

Seafood Progress: Year 2 results

What changes have we seen in the Canadian retailer landscape in the last year?

July 2019

[Seafood Progress](#) is an online resource that profiles major Canadian retailers' sustainable seafood commitments and their progress in meeting those commitments. Each retailer structures their commitment differently, so Seafood Progress provides a standardized framework to evaluate the components of each retailer's commitment and show how they compare to the mean scores across all major retailers (the "national average").

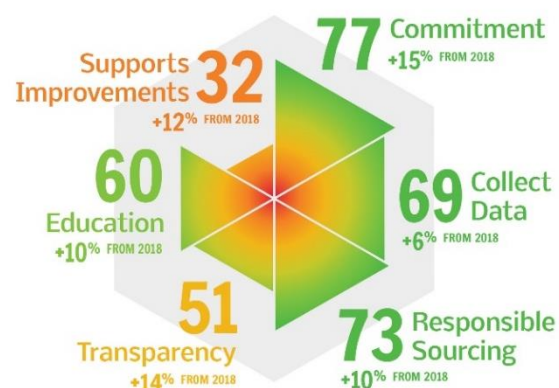
SeaChoice based the assessment framework on recommendations produced by the [Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions](#) in their [Common Vision for Sustainable Seafood](#). The Common Vision outlines six steps – making a public commitment, collecting data on seafood products, making responsible sourcing decisions, being transparent, educating staff, customers and vendors and supporting improvements in fisheries and aquaculture – which SeaChoice broke down into twenty-one key performance indicators (KPIs; for more information see the [methodology page](#)).

SeaChoice contacted all retailers profiled in Seafood Progress and invited them to collaborate in the development of their assessment profile, including sharing information that is not currently publicly available (referenced throughout with personal communications). Buy-Low Foods, Federated Co-operatives Limited (Co-op), Loblaw's, METRO, Safeway, Save-On-Foods, Sobeys and Walmart Canada all engaged with SeaChoice to help inform their profiles. The profile of the one retailer that did not engage is based solely on online information.

What has changed in the past year?

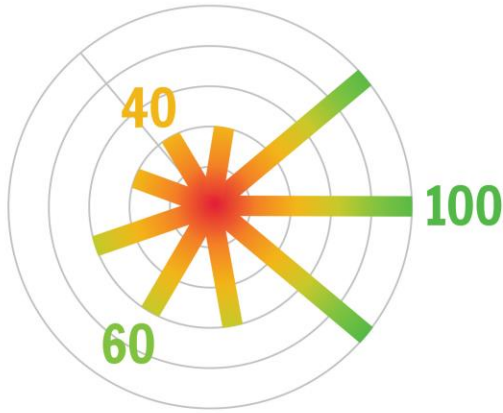
Ongoing engagement with retailers combined with technological upgrades to the online platform mean consumers can now see how retailers' commitments and/or their progress in meeting their commitments are changing. SeaChoice is pleased to report that the national average increased across all Steps, with the largest increases on Commitment, Transparency and Supports Improvements (see National Averages figure, right). In spite of the increased average scores, there is still a lot more that some retailers could be doing on the Steps for Support Improvements, Transparency and Education.

NATIONAL AVERAGES OUT OF 100



KPI 1.2

Retailer has a publicly available commitment or policy to source more socially responsible seafood



Social responsibility – Seafood Progress’s assessment of retailers’ commitments shows that, overall, they are much further ahead in terms of their environmental commitments but many are struggling with how to ensure their seafood products have also been produced in a socially responsible way.

Addressing this gap is important, as there have been many documented instances of human rights abuses and exploitation of vulnerable people on board fishing vessels, in aquaculture facilities and in seafood processing plants. KPI 1.2 (left) shows that only three retailers have social responsibility commitments that reference credible international standards, include clear objectives, actions or expectations for their seafood suppliers, a clear and effective traceability policy and a timeline for achieving their commitment. The scores for this

indicator increased by only 6% compared to last year. SeaChoice encourages Canadian retailers to take advantage of the new risk assessment tools and due diligence practices have been developed in the past year to ensure the safety, dignity and prosperity of the people who produce their seafood.

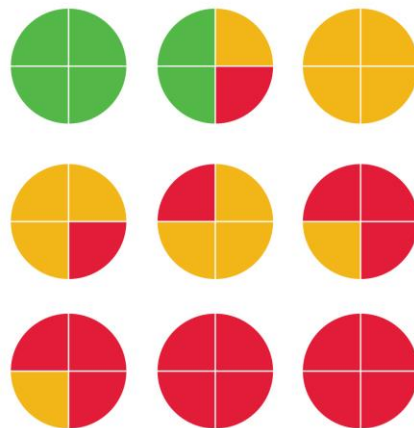
Quality of seafood labelling – Canada’s lax labelling laws mean that retailers don’t have to include the information that is necessary for seafood consumers to make informed purchasing decisions (see KPI 4.1, below). One retailer, METRO, continued to be a clear leader in seafood labelling by voluntarily including species’ scientific (Latin) name, country of origin, whether its wild or farmed and the gear type or farming method on all of its fresh, frozen and private label products. On average, scores for this indicator only increased by 1% compared to last year, although some retailers are making improvements in recognition of their customers’ desires for more detailed labelling information. SeaChoice encourages the retailers that are just meeting the minimum legal requirement to explore traceability and labelling strategies so they too can provide their customers with this essential information.

KPI 4.1

Retailer labels products with the information that allows consumers to make informed decisions

Species Latin name
Country of origin
Wild or farmed
Gear type or farming methods

● = ALL PRODUCTS ● = SOME PRODUCTS
● = NO PRODUCTS



Disclosure of performance – Before Seafood Progress first launched in June 2018, all nine major Canadian retailers had sustainable seafood policies, but only four were reporting publicly on how much of their procurement was in line with their policy – and three of these had been SeaChoice sustainable seafood program partners. With this update to Seafood Progress, seven out of the nine retailers have at some point publicly reported how much of their seafood meets their sustainability criteria (see KPI 4.4, right). Four are reporting regularly, and three have reported at some point. Transparency around metrics like this is critical because it shows whether businesses are taking their commitments seriously and that they are accountable to them. SeaChoice encourages all retailers to regularly report their progress in meeting their commitments so their customers know the commitment is driving real change down the supply chain.

KPI 4.4

Retailer publicly reports how much of their seafood meets their sustainability criteria (by volume or value of sales).



Supporting Improvements – Consumers can use their purchasing power to reward businesses they want to support, and when Canada’s largest food retailers do this too, it scales up quickly. Step 6 of Seafood Progress looks at what actions retailers are taking to support the improvement of challenging seafood commodities sold in high volumes in Canada, including farmed Atlantic salmon, farmed shrimps and prawns and skipjack tuna. Some retailers are taking action to improve some these commodities, for example, Loblaw and METRO are working with their suppliers to switch to more environmentally-friendly methods of catching skipjack tuna, and all of Save-On-Foods’ private label shrimp and prawns are produced in ways that are ‘Recommended’ by Ocean Wise and from farms certified by the Aquaculture Stewardship Council. Alternatively, retailers are sending market signals by opting out of these commodities entirely, such as Buy-Low Foods which doesn’t sell any farmed Atlantic salmon. Much more remains to be done, however, and this this remains the lowest scoring Step within Seafood Progress. Over the next year, SeaChoice will be encouraging retailers to more actively support better seafood production practices thereby better leveraging the market power of Canada’s largest retailers.

Commitment scope and ambition

Although Seafood Progress doesn’t judge retailers on the scope or ambition of their commitments, shining a light on the details of commitments and actions makes it easier to assess where retailers are in relation to current ‘best practice’ and compare their actions to those of their peers. Retailers’ commitments are generally focused either on what they *will* buy or on what they *won’t* buy.

A good example of the former is Loblaw, whose commitment is that all wild seafood sold in its stores will be certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and that all farmed seafood will be certified by the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC). This commitment is aiming for all seafood products to have passed a high sustainability bar and have good traceability as well. Some retailers are also aiming for 100% MSC or ASC certified products but only for certain types of seafood (e.g. for wild cod or farmed salmon). Other retailers use this approach but their goal is based on a percentage of

products that meet a sustainability bar, for example a commitment that at least 50% of seafood products will be 'Recommended' by the Ocean Wise Seafood Program.

The other type of commitment is focused on what a retailer won't buy, and this is often based upon ranking or recommendation programs as opposed to certification schemes. For example, both Buy-Low Foods and Federated Cooperatives Limited have committed to not procuring any seafood that has been assessed by the American NGO Seafood Watch as 'red-ranked' or 'Avoid'. Two retailers have the public commitment to avoid selling seafood species that have "major sustainability issues associated with them", which they define as species classed as Endangered or Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) or from sources known to engage in illegal fishing.

Commitments can also include a mix of these two strategies for directing procurement, for example a commitment to aim for eco-certified products while also promising not to sell any products that are 'red-ranked' by Seafood Watch.

Another significant difference between commitments is the scope of products they apply to – or rather, the products that aren't included. For example, some retailers' sustainable seafood commitments don't apply to shelf stable seafood products, such as canned tuna or tinned anchovies. In other cases, not all of a retailer's grocery store brands (chains) have to abide by the retailer's sustainable seafood policy – even if those brands sell a lot of seafood. SeaChoice encourages all retailers to expand the scope of their sustainable seafood commitments to apply to *all* of the seafood they sell in *all* their stores. This will be the best way to meet Canadian seafood consumer's expectations for legally caught, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible seafood.

Conclusions and next steps

SeaChoice is pleased to report that almost all major Canadian food retailers are now engaging with Seafood Progress, leading to a more transparent Canadian retail landscape, and that the last year has seen an increase in the national averages for all Steps and KPIs. But as explained above, there is still much work to be done – particularly when it comes to social responsibility, better seafood labelling and supporting improvements in challenging commodities. SeaChoice will continue to share resources, information and recommendations with retailers on how they can continue to develop, implement and monitor their sustainable seafood commitments so that seafood sold in Canada meets all three pillars of sustainability – environmental, social and economic.

[SeafoodProgress.org](https://seafoodprogress.org) will be updated periodically as new information becomes available and reviewed in-depth again in July 2020.