

June 30, 2021

Canadian retailers are not doing enough to stop human rights abuses in seafood supply chains

Vancouver/Traditional unceded territories of the x̱m̓əθk̓w̓əy̓əm (MUSQUEAM), Skwxwú7mesh (SQUAMISH) and səliłwətał (TSLEIL-WAUTUTH) First Nations AND Halifax/Kjipuktuk, unceded Mi'kmaw territory — Despite years of accounts and exposés of slavery, forced labour, human trafficking and other human rights abuses in seafood supply chains, most Canadian retailers' social responsibility commitments and actions continue to be inadequate and untraceable, according to SeaChoice's fourth update on [Seafood Progress](#), an online platform that profiles seafood commitments and practices of major Canadian retailers.

“The global pandemic has led to a dramatic increase in the profitability of Canadian grocers. Retailers have more opportunity than ever to put at least as much emphasis on social responsibility and environmental sustainability as they do on profits,” SeaChoice supply chain analyst Dana Cleaveley said. “Retailers need to do more to meet their customers' expectations of legally and responsibly made products through active due diligence and effective traceability.”

This May, three retailers — Buy-Low Foods, METRO and Save-On-Foods — sent letters to the federal government supporting development of an effective boat-to-plate traceability system for all seafood sold in Canada. The lack of this traceability makes it far too easy to support slavery and irresponsible fishing practices in seafood supply chains. Retailers have a large part to play in driving this regulation forward.

“Better ways to trace seafood from harvest to plate will benefit consumers, businesses and sustainability,” Christina Callegari, Ecology Action Centre sustainable seafood co-ordinator and SeaChoice representative, said. “It will also help reduce mislabelling.”

This year, the number of retailers to include all seafood they sell under their sustainability commitments has doubled, thanks to Walmart Canada and Co-op. Four retailers still fail to include canned and/or seafood brand products (e.g., [High Liner](#), [StarKist](#) and [Cloverleaf](#)). As a result, a significant amount of seafood these companies sell could be unsustainably harvested and breaking human rights laws.

SeaChoice removed Costco Canada from its national average calculations to better represent the actual average among participating retailers. Costco has avoided engaging with Seafood Progress since it began four years ago and this year its scores declined to the point where they became incomparable with other retailers.

As Costco remains the most viewed retailer on Seafood Progress, SeaChoice will continue to profile it, as a resource for Costco customers.

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About SeaChoice:

[SeaChoice](#) is a collaboration of three internationally recognized organizations — the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecology Action Centre and Living Oceans Society — that use their broad, national expertise to find solutions for a healthy ocean. SeaChoice is a science-based, solutions-focused influencer, advocate and watchdog leading the next evolution of seafood sustainability in Canada. SeaChoice is a member organization of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions, and works with consumers, retailers, suppliers, government and producers to accomplish its objectives.

Backgrounder:

Seafood Progress landing page and retailer profile links: www.seafoodprogress.org

SeaChoice has published a short report on Year 4 Seafood Progress results. An advance copy is available here: <https://www.seachoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Seafood-Progress-Year-4-report-2021.pdf>

Methodology used to create Seafood Progress: <https://www.seachoice.org/seafood-progress/methodology/>

The Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions' Common Vision for Sustainable Seafood: <https://solutionsforseafood.org/resources/common-vision/>

Articles about human rights risks in seafood supply chains:

[Cambodian fisheries worker urges Canada to do more to combat slave labour](#) (CBC, September 1, 2019): “Canada imports more than \$390 million US worth of fish from countries suspected of having modern slavery in their fishing industry supply chains, according to advocacy group International Justice Mission (IJM).”

[Global Slavery Index G20 Analysis](#) provides “a high-level indication of how the world’s most developed countries are connected to modern slavery not only through exploitation occurring within their own borders but also through the goods they import.”

[Is there modern slavery behind your seafood?](#) (Oceana, January 5, 2018): “Modern slavery in seafood supply chains has been documented for years, and a lack of boat-to-plate traceability in Canada and around the world makes it far too easy for us to support this practice without knowing it.”

[Out of sight modern slavery in Pacific supply chains of canned tuna: A survey and analysis of company action.](#) “Modern slavery is endemic in this industry, where the tuna supply chain is remote, complex and opaque.”