

Seeking out Sustainable Seafood in Your Grocery Store is no Walk on the Beach

Living on an island, it's natural to have a strong connection with the sea and the food it provides. But how much do we really know about the seafood we buy and its impact on our oceans?

With the lack of information available to the average seafood buyer, one can't help but feel a major disconnect with what's behind the seafood counter. What species is this, anyway? Where and how was it caught or farmed? Does the catch or farming method have impacts on other species or ocean ecosystems? Is it coming from a healthy population? Was it even caught legally? These are all crucial questions that must be answered in order to ensure that what you are buying and eating is healthy and sustainable, but it is information that is rarely available in your local grocery store.

One thing we know for sure, fisheries scientists are telling us that much of the seafood sold in Canada, whether caught or farmed in our national waters or another corner of the ocean, has concerning answers to the above questions. According to the United Nations, 80% of global fish stocks are either fished at capacity, overfished, or depleted. Recent studies have concluded that 90% of top predators, and most commercially popular species, such as cod, tuna, swordfish, and sharks have vanished from our oceans. From bluefin to cod, many of these most threatened species are found off P.E.I.

Atlantic cod remains the poster fish for overfishing, mismanagement, and devastation. Since their collapse in the early '90s, Canada's cod stocks remain a fraction of what they once were and some stocks are showing only meagre signs of recovery. Last year, scientists determined that the southern gulf stock had the lowest spawning stock biomass in 60 years. This, combined with high natural mortality and low recruitment, is pushing them towards extinction in 20 years with continued fishing and 40 years without.

The tale of the cod embodies an ever-growing trend in the global fishing industry—fish for now, not fish for the future. The majestic bluefin are no exception. We need to change the way we view our ocean resources, and we need to do it quickly.

Greenpeace Canada has a sustainable seafood campaign directed at Canada's retail sector. As major buyers and sellers of seafood, grocers have the power and responsibility to ensure sustainable seafood for their customers and to help safeguard our oceans for future generations. Many retailers have now begun to recognize the crisis facing our oceans and the role they can play in finding a solution. But they have a ways to go.

Greenpeace is calling on supermarkets to stop selling seafood that originates from harmful fishing and farming practices, known as the 'Redlist' (www.greenpeace.ca/redlist), to develop and implement a strong sustainable seafood procurement policy that ensures the seafood they are selling is coming from legal, sustainable and equitable sources, and to improve product labelling to help their customers make more informed decisions about what they're buying.

Retailers, particularly those with roots in the Maritimes, need to hear from their customers that healthy coastal communities are dependent on healthy oceans. Let your grocer know you support sustainable seafood.

Those interested in getting involved in encouraging supermarkets to take action or becoming a Greenpeace volunteer on the ground can contact Sarah King at sarah.king@greenpeace.org