

Sustainable seafood options grow

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What's happening?

In 2015, Ocean Wise (<http://www.ocean.org/seafood>) began conducting assessments of small-scale Canadian fisheries to promote local sustainable seafood options. To date, Nunavut arctic char, Clayoquot Sound gooseneck barnacles, Chedabucto Bay trap-caught shrimp, and British Columbia giant pacific octopus and sea cucumber have all been assessed and recommended as Ocean Wise. Previously Ocean Wise relied strictly on assessments done by others, including Seafood Watch, but this practice limited seafood options from small-scale Canadian fisheries.

Ocean Wise defines sustainable seafood as species that are caught or farmed in a way that ensures the long-term health of the stock as well as the larger marine ecosystem. Ocean Wise aims to educate and empower consumers to make informed seafood choices and works with seafood industry business partners (i.e., fisheries, suppliers, retailers, restaurants, etc.) to meet their commitments to sourcing and selling sustainable seafood. In turn, partners identify these options on their menus or in their display cases with the Ocean Wise symbol. Ocean Wise's classification system is based on two categories: Ocean Wise or Not Recommended. Species are updated or reclassified every 3–5 years with the latest scientific information, and these changes are communicated to Ocean Wise partners.



Photo: Ocean Wise

Why is it important?

Overfishing is one of the biggest threats facing the global oceans today. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that 90 percent of the world's fish stocks are fully fished or overfished.¹ In 2014, Canada reported that 34 percent of major fish stocks were considered either critical or cautious,² while many other commercially exploited stocks lack the scientific information needed to determine their health.

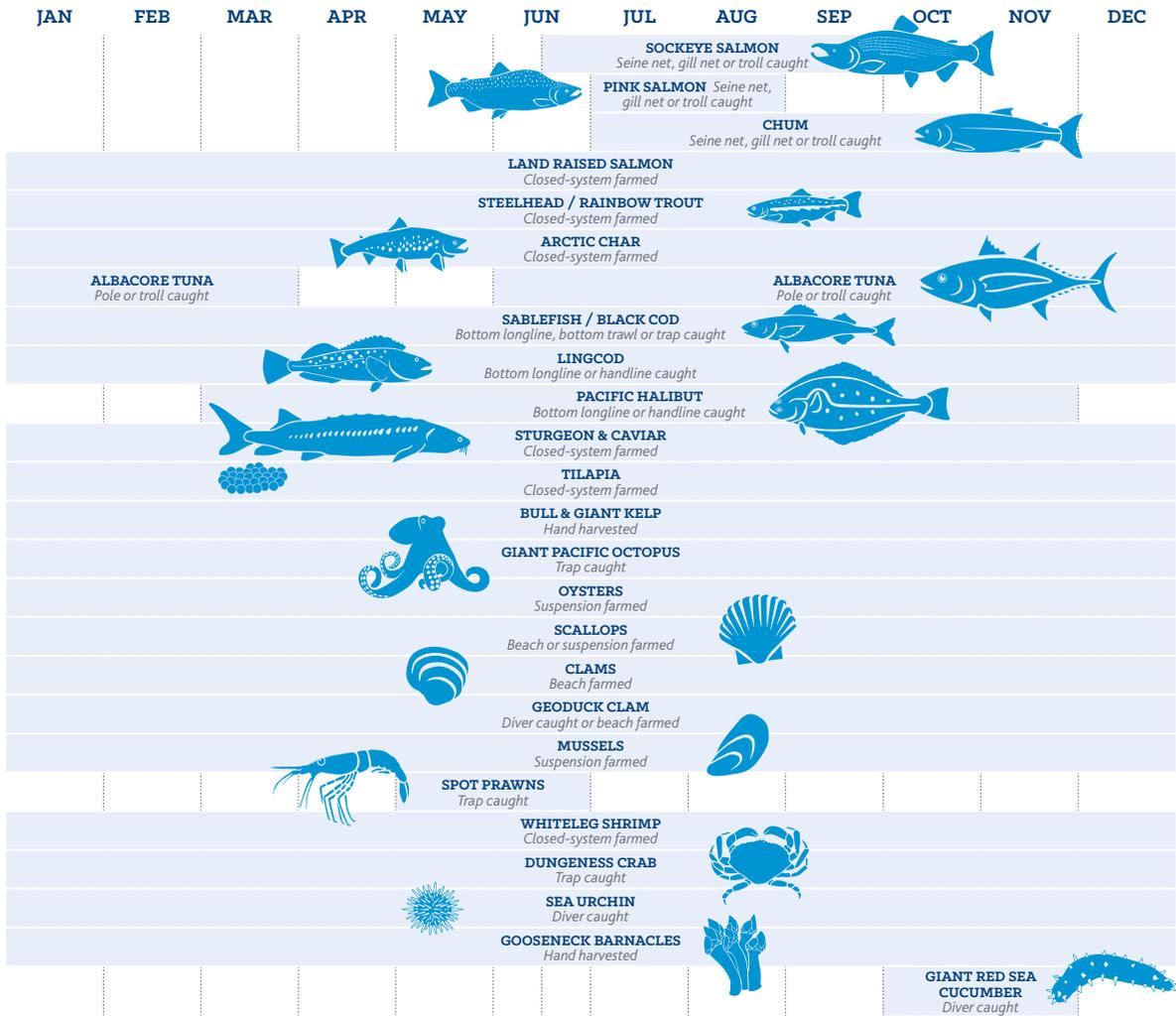
A rising awareness of overfishing in the late 1990s and early 2000s, saw an increase in sustainable seafood initiatives aimed at creating consumer awareness. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) was formed in London, UK in 1996 and is the largest global eco-certification body. MSC certified fisheries meet specific environmental and management standards as well as undergo independent audits for verification in order to carry the eco-label. A similar organization for aquaculture, the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), was established in 2010.

In North America, many aquariums and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as Seafood Watch, took the lead in incorporating consumer-facing seafood recommendation programs into their outreach and education strategies. According to market research done by the Vancouver Aquarium, the most recognized seafood recommendation organization in Canada is the Ocean Wise Seafood Program, which was established in 2005. Unlike the MSC, Ocean Wise is not focused on auditing and certifying fisheries, but rather works largely with consumers, restaurants, and retailers to source and consume products recommended as 'sustainable' based on the rigorous science-based assessments of Seafood Watch and MSC.³ The exception is the new work of Ocean Wise to assess small-scale Canadian fisheries based on Seafood Watch criteria. (For more information on rankings, certifications, and assessments see the Ocean Wise [Standards webpage](#)).⁴

Sustainable seafood choices are available throughout the year in B.C. (Figure 1).

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD

Overfishing is the biggest threat that our oceans face today. Your seafood choices make a difference. By supporting Ocean Wise you are making an ocean-friendly seafood choice and when you choose to buy local, you enjoy food that is better for you, the environment, and your community.



For a complete list of Ocean Wise recommended seafood, visit ocean.org/seafood

Figure 1. Annual calendar of sustainable seafood choices in B.C.

Recent study asked why B.C. consumers eat fish

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A recent study (2017) into what matters most to British Columbians when they buy seafood at the supermarket found that taste, smell, and appearance ranked highest among 10 choices (Table 1).¹

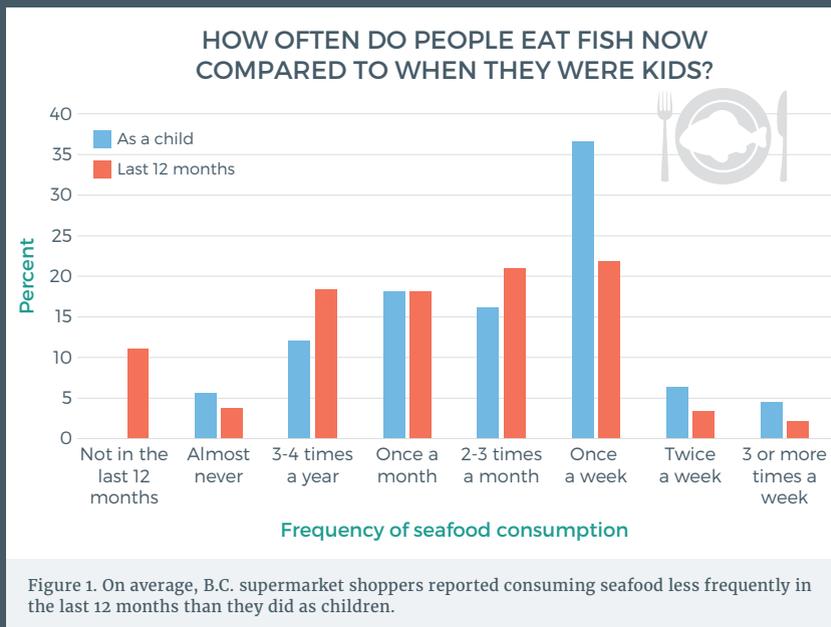
Table 1. Rank order of factors taken into consideration by supermarket shoppers when deciding to purchase seafood.

FACTORS	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO RANKED THIS #1
Taste, smell, and appearance	34
Farmed versus wild seafood	15.6
Price	12
Health benefits and nutritional value	12
Seafood is local	8
Sustainability of the species	4
Comfortable cooking or preparing seafood	3.4
Health risks such as allergies, mercury, etc.	2
Other	1
Cultural or religious reasons	0

Terms like “local” and “sustainable” were not defined for participants in the study, so people made these choices based on whatever those terms meant to them.

¹ Murray, G., Wolff, K., and M. Patterson. 2017. Why eat fish? Factors influencing seafood consumer choices in British Columbia, Canada. *Ocean & Coastal Management* 144: 16–22.

Another interesting finding was that shoppers, overall, seem to be consuming seafood less frequently than they did as children (Figure 1). 82 percent of respondents ate seafood at least once a month as a child, while only 67 percent ate seafood with that frequency in the last year. At the other end of the spectrum, 15 percent of consumers never or almost never (i.e., not in the last year) eat seafood, but only six percent of that same group did not eat seafood as a child.



Interpretation and generalization of this work is limited for a few reasons:

- Seafood was referred to generically and not by type or species;
- Key terms (e.g., farmed, sustainable, local) were not defined, so each consumer applied their own personal understanding;
- Consumers were surveyed only in grocery stores/supermarkets; and
- Recall of childhood seafood consumption is not perfect.

Is there a particular importance or connection to First Nations?

Within the sustainable seafood movement there is growing interest in ethical fisheries that give fair and equitable access to fisheries.⁵ The only gooseneck barnacle (*Pollicipes polymerus*) fishery in North America occurs off the west coast of Vancouver Island in Clayoquot Sound, near Tofino (Figure 2). This fishery is co-managed by the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations. At present, the fishery is very small with only four groups of 2–3 individuals collecting barnacles from

48 designated harvest rocks. All fishers are members of the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations and barnacles are gathered entirely by hand. In 2015, Ocean Wise conducted an assessment of this fishery and recommended it as a sustainable option.⁶ Hand gathering is highly selective and this harvest method does not cause damage to the surrounding habitat and only causes minimal bycatch of attached mussels and juvenile barnacles.

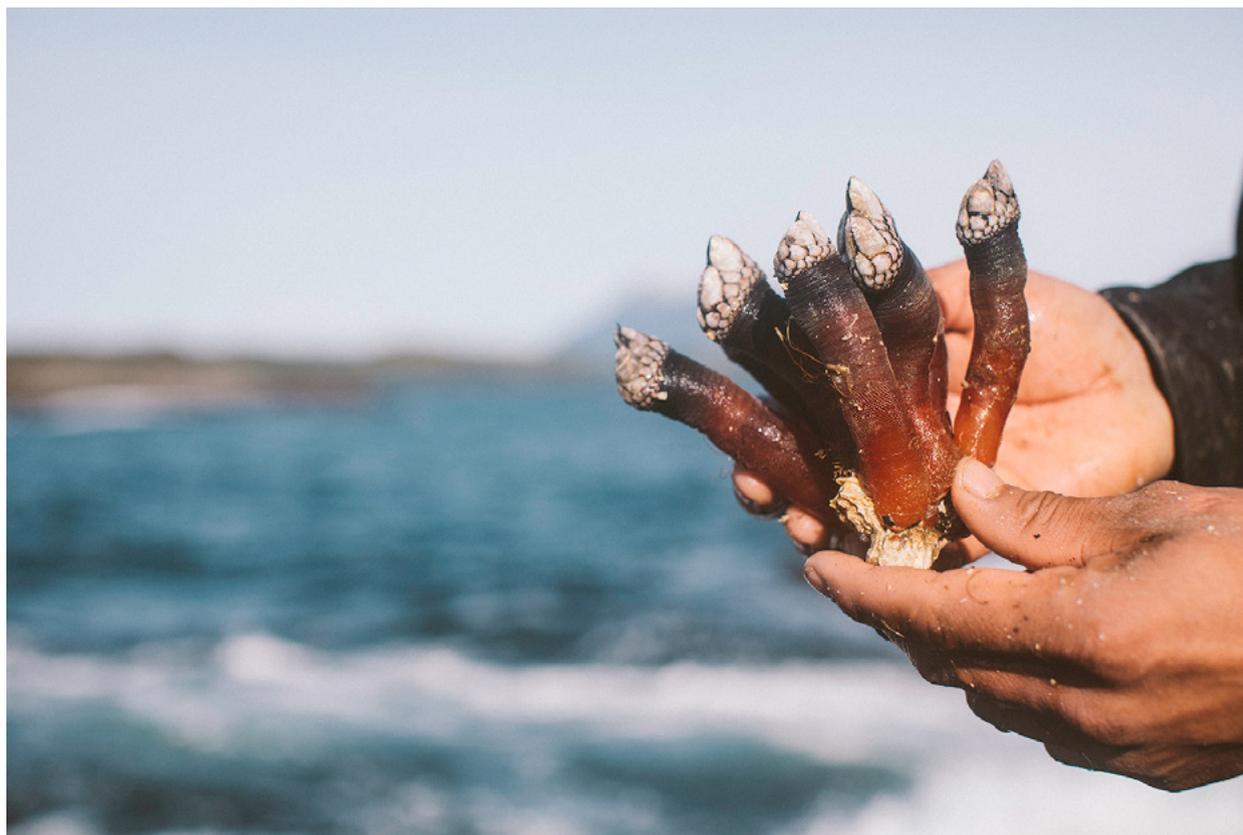


Figure 2. Hand-picked gooseneck barnacles. (Photo: Ha'oom, T'aaq-wiihak Fisheries)

What is the current status?

Since 2005 Ocean Wise has grown from just 16 local Vancouver restaurant partners to over 700 partners nationally, including suppliers, distributors, and retailers (Figure 3). As consumer demand for sustainable seafood grows, Ocean Wise has likewise expanded to include larger buyers (such as primary producers

and suppliers) on the supply chain who are likely to have a bigger market impact. Partners receive up to date sustainability recommendations, access to training and marketing materials, and also benefit from Ocean Wise promotion.

GROWTH OF THE OCEAN WISE SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD PROGRAM

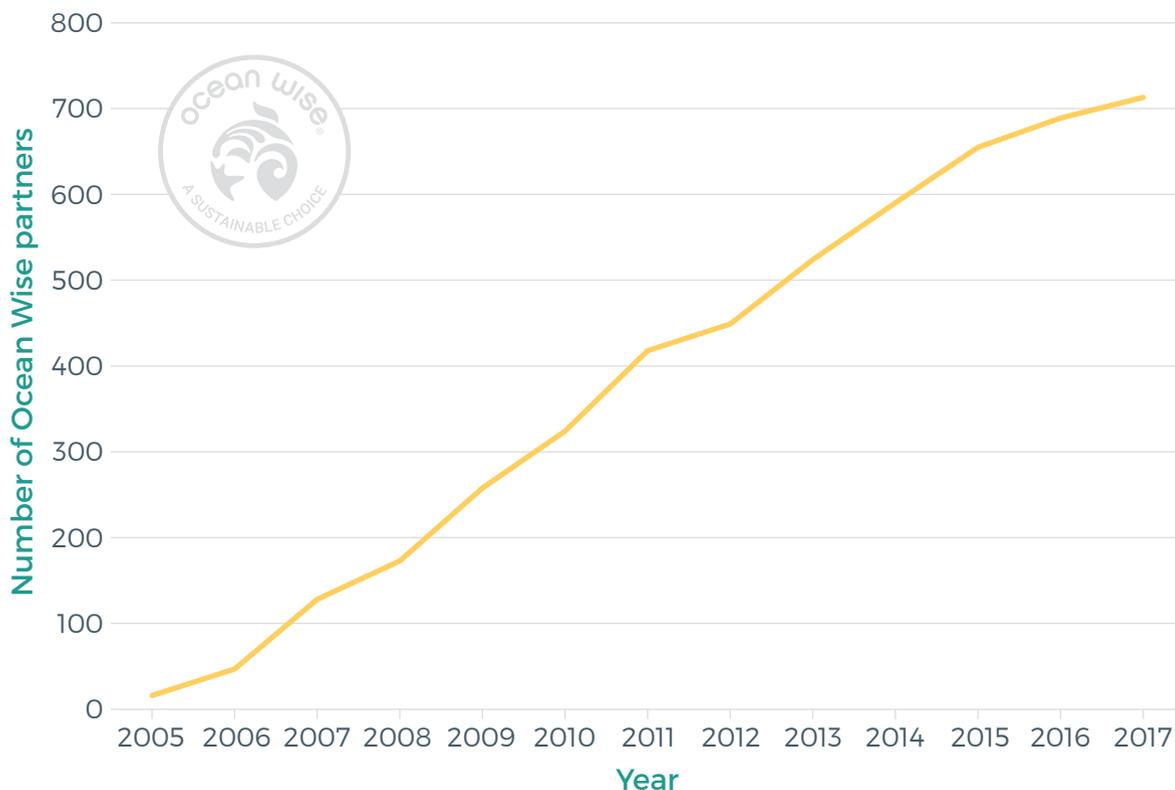


Figure 3. The Ocean Wise sustainable seafood program has shown steady growth since its inception in 2005.

What is being done?

In recognition of a need for better coordination between market-based sustainable seafood initiatives, 16 North American non-profit conservation organizations formed The Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions in 2008.⁷ A key output of this collaboration was a roadmap with six realistic steps that companies can take to develop and implement a sustainable seafood policy. The original version was updated in 2016 to reflect changes in the sustainable seafood landscape and now includes recommendations to go

beyond purely ecological standards and address social issues like human rights and labor exploitation.

As global interest in eco-labels has grown, the Global Seafood Ratings Alliance (GSRA) was formed to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and influence of seafood ratings organizations around the world. To date, 13 partners from 11 countries (including Ocean Wise as the only Canadian partner) have committed to developing common tools and coordinated action in order to amplify their collective impact.

What can you do?



Individual and Organization Actions:

- Next time you're at the grocery store or a restaurant be sure to ask questions about what species it is, how it was caught or farmed, and where it is from.
- Look for the Ocean Wise symbol when buying seafood to ensure you are making the best choice for our oceans.
- Aim to eat lower on the trophic level – choose smaller forage fish such as sardines and mackerel, or farmed shellfish like clams and mussels, over larger fish such as salmon and halibut.
- Join a Community Supported Fisheries (CSF) such as Skipper Otto to connect with and purchase from local fishermen in your area.



Government Actions and Policy:

- Legislate improved seafood labelling in Canada (e.g., <http://labelmyseafood.ca/>).
- Allocate more resources to enforce fishery regulations and conduct regular scientific stock assessments of commercially caught species.
- Create more marine protected areas (MPAs) to allow fish stocks to recover.
- Eliminate harmful fishing subsidies of industrial fisheries that lead to overfishing and promote fuel-inefficient technology.

Resources

Skipper Otto Community Supported Fishery (CSF)
<http://skipperotto.com/>

Ocean Wise
www.ocean.org/seafood

Seafood Watch
www.seafoodwatch.org

Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
www.msc.org

Ha'oom Nuu-Chan-Nulth Wild Seafood
<http://www.haoom.ca/>

Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)
<http://www.asc-aqua.org/>

Sea Choice
<http://www.seachoice.org/> and <http://labelmyseafood.ca/>

Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions
<http://solutionsforseafood.org/>

Global Seafood Ratings Alliance
<http://globalseafoodratings.org/>

Footnotes

¹ The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (FAO, 2016): <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5555e.pdf>

² Canada's 5th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/ca/ca-nr-05-en.pdf>

³ <http://seafood.ocean.org/seafood-guide/how-we-grade/>

⁴ Ocean Wise Standards webpage: <http://seafood.ocean.org/seafood-guide/how-we-grade/>

⁵ McClenachan, L., Dissanayake, S. T. M. and X. Chen. 2016. Fair trade fish: consumer support for broader seafood sustainability. *Fish and Fisheries*, 17: 825–838. doi:10.1111/faf.12148

⁶ <http://www.oceanwise.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Barnacle-Gooseneck-Leaf-British-Columbia.pdf>

⁷ <http://solutionsforseafood.org/resources/common-vision/>

⁸ <http://globalseafoodratings.org/>