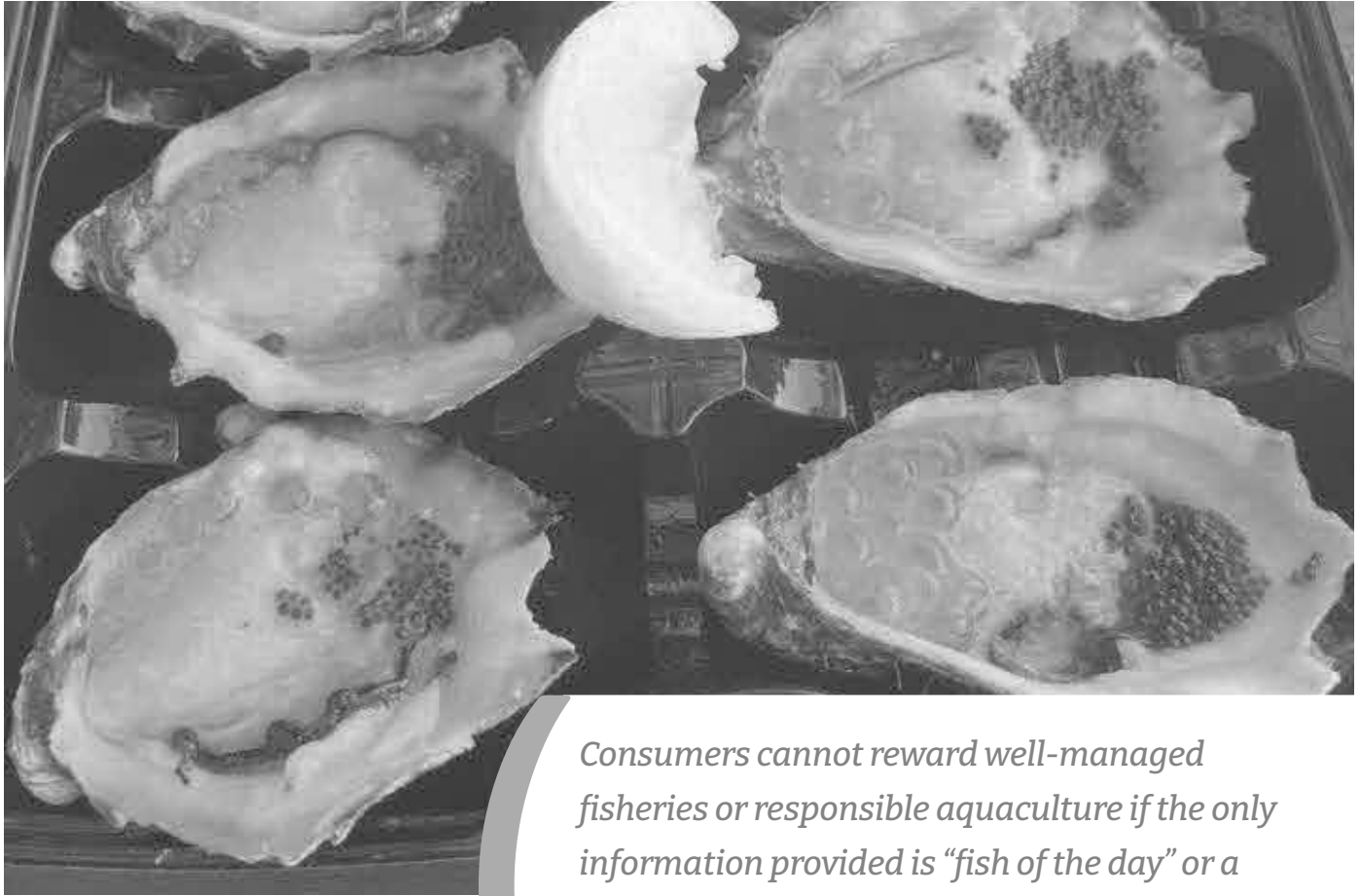
### **Four Triggers for Transformation**

FAO's Director-General, Qu Dongyu, sets out four "priority triggers" de-

signed to catalyze meaningful change across global agrifood systems:

1. Institutions and governance.
2. Consumer awareness.
3. Income and wealth distribution.
4. Innovative technologies and approaches.

FAO describes these as "effective starting points for transformative processes". From a seafood consumer perspective, they also read like a checklist of the sector's most persistent problems — and its biggest opportunities.



A quick meal of Oysters.

*Consumers cannot reward well-managed fisheries or responsible aquaculture if the only information provided is “fish of the day” or a generic “battered fillet”. Environmental and health consciousness cannot be leveraged if labels and menus obscure rather than clarify.*

### 1. Institutions and Governance: Making Transparency Non-Negotiable

FAO’s first trigger focuses on stronger, more transparent and accountable institutions. In seafood, that goes well beyond fisheries management plans and stock assessments. It cuts directly to the everyday consumer experience — and long-standing weaknesses in how seafood is governed at the point of sale.

Across retail and food service, consumers still encounter:

- » Inconsistent or vague species names.
- » Poor or absent country-of-origin information.
- » Blurred distinctions between wild and farmed product.
- » Limited visibility of production methods.

- » Weak enforcement of existing naming and labelling rules.

These gaps make it easier for mislabeled, substituted or illegally sourced seafood to enter legitimate supply chains. They also place an unfair burden on consumers, who are effectively asked to “trust the system” without being given the information needed to verify claims.

From FAO’s perspective, governance is not credible unless it delivers transparency. For SCA, this reinforces a core message: **standardized, enforceable seafood labelling is governance reform**, not cosmetic tidying-up. When institutions require clear, consistent naming and origin disclosure, they move the system from “trust us” to “show us”.

### 2. Consumer Awareness: From Passive Eaters to Active Market Shapers

FAO’s second trigger — consumer awareness — speaks most directly to the seafood sector’s future. FAO explicitly recognizes that informed consumers can influence how food is produced, sourced and marketed.

In seafood, the appetite is already there. Consumers increasingly want to know:

- » Is this fish legal?
- » Where was it caught or farmed?
- » Is it Australian or imported?
- » Is it wild or farmed — and impact on shelf life?

Concern about seafood fraud, species substitution and IUU (Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated) fishing is

*Transparent, standardized labelling is one of the simplest ways to rebalance value. When species, origin and production method are clear, it becomes harder for non-compliant product to hide behind generic descriptions.*

no longer confined to specialists. It is part of mainstream consumer consciousness.

The problem is not awareness; it is **information failure**. Consumers cannot reward well-managed fisheries or responsible aquaculture if the only information provided is “fish of the day” or a generic “battered fillet”. Environmental and health consciousness cannot be leveraged if labels and menus obscure rather than clarify.

FAO’s message is clear: consumer awareness only works if consumers are given usable, trustworthy information. This is where SCA’s long-standing advocacy — for standard names, clear origin labelling and truth in wild-caught versus farmed claims — becomes a practical expression of FAO’s global strategy.

### **3. Income and Wealth Distribution: Fair Value for Honest Fishers**

FAO’s third trigger addresses income and wealth distribution — an area often overlooked in seafood debates. Fraud, mislabeling and IUU fishing are sometimes framed as consumer deception issues alone. They are not.

These practices directly harm:

- » Commercial fishers who comply with quotas, reporting requirements and safety rules.

- » Processors and retailers who invest in compliance and traceability.
- » Communities dependent on legitimate fisheries.

Illegally or misleadingly marketed seafood undercuts honest operators, distorts prices and creates the false impression that legally caught seafood is “too expensive”. Over time, this erodes trust and demand across the entire sector.

Transparent, standardized labelling is one of the simplest ways to rebalance value. When species, origin and production method are clear, it becomes harder for non-compliant product to hide behind generic descriptions. That supports fairer returns for those who play by the rules — a point FAO’s income distribution trigger makes explicit.

From SCA’s perspective, consumer transparency is not just about informed choice; it is about **market fairness**.

### **4. Innovative Technologies: Traceability Consumers Can Actually Use**

FAO’s fourth trigger focuses on innovation — but with an important condition: new technologies must be accessible and inclusive, not just efficient for large players.

Seafood is already rich in traceability innovation:

- » Digital catch documentation.
- » Electronic logbooks.
- » Blockchain pilots.
- » DNA testing and verification tools.

Yet much of this innovation remains invisible to consumers. Traceability systems often serve regulators, auditors and corporate buyers, while shoppers and diners still see minimal information at the point of decision.

If FAO’s trigger is taken seriously, the next step is obvious: **bring traceability to the front of the label**. That could include:

- » QR codes linking to verified species, origin and production data.
- » Simple, standardized icons for key attributes.

- » Clear, consistent digital records accessible on request.

Crucially, these systems must work for small-scale and Indigenous fishers, not exclude them through cost or complexity. Designing traceability that is both robust and inclusive is one of the sector’s biggest challenges — and one FAO has squarely put on the table.

### **What This Means for Seafood — and for Australia**

Taken together, FAO’s four triggers send a powerful message:

- » Transparency is foundational, not optional.
- » Consumers are legitimate drivers of change.
- » Fair markets depend on eliminating fraud.
- » Technology must serve accountability, not just efficiency.

For the Seafood Consumers Association, this global framing strengthens our work in three ways. It aligns consumer-focused reform with UN-endorsed priorities. It reinforces that information is a governance and fairness issue, not a marketing extra. And it opens the door to collaboration — across industry, government and the supply chain.

FAO’s plan will not, by itself, stop a single mislabeled fillet. But it changes the narrative. Consumers are no longer an afterthought; they are a trigger for transformation.

The task now is to turn that recognition into practice — building seafood systems that are transparent enough to earn trust, fair enough to reward honesty, and resilient enough to serve future generations.

That is a future worth working towards. [aqm](http://aqm)

\* Seafood Consumers Association  
[www.seafoodconsumers.global](http://www.seafoodconsumers.global)