



SEACHOICE FIVE-YEAR IMPACT REPORT

ACCELERATING PROGRESS IN
SEAFOOD SUSTAINABILITY



Photo: Pexels/Juanjo Menta

PUBLISHED 2023



The past five years have been transformational for the SeaChoice program. We entered 2018 with a new strategic direction and the ambition to incentivize and scale up progress across the seafood supply chain. To achieve this, we shifted our focus to accelerating the sustainability actions of major grocers and seafood brands, international certification bodies and national policy-makers to drive upstream change on the water that results in healthy oceans where marine ecosystems, communities and workers can all thrive.

As a result of this strategic shift, SeaChoice has positioned itself as a credible watchdog within the Canadian and global seafood market space.

- Our work has led a dramatic shift toward transparency among major grocers and seafood brands, thanks to our unique Seafood Progress commitment tracking tool.
- We enabled the conditions for two vital federal government commitments to be created: a boat-to-plate traceability mandate and a transition away from unsustainable open-net pen farmed salmon in British Columbia.
- We have built and led global alliances to hold the world’s most prominent eco-certifications to account for greenwashing. Alliance pressure has resulted in meaningful improvements to scheme standards.

We’re successfully accelerating progress in environmental conservation and social responsibility in seafood production, traceability and transparency.

As we approach nearly two decades of collaboration among SeaChoice member organizations, we review how the program’s recent evolution has placed SeaChoice as an effective program with a global reach.

Sincerely,

Karen Wristen,
Living Oceans Society

Shannon Arnold,
Ecology Action Centre

John Driscoll,
David Suzuki Foundation

SeaChoice Steering Committee



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Photo: Simon Ryder-Burbridge

1 A SHIFT TO TRANSPARENCY AND ACTION BY COMPANIES

Daylighting grocers' and brands' performance to drive progress

By holding companies such as Walmart, Costco and High Liner to account publicly, SeaChoice's Seafood Progress tool has successfully incentivized grocers and brands to increase their transparency and take accountability for the impact they have on the ocean.

Major grocers and the seafood brands, all of which operate or source seafood globally, hold significant influence over consumer choices and economic power within the supply chain. At the same time, environmental and social responsibility policies and commitments are now common corporate practice. However, turning words into action, at a pace that is necessary, is often where corporations stall. Thanks in large part to SeaChoice's first decade of work, by 2016 all Canadian grocers had some sort of sustainable seafood commitment. However, progress against commitments by grocers was stalling.

Introduced in 2018, Seafood Progress is a one-of-a-kind platform that annually tracks and scores the actions of 8 major grocers and 13 brands against their commitments to sourcing sustainable and socially responsible seafood.

OUR IMPACT

- As a result of Seafood Progress, grocers and brands are making progress against their commitments.
- From 2018 to 2022 the average grocer score has improved from 49 to 71 per cent.
- As of 2022, all grocers work with SeaChoice to update their public profiles annually — demonstrating that grocers see value in engaging with the platform.
- We have caused several brands to move away from an “available upon request” approach to offering sustainable seafood products to establishing actionable commitments and reporting against them.
- Our work also compelled four brands to take the first step in improving seafood ethics by establishing and publishing commitments to social responsibility.
- Evidence that consumers are taking notice of Seafood Progress is demonstrated by the nearly 3,500 emails sent to brands and grocers from their profile pages in 2022. These emails call on companies to drive meaningful improvements to fisheries and aquaculture.

 **CLICK HERE FOR MORE ON SEAFOOD PROGRESS**



Canada’s role as a significant exporter and importer within the global seafood supply chain allows SeaChoice the opportunity to connect our novel approaches, advocacy and watchdog work to international networks.

Our work with major brands and grocers — including global retail giants Walmart and Costco — drives environmental and socio-economic improvements throughout global supply chains. Our work on global certifications has resulted in the formation of international allies and coalitions with direct pathways to North American, European, Asia Pacific and South American markets.

Canada’s government plays a significant role at international fisheries and ocean management fora that negotiate standards for monitoring, transparency, traceability and trade information, as well as practices on the water. SeaChoice member organizations work closely to ensure Canada is forwarding best practices at these tables that affect global seafood supplies.



2

A BOAT-TO-PLATE MANDATE

The case for stronger labelling and traceability laws prompts government efforts

SeaChoice’s campaign efforts exposed issues of mislabelling, poor labelling and lack of strong traceability regulations in Canada, contributing to the Canadian government’s commitment to implement a “boat-to-plate” traceability program.

Proper traceability and labelling can identify and uncover seafood that has environmental, social and/or economic implications such as fraud; illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing; and labour abuses. In 2017, SeaChoice’s analysis identified Canada’s lax traceability and labelling laws as insufficient, particularly in comparison to our largest trading partners, the European Union and United States.

Over the past five years, SeaChoice has led the campaign for comprehensive traceability and labelling laws. Our subject-matter expertise on best practices for implementing strong traceability regulations is recognized as an important voice for input on how the “boat-to-plate” mandate develops.

In 2019, the Canadian government committed to a “boat-to-plate” traceability program.

OUR IMPACT

- Over 2017 and 2018, SeaChoice recruited a total of 773 citizen scientists to conduct a study on seafood labelling and accuracy using DNA and label analysis. The results of the study provided strong evidence of mislabelling in the marketplace, shining a light on Canada’s poor labelling and traceability regulations.
- Our follow-up actions calling on government to improve traceability requirements and seafood labelling laws garnered over 16,000 petition signatures and emails sent to government officials.
- SeaChoice also led a group of 25 seafood companies, grocers and experts (including Ocean Brands, Sobeys and Save-On-Foods) calling on the government to improve traceability requirements for all seafood sold in Canada.
- In 2019, Canada ratified the “Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.” This international agreement helps to combat IUU fishing by granting officials the ability to deny port entry to vessels and increase monitoring of Canadian seafood supply chains.
- In 2022, SeaChoice appeared as a witness to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans to provide insights into their seafood traceability and labelling study. The FOPO committee released recommendations to Fisheries and Oceans Canada that closely reflected SeaChoice’s recommendations.

ACCELERATING PROGRESS: **FIVE-YEAR WINS**

Photo: Tavish Campbell

3 A TRANSITION FROM UNSUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE

*Protecting wild salmon and coastal habitats,
and supporting regenerative sea farming*

SeaChoice and member groups' work in the nexus between markets and policy reform helped to secure the Canadian government's commitment to transition the British Columbian salmon farming industry from open-net pens and to halt the expansion of industrial salmon farming on the Atlantic coast.

The negative impacts of net pen salmon farms on the plight of endangered wild salmon stocks, coastal habitats and forage fish populations used as feed have long been a concern. First Nations rights and consent have also been largely disregarded by preceding governments as well as by market tools such as certification and major buyer policies. Open-net pen farmed salmon remains the largest unsustainable seafood product by volume sold in Canada.

However, over the past five years the tide has changed. Due in part to SeaChoice's advocacy, during the 2019 election all four national parties pledged to protect Pacific wild salmon from the adverse effects of open-net pen salmon farming. Nova Scotia's government has halted expansion and support has grown for regenerative sea farming of shellfish and seaweeds as opportunities for coastal communities.

*In 2019, the
newly elected
federal
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the fisheries
minister to "...
transition from
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in coastal British
Columbia waters
by 2025."*

OUR IMPACT

- SeaChoice worked to ensure the rapidly evolving peer-reviewed science on disease and sea lice was incorporated into updated sustainability assessments of the industry. As a result, in 2021 the U.S.-based Seafood Watch program downgraded its B.C. farmed salmon rating to "Red."
- We also worked to ensure that sustainability certifications included recognition of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Our markets work resulted in major grocers procuring land-based, closed-containment farmed salmon as a sustainable alternative for their customers, with demand outstripping supply.
- Member groups participated in the 2020 FOPO hearings on concerns about government science and advice, which resulted in recommendations to address Fisheries and Oceans Canada's perceived science bias.
- SeaChoice member groups worked with allies to ensure wild salmon and independent science were considered in the fisheries minister's decision to keep Discovery Island farms closed. This remarkable decision is the first time that the government has enacted the precautionary approach as required by the Fisheries Act.
- Our coordination of the Health Bays Network of community organizations across Nova Scotia stopped a massive new salmon farm plan proposed by an overseas company. The Network enabled well-researched, substantive community participation in the new aquaculture board review process; launched a citizen science monitoring program; and secured commitments from all parties to introduce more stringent regulations on finfish ocean farming.
- As members of the Nova Scotia provincial aquaculture regulatory advisory committee, we played a critical role in a comprehensive regulation review process that resulted in commitments to "right-size" aquaculture policy; to prioritize and support small-scale shellfish and seaweed farming; and to secure a moratorium on new finfish open-net pen farms.
- Our member groups launched the Kelp Kurious support hub to build a seaweed and shellfish farming industry that is well-regulated against negative ecosystem impacts and can offer income for coastal communities.



PHASE 1
2006–2017

The SeaChoice program focuses on increasing consumer awareness about sustainable seafood, conducting scientific assessments of fisheries and farms and partnering with major Canadian grocers to establish sustainable seafood policies. SeaChoice is one of the founding organizations of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions and helps to create the Common Vision six steps for major buyers’ seafood commitments.



Photo: Simon Ryder-Burbidge



PHASE 2
2018–2023

SeaChoice strategically shifts to a watchdog role to accelerate the actions of supply chain actors and government. SeaChoice launches the first of its kind Seafood Progress platform to transparently publish major grocer and seafood brand commitments and their progress against them. SeaChoice also campaigns for better labelling and traceability regulations and builds global stakeholder alliances to drive improvements in eco-labelling standards.



PHASE 3
2024

SeaChoice is poised to build on its watchdog role to further its place in the global sustainable seafood movement.



Photo: Simon Ryder-Burbidge

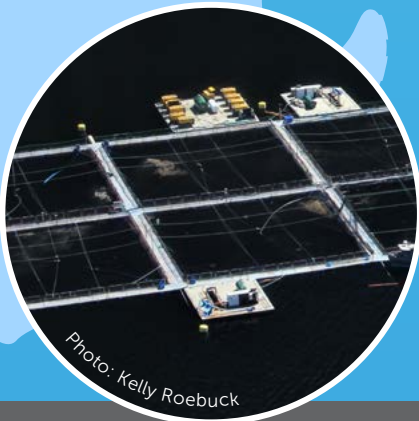


Photo: Kelly Roebuck



We successfully influenced the MSC to make improvements to its Fisheries Standard and the ASC to strengthen its Farm Standard.

4 MEANINGFUL IMPROVEMENTS TO SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS

Building global alliances to hold prominent certifications accountable

SeaChoice has built and led global alliances that have resulted in prominent sustainability certifications, the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), making meaningful changes to their standards and processes.

The purpose of certifications is to use market-based levers to incentivize sustainability improvements in wild fisheries and aquaculture farms. This purpose can be undermined when weak standards and auditing processes allow fisheries and/or farms that degrade habitats and contribute to the decline of threatened and endangered species to hold eco-certifications.

SeaChoice and its member groups have had long-standing engagement with ASC and MSC through steering committees, advisory boards, audits and standard revisions, fishery/farm objections and landmark analysis reports. We have used our expertise to spearhead global coalitions and alliances to draw greater attention to stakeholder concerns and amplify the pressure for the stewardship councils to live up to their purpose.

OUR IMPACT

IMPACT ON CAPTURE FISHERIES:

- SeaChoice’s landmark report, “Decade of MSC in Canada,” helped stop the practice of granting fisheries lengthy extensions to the requirement to fulfill fisheries improvements stipulated in their conditional eco-certifications.
- SeaChoice helped to create Make Stewardship Count, a coalition of more than 90 marine conservation experts, organizations and researchers from around the world working to hold the MSC to account. The coalition’s work throughout the MSC Standard Review contributed substantially to the adoption of critical improvements in the new standard, including a requirement that all sharks be landed whole (fins naturally attached), stronger assessment of impacts on endangered and protected species and higher levels of monitoring of catch and fishery compliance.

IMPACT ON AQUACULTURE:

- SeaChoice’s global review of the ASC Salmon Standard was the first in-depth analysis to uncover the failings of the certification and identify necessary improvements. Our expertise has informed international frameworks that oversee sustainability certifications, resulting in stronger requirements.
- We successfully built global alliances with over 40 community and conservation groups in major salmon farming regions and encouraged major retailers such as METRO, Save-On, Bolton Group and Toppits to participate in efforts to improve the ASC’s standards. Alliance member contributions resulted in the ASC moving toward auditing all impacts for the complete production cycle of certified fish, and new rules for certified salmon farms to take prompt corrective action on sea lice outbreaks.
- Collaborations with regional stakeholders have resulted in successful complaint investigations by oversight bodies, leading to improved auditing practices on farms.
- Our interventions have resulted in the ASC strengthening and expanding technical and stakeholder input within its processes. Because of this change, we have seen greater ASC engagement with regional stakeholders and further scientific advice incorporated in auditing decisions to ensure that facilities with poor farming practices are not eligible for ASC certification.

Our advocacy has resulted in sustainability improvements at local, national and international fishery arenas.



5 IMPROVING HOW WE FISH
Moving Canada’s fisheries toward sustainability

SeaChoice works at the local, national and international levels to identify key sustainability challenges in Canada’s fisheries and to address them through a combination of government action and industry innovation.

With the longest coastline in the world and a wealth of inland lakes, Canada is home to a rich diversity of commercial fisheries — from large offshore freezer vessels to family-run operations on remote lakes. With this diversity of fisheries and fished species comes a diversity of sustainability challenges. Overfishing, habitat damage and incidental bycatch of key species are consistent concerns across fisheries, yet they are rarely fixed by one-size-fits-all approaches. Furthermore, information is often lacking for these issues. Collectively, SeaChoice’s member groups have decades of experience in navigating these challenges in order to deliver effective change on the water.

Over the past five years, SeaChoice engaged in direct advocacy at decision-making tables, worked with fleets to adopt new practices and brought pressure to bear on regulators from companies along the supply chain.

OUR IMPACT

- The effects of SeaChoice’s critical and highly publicized 2015 assessment of Manitoba’s fisheries continue to cascade, with the recent initiation of several large-scale government investments and programs meant to guide the province’s fisheries to MSC certification.
- In 2021, member groups successfully led an effort to cut in half the maximum catch rate for the largest stock of Canada’s ecologically critical Pacific herring.
- After years of efforts to stop the overfishing of Atlantic forage fish populations of mackerel and herring, we have finally achieved implementation of science advice to close the commercial mackerel fishery, significantly reduce the allowed catch of herring and introduce recreational limits. Our consistent work at advisory tables has been instrumental in securing catch limits and rebuilding plans.
- For British Columbia’s Chinook salmon, ongoing work has contributed to reduced exploitation, identification of a number of at-risk populations and development of initial recovery objectives for at-risk populations.
- Over the past five years, our work has led to significant improvements in the management of skate and shark, including Canada adopting a “fins naturally attached” policy for all sharks landed, bycatch limits on endangered skates, a ban on retaining the endangered North Atlantic short fin mako shark domestically and the subsequent international Atlantic-wide ban championed by Canada with our support, and the first international quotas ever adopted for migratory sharks with a management plan for Atlantic blue sharks.
- Our work to test alternative, low-impact gear to catch swordfish with no bycatch of endangered sharks and sea turtles has been a success and is also allowing a century old harpoon fleet to adapt to changing ocean conditions.
- SeaChoice’s work as a member of the non-governmental Tuna Forum continues to move regulations ahead at regional fisheries management organizations for better management of industrial tuna fishing in the Atlantic and Pacific.

Photo: Mackenzie Sapler

The SeaChoice program is a partnership among the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecology Action Centre and Living Oceans Society.

SeaChoice is grateful for the support the Packard Foundation has provided.

To learn more about SeaChoice, please visit SeaChoice.org

Contact us at info@SeaChoice.org

An underwater photograph showing a school of fish swimming over a dense bed of yellowish-brown seaweed. The lighting is dim, creating a serene and naturalistic atmosphere.A white logo consisting of a stylized fish silhouette above two wavy lines representing water.

SeaChoice.org
for healthy oceans

Photo: Tavish Campbell

