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**Food**

# Food: Something's fishy

Loblaws and others are promising to sell only certified fish — but does that really mean anything?  
 By Matthew McClearn



You mightn't think a fish classified as a "slimehead" would prove appetizing, yet orange roughy's mild flavour makes it a popular dish baked, broiled or fried. Shoppers seeking it at Loblaw supermarkets this summer, though, might have been sorely disappointed: where the deep-sea fish is normally displayed, they may have encountered an empty stainless steel tray — with a note inside suggesting they consider tilapia or sole instead. The problem is that bottom trawling has devastated the species — certain

Australian stocks, harvested only since the 1990s, have dwindled by an estimated 90%. To protect the pittance that remains, Loblaw has stopped selling it.

The empty trays are perhaps the most visible evidence of a sea change underway behind the scenes at Canada's largest grocer and fishmonger. Last year, Loblaw promised that all seafood sold on its shelves — canned, frozen, fresh, wild and farmed — will come from sustainable sources by the end of 2013. That includes not only in-house brands like President's Choice, but also national brands like High Liner. Implications extend well beyond the obvious: half of Loblaw's product categories, including pet food, fertilizer and dairy products, contain seafood ingredients. And the policy will apply at all its banners coast to coast, among them Loblaws, Zehrs, Atlantic Superstore and Provigo. "We're very concerned that seafood is in dramatic shortage," says Paul Uys, Loblaw's vice-president of sustainable seafood. "Certain species, such as orange roughy and Chilean sea bass, are increasingly difficult to come by — and prices are obviously increasing."

Loblaw's definition of sustainability owes much to its partner, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). One of the oldest international eco-certifications, MSC offers a widely recognized blue check mark. Its promise: any seafood bearing its logo has not been overfished, nor harvested in ways that harm ocean ecosystems. Already popular in Europe and gaining steam in the U.S., the MSC is taking the world by storm — and with other Canadian retailers including Metro, Sobeys, and Walmart also seeking certified products, it's coming to a supermarket near you.

A wide variety of logos, such as those for fad diets like Atkins and South Beach, have been shown to increase food sales. Yet arguments over credibility inevitably surface, and the MSC's check mark is no exception. Its certification of B.C. sockeye salmon this summer is just the latest in a series of controversial decisions. Several long-term MSC supporters now worry that the organization has become corrupted by commercial interests and may only accelerate the depletion of the world's oceans. "This was something that was created as a bridge between conservation and supplying people and markets in a responsible

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