



SeaChoice Emerging Issues Bulletin

NOVEMBER 2015

SeaChoice is a national program that helps Canadian businesses and consumers make the most sustainable seafood choices to support the long-term health of our ocean and coastal communities. We bring together national experts from a variety of conservation organizations, and work with the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch Program to provide science-based fishery and aquaculture sustainability rankings.

Practices and products change over time, and so the focus of our work also changes. We wanted to take this opportunity to let you know about some of the new themes, as well as specific fisheries, we will be focusing on over the coming year, both as SeaChoice and as member organizations.

Importance of MSC Chain of Custody

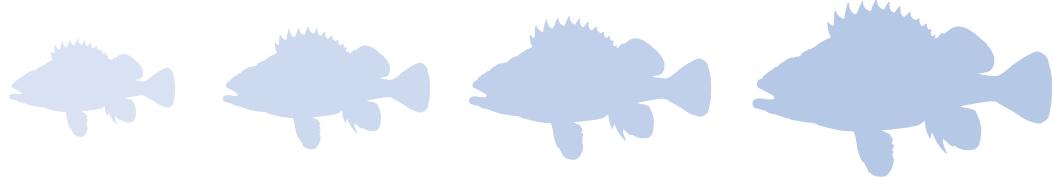
The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) has become the largest eco-certification body for fisheries in the world. MSC's goal is to promote sustainable fishing practices around the world and to encourage continuous improvement within certified fisheries. MSC has had great reach in Canada, exemplified by the fact that more than 65 per cent of Canadian fisheries (by weight) and close to 80 per cent (by value) are now engaged in the MSC process.

With this increased prevalence, MSC certification is also playing a larger role in the seafood supply chain. Beyond actively working to increase the sustainability of these certified fisheries, much of the seafood from these MSC-certified fisheries carries chain of custody (CoC) which ensures that the seafood can be traced all the way back to the source fishery. This traceability holds a great advantage as it helps to ensure that no illegal, unregulated, or unreported seafood enters the Canadian marketplace and seafood mislabelling is also prevented. SeaChoice has continually and rigorously worked with our supplier partners to ensure that we have full transparency of the source of all seafood sold in our retailers. This includes region of catch, gear type, and species name, however chain of custody only serves to increase traceability and confidence in these sources across all levels in the supply chain. SeaChoice is now working to ensure it carries chain of custody from source to our retailers' supplier partners for all seafood sourced from MSC fisheries.

In order to support the process/sustainable seafood/fisheries at all stages, SeaChoice is also dedicating resources toward engagement with fisheries that are currently MSC certified or undergoing MSC assessment. Because the member organizations that comprise our coalition have in-depth knowledge and experience with fisheries science and Canadian fisheries policy, SeaChoice is well placed to provide knowledgeable input into MSC assessments. We will also monitor fisheries that are already certified to ensure that requirements for improvement (through certification conditions and annual milestones) are met.



While MSC has brought about improvements in some fisheries, we believe that it can help to raise the sustainability bar by encouraging better practices, particularly related to bycatch mitigation, ecosystem/habitat protection, and endangered species protection. In the last few months, SeaChoice has submitted comments on MSC assessments for Atlantic halibut, Atlantic herring, 3Ps cod, northwest Atlantic swordfish, northern shrimp and 3LN redfish, as well as met with MSC assessment teams to discuss a wide range of issues related to fisheries sustainability. We have also had ongoing dialogue with MSC staff about how to bring about improvements within the system. We believe that by engaging in MSC processes, and securing good outcomes in certified fisheries, we can help grow Canada's supply of sustainable seafood.



Rockfish Source Separation Hurdles

Rockfish, often marketed as snapper, is an important fishery in British Columbia – about 23,000 tonnes are caught annually, with over ninety per cent coming from the trawl fleet. There are over 70 species that live on the pacific coast of North America and 12 species that make up the bulk of the BC catch; most are very long living and many mature quite late in life, making them very vulnerable to overfishing.

This is precisely what happened in both B.C. and U.S. waters from about 1940 to 2000. Lack of adequate management resulted in depleted rockfish populations and nearly all species were placed on the SeaChoice “Avoid” red list. Rockfish, once a staple Canadian seafood, was gradually overtaken by imported “value” whitefish such as Basa and Tilapia in Canadian markets.

Management of these fisheries has steadily improved throughout North America since about 1997. Now most stocks are recovering and being fished to ensure a continued rebound. Updated B.C. rockfish recommendations were released in January, and almost seventy per cent of rockfish caught by the trawl fleet are now yellow-ranked. The volume of available “yellow” rockfish is likely continue to increase as outdated stock assessments for several Canadian species are completed.

The current divergence in rankings between rockfish species presents a unique problem for seafood buyers seeking to preferentially purchase those yellow-ranked. Rockfish is almost universally sold using a broad species grouping, and not by the detailed species that SeaChoice holds rankings for. SeaChoice is currently working with our retailers and groundfish suppliers to separate these yellow-ranked species and some key high-volume species individually.

It is, in part, our world-class management regime that helped catalyse the conservation gains in the groundfish fleet that is now helping ensure this species separation. Under the individual vessel quota system, an independent monitor must separate all fish by species to be enumerated at the dock. Those processors and suppliers currently offering yellow-ranked or rockfish by distinct species are ensuring this separation continues throughout the rest of the supply chain.

SeaChoice hopes that differentiation of these rockfish by species and ranking will help elevate rockfish to a more prized local seafood, leverage the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to continue stock assessments where necessary and continue to increase the sustainability of the groundfish fleet.

Atlantic cod

Seafood Watch has recently released its re-assessment of *Atlantic cod* (see SeaChoice website), with a focus on populations located in the Northern Gulf of St. Lawrence (3Pn4RS) and Southern Newfoundland and Labrador (3Ps), with both areas remaining red-ranked or “avoid,” which means we recommend that our business partners continue to avoid procurement of cod from these areas. The red ranking is based on the fact that Atlantic cod has been scientifically assessed as “endangered,” in Canada, which means it faces a risk of extinction, if measures are not taken to rebuild the populations. We are monitoring management measures as well as research surveys and related stock assessments closely, as the data on potential improvements particularly in inshore areas are still inconclusive. Unfortunately, other Canadian Atlantic cod stocks including the Scotian Shelf and Gulf of Maine populations continue to decline, and likely won’t recover unless decisive measures are taken by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). SeaChoice will continue to recommend that partners avoid the 3Ps (Southern Newfoundland) cod stock until there is better certainty around rebuilding. This particular fishery is currently under assessment for Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification. SeaChoice has submitted [stakeholder comments](#) (see SeaChoice website) outlining our concerns regarding the certification of a population that is at such low levels, particularly before trends of population increase have been established on a year over year basis.



PHOTO: Hans-Petter field (CC BY-SA)

Seafood Waste

Are our efforts being wasted?

Waste. Spoilage. Loss. Shrinkage. There are many names for food that is produced for human consumption but goes uneaten, but no matter what you call it it is all too common in the seafood supply chain.

A recent report from the Johns Hopkins Center for a Liveable Future found that 47 per cent of the edible U.S. seafood supply is wasted each year and most of that loss occurs at the end of the supply chain at either the retail or consumer level¹.

Research out of Dalhousie University found that higher amount of loss occurred in fresh seafood supply chains, with levels of loss at the retail level ranging from ~1.5 per cent for scallops and halibut up to 26 per cent for whole fish and mussels².

This research begs an important question about our collaborative work: What good is it to produce seafood sustainably if at the end of day it is simply thrown in the trash?

Together we could make significant economic and environmental gains by reducing seafood waste and we hope that you will work with us towards this goal.

Recommendations

- **Conduct a waste audit of your operation**
- **Find means of redirecting seafood nearing its sell-by date:**
 - o Transfer it to the prepared foods department
 - o Donate it to a local community kitchen
 - o Freeze it
- **Hand out recipe cards at your seafood counter for customers that may be out of their comfort zone preparing seafood.**

Want help implementing these recommendations?
Contact us at info@seachoice.org



¹ Love, D. et al. (2015). Wasted seafood in the United States: Quantifying loss from production to consumption and moving toward solutions. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378015300340>

² Stoner, J. (2013). Applying the Concept of Sustainable Consumption to Seafood: How Product Loss Through Post-Harvest Seafood Supply Chains Undermines Seafood Sustainability. Retrieved from <http://dalspace.library.dal.ca:8080/xmlui/handle/10222/37035>



PHOTO: Robert Linsdell (CC BY-SA)

Manitoba Freshwater Lakes

Most Canadians are unaware of just how important freshwater fisheries are for the production of fish. Manitoba's freshwater fisheries in 2012 produced about nine million kg of various fish. These 'seafood' products are important for consumers and retailers in central Canada.

On November 9, 2015 the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program released a report on Manitoba Freshwater Lakes (see SeaChoice website). The report covers the three main fish producing lakes in the province and has recommendations for walleye, lake whitefish, yellow perch, and northern pike. Unfortunately, the assessment resulted in a red ranking for all species in all lakes. While the results may be surprising, they clearly show that improvements are necessary. Many red-ranked fisheries in Canada and worldwide receive poor scores due to a lack of basic stock assessment, data reporting, enforcement, compliance and management measures.

As the results have shown, the management of Manitoba's lake fisheries are in need of additional resources to better manage these stocks so that at the very least an understanding of whether the level of catch is appropriate to the size of the stock they are harvesting.

Retailers and consumers can incentivize improvement of these fisheries by using their respective market influence to encourage a change to how Manitoba's commercial fisheries are managed.

Bycatch Reduction in B.C. Shrimp Fishery Using LED lights

Over the last 15 years the B.C. shrimp trawl industry has implemented a [suite of practices](#) (see DFO website) to reduce bycatch of eulachon. Eulachon, also referred to as salvation fish and candlefish due to their high oil content, are historically and presently an important species for a variety of coastal First Nations. A recent National Geographic story explains the significance of '[Salvation Fish](#)' (see National Geographic website).

A [recent study](#) (see ScienceDirect website) undertaken in Oregon found that artificial lights attached to the shrimp trawl nets reduced the bycatch of eulachon by 91 per cent. Fisheries and Oceans Canada currently has an objective to "minimize eulachon bycatch to the extent possible." Existing management practices to address impacts of the shrimp fishery on eulachon include closed areas, by-catch exclusion grates on trawl nets, and a 8 t 'Eulachon Action Level' (EAL) which places a fleet-wide mandatory cap on eulachon catch. These combined measures have already significantly reduced the catch of eulachon in the shrimp trawl fishery to less than 1 t per year and in 2013/14 was estimated at only 200 kg. So why bother with lights as an extra measure if the catch is so low?

While the catch is low so is the industry wide fishing effort, with the fleet only catching a small percentage of its allowable catch (only 2.3% caught in 2014). The risk associated with exceeding the EAL has been a hindrance to reinvestment in the industry as the fleet can be closed down by a single tow with a large bycatch of eulachon.

Fishing with lights to help reduce bycatch of eulachon will help reduce the risk and possibly increase reinvestment in the fishery. Sounds simple, but the challenge in Canada is that under DFO's [Pacific Fishery Regulations](#) it is illegal to fish with lights. The David Suzuki Foundation and the Pacific Coast Cooperative Shrimpers Association (PCCSA) are currently (Fall 2015) undertaking a trial of these lights under a scientific permit from DFO. It is hoped that this pilot study will help expedite a change to the regulations.

