



Frequently Asked Questions

What exactly is sustainable seafood?

Sustainable seafood means fish, molluscs or crustaceans caught or farmed in ways that are not harmful to wild populations or to the environment they live in. In fisheries, it means stocks are not overfished and their exploitation is not damaging the ecosystems. In other words we only take what nature offers us on a sustainable basis. It is also very important for the long-term prosperity and viability of fishery-dependent industries and communities, both in Europe and worldwide.

What can I do?

Be an active and responsible consumer, find out more about your fish from wherever you buy it. Ask your fishmonger, waiter or supermarket what the origin is of the seafood on offer, whether the species is overfished and how it was fished or produced. They may explain for which species there are certain harvesting seasons in place to ensure the fish have had a chance to reproduce, or how, for others, you should avoid eating juveniles as they are part of the future of the stocks.

Think also about making new choices – at the moment a majority of consumption is driven by just a few species, putting these stocks under serious pressure. Governments and rules can play a role, but with your choices you can influence the market. For instance by favouring sustainable producers you can send a signal to other operators. You hold the key to change.

How can I make the right seafood choices?

By being an active consumer and informing yourself on the different options that are available, you can make the right choices. Look for information in magazines, in leaflets, and on the web. Check the packaging on your seafood products, to see if and by whom it is certified and what this really means. Talk with your fish monger who is often an expert, and think about changing some of your preferences. There are many sustainable options available which do not damage the environment and are often cheaper than other alternatives. Sustainable choices can also be good for your taste buds: discover lesser known species, rediscover the fish our grandparents used to cook, be creative in your kitchen.

Will sustainability make my fish more expensive?

Many sustainably produced but lesser known species are actually cheaper. For some popular species your choice for sustainable products might be more expensive, but the extra money you spend goes toward conserving the stocks and our ecosystems, and helps to provide quality jobs to people all over Europe and beyond. In the end the recovery of stocks will lead to more fish in the sea meaning higher catch potential, lower costs for the fishermen and ultimately lower prices for the consumer.

What should I look for on a label?

There are many different types of labels which will provide you with information on where and how your seafood was produced, such as whether it was from aquaculture or captured fisheries and what type of fishing gear was used.

What is overfishing and should I be concerned if a stock is overfished?

Simply put, overfishing means taking too much fish from our seas. Renewable resources only stay renewable (or sustainable) if we respect their reproductive rhythm and capacity to recover. We should all care that individual species are overfished, because ecosystems are finely balanced and when we tip the scales too far in one direction, the impact can be felt by many other sea creatures. It is plausible for the problem to get so out of control that whole species could be threatened. Allowing stocks to recover and reproduce will mean going from fishing desperately on smaller fish stocks to fishing rationally on more abundant ones.

Isn't it all about the way we fish?

The way we fish affects the sustainability of seafood but so does the way we consume it. The work of European governments and institutions on improving what and how we catch our fish and reducing the associated environmental impact continues to be important. Yet the responsibility is as much on the rest of the supply chain to adapt their behaviour to promote sustainability. Any industry efforts to improve should be matched by equal engagement and participation from consumers. Sustainability is a responsibility shared between all of us.

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Eat, Buy and Sell Sustainable Fish



What is discarding?

Discarding means throwing, often already dead, fish back into the sea after they have been caught. Fishermen have different reasons for discarding, one of which being the difficulty to select the exact fish you want to take out of the sea, especially when fishing for different species at the same time. Discarding has negative effects on the health of stocks. Recognising the detrimental effect of discarding, the EU will now ban the practice, and through the new Common Fisheries Policy will support fishermen who improve the selectivity of their fishing gear and help the market make the best use of all fish caught.

Is sustainability good for business?

Sustainability, particularly when it involves certification, adds value to any product as it reassures consumers that what they are buying respects the environment and the health of fish stocks. It is something that will help your product, not harm it. Sustainability normally comes with better quality. It opens new markets and increase outlets. It also helps secure the future of your business by ensuring that the fish you sell will still be available, in high quantities, for years to come.

Is seafood from aquaculture sustainable?

Aquaculture can reduce fishing pressure on wild stocks by satisfying some of the demand for certain species. The EU leads the way in developing new species, feeding products, and breeding techniques. As with any other industry, aquaculture can be damaging when not responsibly managed, but the European rules aim to ensure that high quality, safe, sustainable seafood is produced by our fish farms.

The EU has strong rules to ensure sustainability of aquaculture products, to prevent damage to ecosystems and to produce seafood which adheres to the highest possible environmental, animal welfare, and health standards. These standards can result in higher costs, and can lead to EU fish farmers facing difficulties when competing with imports. However the EU is convinced that sustainable aquaculture is part of the solution.

What has this got to do with the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)?

The Common Fisheries Policy is the European set of rules on fisheries and aquaculture. The CFP establishes the policy for all those who fish, farm, or trade seafood in the EU. To ensure sustainability it determines for instance how much fish fishermen can catch, and how, when, and where they do so. It ensures that the rules are respected and enforced, for example to stop illegal fishing which places huge strain on those who fish sustainably. It contributes to increased transparency and competitiveness, provides a framework as to how the market should operate, and supports the sector to adapt and work together.

The CFP is vital in guiding European fishing towards sustainability and also sends a strong message of leadership to our partners abroad. It is crucial in an increasingly inter-dependent world that we all play our role in securing the future for the fish, the fishermen and the fish consumption of tomorrow. Through the CFP, and with the help of its industry and citizens, the EU seeks to reinforce its position as a world leader in fisheries management and aquaculture standards.

Is the European Union working alone on seafood sustainability?

The European Union works closely with many organisations to promote sustainable fishing. The EU's policy uses the best available scientific advice from independent bodies such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). The EU invites all interested parties to participate when developing new laws. From fishermen's organisations to NGOs, national authorities and the European Parliament to stakeholders, the EU seeks to improve the environmental, economic and social sustainability of the industry and ensure that fish, and the associated jobs and opportunities, have a secure future. The Inseparable campaign will build on the momentum of the commitments of these players and the many and varied initiatives of individual citizens and chefs.

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