

## Enjoying Seafood Sustainably

By Christina Reed | Fri Feb 4, 2011 03:52 PM ET



There's never been a better time to eat seafood. And our growing population is doing just that. [According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization](#), a record number of humans are now relying on seafood more as a significant source of protein than we ever have in the past.

"The contribution of fish to global diets has reached a record of 17.1 kg per person on average, supplying over three billion people with at least 15 percent of their average animal protein intake," write the authors of the FAO's [State of the World's Fisheries and Aquaculture report](#), published during [this week's meeting](#) to discuss whether the implementation of a Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries has shown results. And recent research out of the University of British Columbia estimates that the [FAO missed accounting for nearly 937,000 tonnes of Arctic fisheries catches](#) between 1950 to 2006, due to under-reporting.

That so many people are eating seafood is good news for the fisheries and aquaculture industries, which, according to the report figures, support the livelihoods of an estimated 540 million people, or eight percent of the world population.

But if you thought I was going to say it's bad news for the fish, let's reel in the line a little bit and see what bites.

Regional and national regulations that have been put into effect in recent years seem to have helped stabilize a situation that for decades was spinning out of control. "The percentage of over-exploitation needs to go down although at least we seem to be reaching a plateau," said senior FAO fisheries expert Richard Grainger in a press release.

The FAO Code of Conduct, basically encourages countries to better enforce regulations currently in place and implement them in cases where none now exist. Individual fishing quotas and an integrated vessel monitoring system are touted as examples that have been shown to work, but need improvement. One of the biggest problems is with illegal catches. Countries are currently debating whether an international identifying number for each vessel would help to keep track of that vessel's history – regardless of its owner or the flag it flies.

On a global scale the international cooperation and collaboration that still needs to happen seems mired in diplomatic [rules for consensus](#); lack of funding for marine science; and policy that tends to separate fisheries science from marine environmental studies.

So if a fish spawns in your neighbor's waters but you catch all the females – you're both in a lose-lose situation. Establishing no-take marine protected areas, and ones that aren't just off-limits to drilling, needs to be backed with nearby regulations on catch limits and, ideally, slot sizes, which allow the bigger females to continue reproducing and the smaller ones time to grow big.



### Giant Tuna Catch: Let the Big Ones Get Away?

Still, the good news is – it's going to get better. At the local level, many fishing industries at their own initiative have already switched to sustainable methods of catch. And though fish farms still remain highly contentious, they are the wave of the future and many aquacultures, such as in Scotland and Nova Scotia are working to manage their farms in ways that minimize harm to local and endemic wild species.

As a result, consumers have more access to sustainable seafood choices now than any of us have ever had in our lifetimes. That doesn't mean we should go off and have a red-listed dinner party like Roger Berkowitz, founder and CEO of Legal Sea Foods [did last week](#).

Imported shrimp; bluefin tuna; Chilean Seabass; Orange Roughy; Monkfish; anything caught from a trawl off the bottom of the seafloor, or in a gillnet, or from a longline; and of course sharks – should still be avoided.



### Oysters Disappearing Worldwide



### Millions of Sea Turtles Captured, Killed by Fisheries

That leaves a lot of options on the table. Canadian and U.S troll or pole caught Albacore, Bigeye, Yellowfin, and Skipjack tuna for example are fisheries that are doing much better in recent years under the tighter regulations that are now in place. The nuances can be difficult to keep track of, but the [handy seafood cards](#) that aquariums often distribute are a good place to start.

"Consumers can carry wallet cards to help guide their seafood decision-making, but it is always good to ask more questions, too, such as, where did the fish come from, what type of gear was used," Nancy Civetta with the New England Fisheries Campaigns told Discovery News.

"Mr. Berkowitz's dinner was an interesting, if distasteful, way of generating a debate about the future of fish and fishermen in New England," added Peter Baker, New England Fisheries Campaign manager for Pew Environment Group in a statement to Discovery News.

In comparison, the annual Seafood Summit, which met in Vancouver this week and is organized by the [Seafood Choices Alliance](#), specifically brings industry, fishermen, and environmental activists together in an effort to improve the sustainability of the resource so many of us consume.

This year's seafood champions, honored for their leadership in "promoting environmentally responsible seafood," are:

- Robert Clark, Executive Chef of [C Restaurant](#) and Harry Kambolis, CEO, of [Kambolis Group](#) in Vancouver, Canada
- Phil Gibson, Seafood Group Director, of Safeway Inc. in California, U.S.

- Dune Lankard, Founder and Chairman, of [Eyak Preservation Council](#) in Alaska, U.S.
- Steve Phillips, President and CEO, of [Phillips Foods](#) and Seafood Restaurant in Maryland, U.S.
- Olivier Roellinger, Vice President, of [Relais and Châteaux in Paris](#), France
- Peter Weeden, Chef, of [Paternoster Chop House](#) in London, U.K.
- [Falmouth Fishselling Co.](#) in Cornwall, U.K.
- [Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association](#) in Olympia, Washington, U.S.

Florida red snapper commercial fisherman David Krebs told Discovery News that fisheries in the United States have improved in ways that the public can be proud of, but because fish swim a global ocean the assessments of their stocks can cause consumer confusion. "Some regional fisheries are healthy while their international cousins are not. This causes the fish to still be red listed even though a good domestic plan is in place," Krebs said.

"We share a similar fate with the Gulf of Mexico red snapper, which is doing very well under the current IFQ [Individual Fishing Quota] system. I think the statement that all U.S. fisheries are sound may be a little premature, since we have a lot of species that still don't have an annual catch limit assigned to them," he added. "I agree that we are getting closer to matching the harvest to the sustainability in our country. We must continue to encourage our fishermen along with our foreign neighbors around the world to continue to develop harvest methods that reduce unintended by-catch and stay within the established catch limits."

For consumers, that boils down to eating locally and legally caught species and asking questions. The more you know about the seafood on your plate the more comfortable you can feel about chowing down.

*IMAGE: Scallops with mango and wild rice in butter sauce. Scallops that are farmed "off-bottom" are the best choice in terms of both health and environmental impact. Photo by Christina Reed.*

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