



The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) has prepared the following policy guidance to inform retailers of the criteria that MCS consider represent environmentally responsible practice when developing a fish procurement policy.

Policy

A responsible fish retailer will have a detailed policy document which clearly outlines their sourcing policies with respect to both wild-capture and farmed fish. This policy should be available to the general public via a website, for example, or on request.

Criteria for a Sustainable Fish Sourcing Policy

A responsible fish retailer should source all wild-capture and farmed fish from sustainably and responsibly managed sources that comply with the following criteria:

Wild-caught Species

Species

The sale of species intrinsically vulnerable to exploitation, or dependent upon habitats particularly vulnerable to damage by fishing, or caught using fishing methods particularly damaging to other marine species or from over-fished stocks should be avoided.

MCS has identified a list of *Fish to Avoid*, that can be accessed via our website www.fishonline.org, which includes, but is not limited to:

- All deep-water species.
- All sharks and skates.
- Wild-caught Atlantic salmon.
- Seabass trawled in the wild.
- Wild-caught sturgeon.
- Warm-water prawns trawled in the wild.

We recommend that retailers regularly access Fishonline to review the Fish to Avoid list as listings change to reflect current scientific advice. See <http://www.fishonline.org/advice/avoid/>

Capture or Fishing Area/Stock

- Fish from FAO Fishing Areas or stocks within these areas must be scientifically assessed as being exploited within sustainable limits. Stock is the term given to a group of individuals in a species occupying a well-defined spatial range independent of other stocks of the same species and forming the basis of a distinct fishery defined in terms of season and area. Where information of the stock is data deficient, there must be clear evidence that the stock is stable and not showing any indications of overfishing.
- In the North East Atlantic (FAO Area 27) sustainable limits are those defined by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES, see www.ices.de) where biomass is above precautionary level (Bpa) and fishing mortality below precautionary level (Fpa) or in regard to other FAO Areas similar levels as defined by other appropriate scientific bodies.
- Sourcing from stocks where biomass is below Bpa (or similar) and fishing mortality above Fpa (or similar) indicating that the stock is at risk of reduced reproductive capacity and/or of being harvested unsustainably should be avoided.

Capture or Fishing Method

Fishing methods used should be the most selective available.

Favoured fishing methods include:

- Handline or rod and line
- Pole and line or troll (Pole and line fisheries for tuna must also be certified as Dolphin-friendly by the Earth Island Institute. See www.dolphinsafe.com for more information)
- Potting or creeling
- Traps
- Diver-caught
- Hand-gathered, hand raked
- Sustainable farming methods for shellfish such as rope-grown

Methods of fishing/fisheries to be avoided include:

- High Seas drift net
- Use of dynamite and cyanide
- Bottom trawling (including beam trawling and dredging) in sensitive environments such as on or around seamounts

Where *trawl nets* are used mesh sizes should be appropriate to the size at which the target species matures. The insertion of separator or square-mesh panels, grids, or other available technology should also be used to increase the selectivity of the fishery and reduce bycatch and discard rates to an absolute minimum.

Where *pelagic or bottom set nets* are used the fishery must be certified as Dolphin-friendly or Safe by independent certifiers such as the Earth Island Institute or as a minimum be able to demonstrate a commitment to minimising bycatch of marine mammals and birds by adoption of appropriate measures such as use of acoustic devices or pingers; observer monitoring; and restrictions on soak times for example.

Long-line fisheries must be able to demonstrate a commitment to minimising bycatch by adoption of appropriate seabird deterrent or Turtle Excluding Devices. Long-line fisheries for tuna must also be certified as Dolphin-friendly by the Earth Island Institute. See www.dolphinsafetuna.com for more information.

Please refer to http://www.fishonline.org/caught_at_sea/methods/ to access MCS Fishing Methods League Table.

Breeding Season and fish size

MCS discourages the capture of fish just prior to or during their breeding season. Suppliers should be able to demonstrate knowledge of when target species breed in relation to when they are captured. Please refer to http://www.fishonline.org/buying_eating/purchasing_guide.php for more information. MCS strongly opposes the purchase of fish below the minimum size at which it reproduces. It should be noted that this size is not necessarily reflected in the legal Minimum Landing Size imposed by some management plans. MCS also discourages the purchase for sale of fish eggs (caviar or roe) or crustacean eggs (coral) and berried (egg-bearing) lobster or crab, and is strongly opposed to the practice of 'scrubbing' – the deliberate removal of eggs from berried lobster. These restrictions apply to wild-caught species only.

Codes of Practice

Where sourcing is not from certified fisheries, suppliers should follow specific Codes of Practice to increase environmental sustainability and conserve marine resources which includes but are not limited to the following practices:

- Wild caught fish should be sourced from stocks managed responsibly in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing and harvested at sustainable levels which do not pose a risk to the reproductive capacity of the stock
- Sourcing from fisheries where problems with Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing are known should be avoided
- Regular monitoring of fishing gear especially fixed gears such as set nets and long-lines
- Restricted towing and/or fishing times
- Use of sustainable fishing methods to reduce impact of fishing on marine habitat and non-target species
- Participation in national (UK) lobster V-notching (see Shellfish below) or other voluntary programmes to increase sustainability
- Use of methods to minimise entanglement or interactions with marine wildlife e.g. shortened buoy ropes and circle-hooks to reduce turtle entanglement and bycatch, avoidance of marine mammal 'hotspots', setting lines at night to avoid seabird entanglement (see www.birdlife.net/seabirds for more information) etc
- Use of gear, technology and practices to increase sustainability of target catch e.g. larger mesh sizes, landing sizes, cessation of fishing during breeding season, prohibition on landing 'berried' or immature animals etc
- Adoption of procedures to release by-catch and/or entangled marine life
- Participation in marine conservation reporting/identity schemes

In complying with national and international marine pollution regulations suppliers should develop and adhere to a Code of Practice for responsibly disposing of rubbish – domestic/galley waste e.g. food waste, glass etc. and fishing waste e.g. monofilament line, rope, netting, bait boxes, fish boxes etc.

Labelling & encouraging diversification

All fish offered for sale should be clearly labelled indicating Method of Production i.e. whether farmed or caught at sea and Area of Capture for wild-caught fish and the Common Name of the species (the scientific name is optional but its inclusion would reduce confusion where a number or differing common names are applicable) in accordance with the Fish Labelling Regulations 2003. In addition, MCS encourages the responsible retailer to provide information on the Stock (defined above) from which the fish is derived e.g. North Sea and Method of Capture e.g. line-caught. Thus allowing consumers to make more informed choices when buying seafood.

MCS publishes a list of *Fish to Eat* and encourages retailers to sell a wide range of fish including lesser-known species from healthy less exploited stocks such as gurnard, and dab to create more diversification in tastes and so relieve pressure on over-fished species such as cod and plaice. See <http://www.fishonline.org/advice/eat/>. Customers should be encouraged to try different species by the provision of in-store recipe cards, tastings and promotion of a range of species reflecting the fluctuating and seasonal nature of supply for example.

Please see www.fishonline.org or the MCS Pocket Good Fish Guide for current complete listings.

Farmed Species

For a comprehensive guidelines on what MCS regard to be best practice for finfish aquaculture please refer to the Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fish Farming available at: <http://www.fishonline.org/downloads/SustainableAquaMay07web.pdf>
Below is a summary of that document:

Finfish

Siting

MCS believes that many of the concerns associated with fish farming in open sea systems (such as organic waste accumulation, degraded water quality, sea lice and wild fish interactions, predator interaction and benthic biodiversity impacts), can be minimised by selecting appropriate siting areas for farms, within a wider Marine Spatial Planning framework.

Feed

MCS believes that fish feed should be manufactured from a combination of environmentally sustainable marine and non-marine raw materials from independently certified sustainable sources, and from fish processing trimmings. Feed use should also be optimised to ensure wastage is minimised whilst food conversion ratios are maximised.

Inputs into the marine environment - minimisation and remediation

MCS believes that alternative and continuous methods of reducing the environmental impact of farm generated marine pollutants should be explored.

MCS believes that no toxic antifoulant treatments should be used on marine fish farms.

MCS would like to see continued research and commercial trials undertaken on alternative sea lice control measures, and research undertaken on the local effects of current sea lice treatments on marine life.

Minimisation of wider ecosystem effects.

Escapes

MCS believes that fish farmers have a responsibility to ensure the nets and pens they use are of the best design, are properly secured, anchored, maintained and located to ensure all fish are contained even in the most adverse weather conditions.

Predators

MCS does not advocate the use of lethal measures for predator control and advises all fish farmers to employ non-lethal predator deterrent and control measures.

Optimal fish welfare and environmental management.

MCS believes that high standards of welfare should be maintained throughout the farming, harvesting and slaughter process.

MCS believes that an effective, independently audited environmental management system should be in place.

Continuous improvement and research

MCS believes that continued industry participation in research projects, and active involvement in finding innovative ways to achieve best practice is essential.

Organic

MCS supports the organic production of farmed finfish and shellfish species as certified by the Soil Association. MCS also supports standards adopted by other certification bodies provided that the standards specified and achieved are comparable to or higher than those prescribed by the Soil Association. Organic production ensures that higher environmental standards are set and maintained during the farming process and provide a recognisable labelling scheme for the consumer.

Shellfish

MCS supports the sustainable harvest of shellfish such as hand-gathering of rope grown mussels, hand-gathering of cultured oysters and sustainable harvest of wild caught species such as the Marine Stewardship Council certified Burry Inlet cockles. MCS does not support any mechanical harvesting method that has adverse effects on sensitive marine habitats and species such as suction dredging. However, some forms of dredging can be permitted in areas that have been re-seeded with molluscs (either as the sole method of production or to enhance natural fisheries), provided this only occurs in non-sensitive areas and is known to have a minimal impact on the environment.

Lobster ranching is practiced in some areas, this involves breeding lobsters in captivity ('berried' or egg-bearing lobsters may also be donated to the scheme) and releasing them into the wild for on growing and subsequent recapture, this practice, as well as the practice of V-notching (the removal of a small v-shaped piece of tail segment of a berried lobster that is then returned to the sea. The notch takes about 2 years to disappear. Byelaws make it an offence to be in possession of a notched lobster) mature female lobsters both contribute to the effective management and conservation of the species

Prawns/Shrimp

Farmed prawn account for 1/3 of the global consumption. Tiger prawn (*Penaeus monodon*) is the most commonly farmed species in south-east Asia and 99% of production comes from developing countries. Historically mangrove forests have been destroyed to create ponds for prawn aquaculture, with an estimated 38% of mangroves lost to prawn farming. Farms are also still dependant on a percentage of fry and broodstock trawled from the wild for the production of larvae, a practice associated with high by-catch of other marine species. It is essential therefore to ensure that all farmed prawns are sourced from sustainably managed farms that comply with standards for mangrove protection and conservation and address issues of habitat destruction, by-catch from wild capture, and chemical usage. By sourcing prawns from organically certified farms you can ensure that these standards have been met.

Labelling & Instore Customer Information

All farmed fish offered for sale should be labelled as such and include country of origin in accordance with Fish Labelling Regulations 2003. Those fish produced by farms that are certified as Organic should also be clearly labelled. Supermarkets should also provide point of sale information including basic information on their farmed fish buying policy.

Contact details:

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Registered Charity no: 1004005

MCS - the UK charity caring for our seas, shores and wildlife