



219-2211 West 4th Avenue
Vancouver, BC
Canada
V6K 4S2

SeaChoice celebrates 10 years with Canada's first comprehensive sustainable seafood study

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On World Oceans Day, a new report released from SeaChoice clearly finds that Canada should do more to protect oceans and the food they provide. The organization, which is celebrating its 10-year anniversary, released today the first major assessment of the sustainability of all of Canada's seafood imports and exports. The report, *Taking Stock: Sustainable Seafood in Canadian Markets*, is part of SeaChoice's work to promote and highlight sustainable seafood choices in Canadian grocery stores.

"While we are celebrating the growing support for sustainable seafood among Canadians, along with increased fisheries assessments, the report's findings show there are still obstacles to supporting healthy oceans," said Karen Wristen from the Living Oceans Society.

The report found:

- Weak government labelling and traceability requirements have made Canadian seafood assessments impossible for many species.
- Tropical farmed shrimp, farmed open net-pen salmon and skipjack tuna caught with harmful gear were the top three "red-listed" or "avoid" fish imported into Canada (by volume).
- Open net-pen Atlantic salmon is Canada's most exported red-listed fish.
- Only 16 per cent of the seafood in Canada is considered "Best Choice" by SeaChoice.

Many groups have contributed to sustainable seafood gains, namely the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions and its 30 collaborators and members, which include the Marine Stewardship Council, Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch, Ocean Wise and SeaChoice.

"Increasing the profile of sustainable seafood would not have been possible without the efforts of collaborators, members, major retailers, suppliers, seafood consumers, chefs and fishing and aquaculture industries," said Bill Wareham, Western Canada science manager at the David Suzuki Foundation, a SeaChoice member.



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SeaChoice was created in 2006 to help Canadian businesses and seafood lovers support sustainable fisheries and aquaculture throughout the supply chain. Huge strides have been made over the past decade.

“Last year, SeaChoice partner Buy-Low Foods was the first major retailer in North America to replace all unsustainable red-listed seafood with sustainable alternatives,” said Wareham.

SeaChoice has also contributed to fisheries and aquaculture reforms. In 2011, members worked to improve the Canadian groundfish trawl fishery, which has spurred trawl improvements around the world. SeaChoice also supported innovative aquaculture solutions such as the closed-containment, land-based Kuterra salmon, sold exclusively through SeaChoice partner Canada Safeway.

“While oceans continue to face numerous threats globally, the sustainable seafood community is doing its part to make them healthier,” Susanna Fuller, SeaChoice Member from the Ecology Action Centre said. “One of the best ways to protect oceans is to support seafood that is caught in environmentally and socially responsible ways. If we continue to expand sustainable seafood’s share of the market, people can enjoy seafood while leaving a smaller footprint on the planet for generations to come.”

SeaChoice

SeaChoice, Canada’s most comprehensive sustainable seafood program, focuses on solutions for healthy oceans. SeaChoice is operated by the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecology Action Centre and Living Oceans Society. Launched in 2006, SeaChoice was created to help Canadian businesses and shoppers take an active role in supporting sustainable fisheries and aquaculture at all levels of the seafood supply chain. SeaChoice has created easy-to-use, science-based tools that help consumers make the best seafood choices. For more information, visit www.SeaChoice.org.

For more information, contact:

Lana Brandt, SeaChoice, 778-833-2954

Bill Wareham, Western Canada Science Manager, David Suzuki Foundation, 604-928-1150

Karen Wristen, Executive Director, Living Oceans Society, 604-788-5634

Susanna D. Fuller, Senior Marine Conservation Coordinator, Ecology Action Centre, 902-483-5033



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Background: Taking Stock: Canada's Sustainable Seafood Markets

- **A lack of government-required labelling and tracking** for exported and imported seafood makes assessing the sustainability of many seafood products impossible.
- **Over 30 per cent** (by volume) of seafood imported into Canada is reported with **insufficient specificity** to allow for sustainability rankings.
- **Sixteen per cent** of all seafood (by volume) produced in Canada is ranked **green (Best Choice)**, 61 per cent is ranked yellow (Some Concerns), 14 per cent is red (Avoid) and nine per cent is unranked.
- Canada assesses 48 per cent of its fish stocks to be “healthy”, a **significantly different finding** from this analysis.
- Red-ranked seafood produced by volume in Canada is primarily **farmed open-net pen salmon** (72 per cent), with the remaining 28 per cent from fisheries including Atlantic cod; Atlantic hake; Manitoba freshwater pickerel, whitefish and perch; Atlantic Pollock; Atlantic swordfish; tuna and Atlantic cusk.
- Canada has a **trade surplus** when it comes to sustainable seafood. We export more sustainable seafood than we import.
- **Only 11 per cent** of seafood available in Canada is listed as green.
- **Imported red-ranked seafood** includes farmed shrimp, farmed salmon and skipjack tuna.
- SeaChoice retailer partner sales data indicate that 23 per cent of seafood is from green sources, 66 per cent from yellow and nine per cent from red ranked sources. This shows that **SeaChoice retail partners source a higher percentage** of green ranked seafood than is available, on average, across Canada.
- Approximately 80 per cent (by value) and 67 per cent (by volume) of Canadian wild-caught fisheries are certified by the **Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)** and have conditions in place to improve sustainability.
- **Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)** certifications are growing on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, with five farms certified and seven within the certification process as of April 2016.



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Report Recommendations

1. To improve seafood sustainability tracking in Canada and the effectiveness of market-based approaches:

- Canada should require government agencies to improve seafood labelling and reporting of fisheries and aquaculture products by requiring species level identifications.
- ENGOs assisting with sustainable seafood procurements should adopt a shared data gathering tool to track program effectiveness.

2. To eliminate red-ranked seafood and increase availability of green-ranked seafood as well as address human rights abuses in seafood production:

- Canadian retailers, food-service companies and restaurants should continue to avoid buying red-ranked seafood.
- Canada should support traceability requirements as a part of sustainability assessments and examine human rights abuses in the seafood supply chain.
- Focus should be on improving practices or restricting imports from red-ranked fisheries within and outside of Canada.

3. To ensure that eco-certification programs are credible, aligned with Canadian law and policy and result in improved fisheries sustainability, including impacts on target species and impacts of fishing on the ecosystem, we recommend:

- Canadian fisheries certified by the MSC meet conditions within a reasonable timeframe, with MSC conditions that are consistent with Canadian laws and policies relating to sustainable fisheries and marine biodiversity protection, and with a particular focus on species assessed by COSEWIC and considered at risk.
- ASC certifications, particularly with reference to the *Salmon Standard*, should not undermine wild salmon management and must uphold a high standard for disease and pathogen control.