

Seafood Progress: Year 3 results

What progress did retailers make in the months before the pandemic hit?

August 2020

[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"). The assessment framework is based on recommendations produced by the [Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions](#) in their [Common Vision for Sustainable Seafood](#). For more information, see Seafood Progress's [methodology page](#)). Click here to see our [2018 report](#) and [2019 report](#).

SeaChoice invited all retailers profiled in Seafood Progress to collaborate in the development of their profile. To more accurately represent their practices, retailers were sometimes asked to share information that was not publicly available (referenced throughout with personal communications). Buy-Low Foods, Federated Co-operatives Limited (Co-op), Loblaws, METRO, Save-On-Foods, Sobeys¹ and Walmart Canada all engaged with SeaChoice to help inform their profiles. Costco is the only retailer that has so far not engaged at all in this initiative, so its profile is based entirely on publicly available information.

What has changed in the past year?

The global pandemic in 2020 has highlighted the importance that grocery stores play in our lives. As we start to look towards recovery, focusing on sustainable and responsible business practices is essential to protect vulnerable people, ecosystems, and consumer trust. But when it comes to seafood, most Canadian retailers have made limited progress since July 2019 when the last updates were made.

At national level, across all steps there was an average increase of only 3.3% across all indicators in the framework. COVID-19 may have contributed to this, but there were eight months since the last Seafood Progress update in which retailers could have made progress before the impacts of the pandemic were felt in Canada. Save-On-Foods for example, did not demonstrate improvements in any indicators across the assessment. No retailers appear to have moved their social responsibility commitments forward at all. Costco continued to not engage with SeaChoice to shed more light on its policies and practices, and according to its publicly available information we could discern no improvements over the past year.

¹ Note that due to the nationalization of Sobeys' sustainable seafood program to its banner Safeway, for 2020's analysis we did not conduct a separate analysis for Sobeys and Safeway and will be presenting all of Sobeys' banners, including Safeway, under its profile.

However, there are some bright spots. Two additional retailers are now being transparent about how much of their seafood procurement is meeting their commitments. This year both Walmart and Sobeys started publishing information about how much of their fresh and frozen seafood meets their commitments. This is a significant step forward because a retailer's impact on sustainable seafood production is only as good as its actual practices. As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words. Now all of Canada's major retailers except Costco are actively participating in Seafood Progress and disclosing their performance against their commitments.

Step changes at national level (Figure 1)

- Step 1, Commitment, decreased 3% due to two retailers' lower social responsibility commitment scores.
- Step 2, Data Collection, increased 3% due to Buy-Low Foods' expansion of its policy to collect data on species' scientific names and country of origin on all products covered by its commitment. Notably, this year METRO expanded its traceability requirements to also apply to its sushi suppliers.
- Step 3, Responsible Sourcing, saw a 5% increase due to Walmart and Sobeys' decision this year to begin disclosing their progress against their commitments.
- Step 4, Transparency, increased 4% due to Co-op's improved labelling for all fresh and frozen products to now include scientific name, origin, catch method and whether it was wild/farmed. METRO and Walmart also contributed to this increase due to their increased score for frequency of public reporting.
- Step 5, Education, saw a marginal 2% increase due to changes in Co-op's introduction of in-store educational materials about their seafood policy and Walmart's new provision of direct support to their vendors through training on its data reporting requirements and seafood sourcing standards.
- Step 6, Supports Improvements, increased 8% primarily as a result of a change in scoring. Starting this year, SeaChoice recognizes BAP certified shrimp as a way that retailers could support improvement in this commodity (previously only ASC certified shrimp qualified). However, there were also improvements in Buy-Low Foods' score for preferentially sourcing eco-certified or endorsed seafood and Walmart's actions to support improvements of canned tuna by signing an advocacy letter to all Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) for tuna asking for increased monitoring coverage for skipjack tuna fisheries.

2020 NATIONAL AVERAGES

OUT OF 100

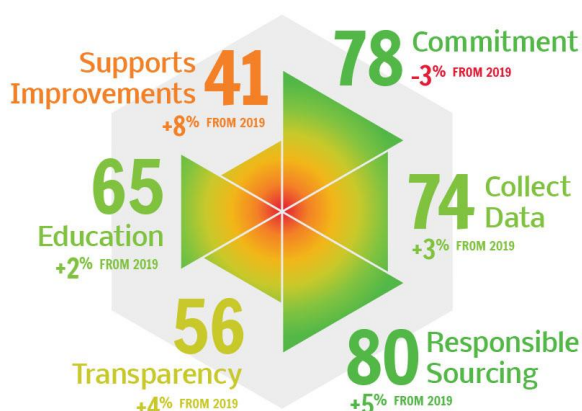


Figure 1: The average of eight major retailers' scores for each step in Seafood Progress

Significant indicators for 2020

The following key performance indicators (KPIs) are either significant for their changes, or their lack of changes.

Commitment to social responsibility (KPI 1.2; Figure 2)

None of the retailers we spoke to this year had made any further progress on their commitment or practices to improve the social responsibility of the seafood they sourced. Considering the national average for this indicator is 65 (out of 100), compared to a national average of 90 for environmental commitments, most retailers need to start devoting more energy and focus to tackling these important issues. Because unfortunately, human rights abuses and poor practices at sea, on aquaculture farms and in processing plants have continued to be reported by investigative [journalists](#), [NGOs](#), [academics](#) and [whistleblowers](#) around the world.

KPI 1.2

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

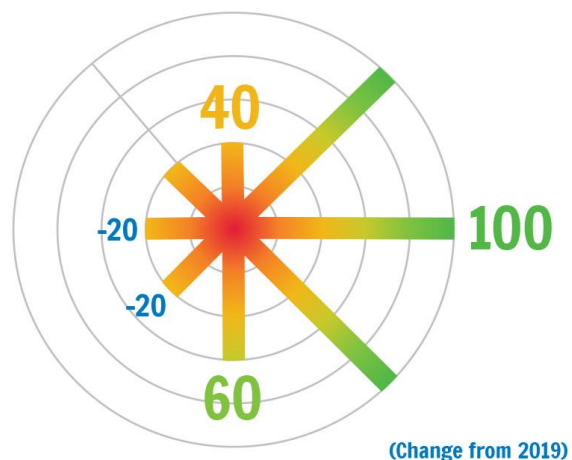


Figure 2: Retailers' scores for KPI 1.2 (each line represents one retailer's score)

KPI 3.2

Retailer can demonstrate that X% of their seafood sold in the last three years meets their sustainability criteria by volume/value

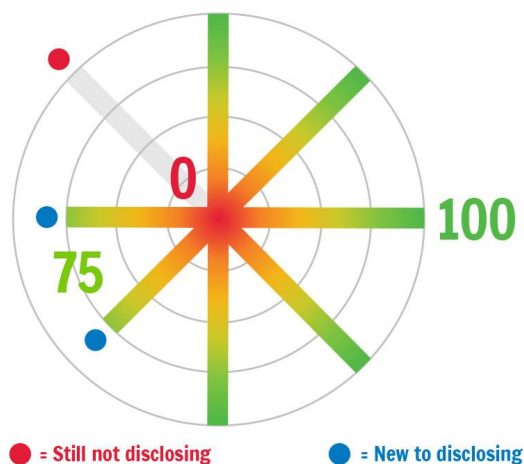


Figure 3: Retailers' scores on KPI 3.2 (each line represents one retailer's score)

Additionally, two retailer's scores were downgraded as a result of planned initiatives that did not materialize this year.

Public disclosure of how much seafood sold meets retailer's commitment or policy (KPI 3.2, Figure 3)

This indicator saw a welcome 19% increase due to the decision by Sobeys and Walmart to begin disclosing information on how much of their procurement of fresh and frozen products meets their commitments. And while this information is critical for both transparency and accountability, it is also necessary for customers to know where their retailer is on the spectrum of sustainability.

Costco Canada is now the only retailer assessed on Seafood Progress that does not publish this information.

Differences in the scope of retailers' policies and commitments

Retailers have different parameters for the seafood products their policy or commitment applies to. These parameters apply to the type of brand – whether it is a retailer's own supermarket brand (e.g. Loblaw's "President's Choice", Sobeys' "Compliments", or Costco's "Kirkland Signature"), an external seafood company's brand (e.g. Birds Eye, High Liner, or Clover Leaf), or a fresh or frozen product that is not branded (e.g. fillets/whole fish ordered from the seafood counter or pre-portioned on styrofoam trays). It often also depends on which department is responsible for sourcing and stocking the product. Frequently, fresh and frozen seafood products are managed by the "meat and seafood" department while seafood products that are stored at room temperature (e.g. canned tuna) are handled by the "grocery" department. The grocery department may or may not adhere to the retailer's seafood sourcing commitment or policy. Finally, it can also vary by the specific grocery store brands that are owned by the retailer (i.e., some store brands owned by the retailer might adhere to the policy while others might not, for example, while Loblaw's seafood commitment applies to all types of seafood sold in most of its stores, it does not apply to products sold in T&T Supermarkets).

In addition to the public disclosure of how much seafood sold is in line with a retailer's commitment, information on the extent or "scope" of this commitment is another important contributor to the transparency and accountability of a retailer's practices.

For example, all retailers with their own supermarket branded fresh and frozen products have those commodities covered by their seafood commitment, however only five out of eight extend this commitment to their shelf stable products. Half of retailers include fresh and frozen products made by external seafood brands, while only two include shelf stable products – like canned tuna – made by external seafood brands. Two retailers, Costco and Sobeys, don't include non-branded fresh or frozen products.

Overall, only two out of eight retailers – Loblaw and METRO – include all shelf stable products, all products supplied by external seafood brands in their commitments and non-branded

COMMITMENT SCOPE

How retailers' sustainable seafood policies and commitments apply to different segments of their products.

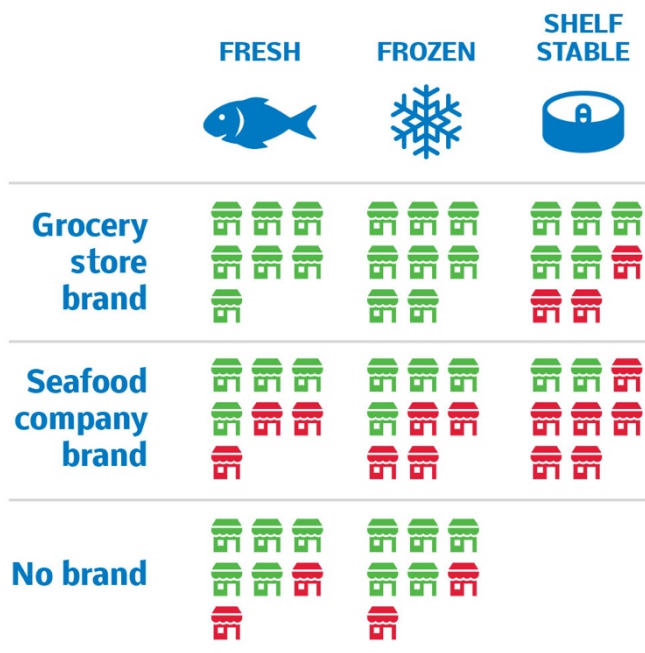


Figure 4: How many retailers include which segments under the scope of their seafood commitment or policy



products. However, even these retailers do not apply this policy across all of their store brands; Loblaw omits Arz, Real Canadian Wholesale Club and T&T Supermarket and METRO omits Marché Adonis.

Conclusions and next steps

While it has undoubtedly been an unusual year for everyone in Canada, as we start to settle into a new “business as usual” we need to make sure it’s a fairer, more resilient and more transparent world than it was before – and this includes retailers and their seafood sourcing policies.

For retailers, this should mean:

1. Taking a good hard look at their social responsibility practices and due diligence, using tools like the [Roadmap for Improving Seafood Ethics](#) to help guide their way.
2. Expanding the scope of their seafood commitment or policy, making sure it covers all the seafood sold in all their stores.
3. Ensuring that they are monitoring and evaluating their efforts to meet the goals they have set for themselves and communicating these to their customers.

These steps will help retailers drive real change down the supply chain to improve the many sources of seafood that are not certified, not recommended, or completely unassessed.