



SEAFOOD SUSTAINABILITY

SUZANNE MEDWAY

Australia's ocean treasures are at risk from land-based pollution, habitat damage, marine pests, oil and gas developments, climate change and fishing.

Did you know that at last count there were 15 Australian fish species considered overfished in commonwealth waters, with some of the fish targeted in state waters also under pressure? To add to this pressure, the demand for seafood is increasing. So how can we best address the need for our oceans to be used sustainably for fishing while continuing to enjoy a high-quality seafood supply?

Sustainable seafood

Sustainable seafood is sourced within the natural limits of our oceans with minimal damage to ocean life and habitats. However, that measure is too broad if we want to look at the sustainability of individual fisheries and the species they target.

While Australia has a vast fishing area (Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone is about 16 million square kilometres), the nature of the marine environment means that its fish stocks are nowhere

near as large as those in the more nutrient-rich Atlantic waters. So there is a real need to sustainably manage this limited natural resource.

Australia has a vast coastline, and many of our major fisheries are in remote coastal locations.

The commercial fishing industry provides a valuable source of employment and income in many rural communities.

The Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ) is the world's third largest in the world, covering nearly nine million square kilometres.

The AFZ extends 200 nautical miles from the Australian coastline including our external territories, such as Christmas Island in the tropical Indian Ocean, and Heard and McDonald Islands in the Subantarctic.

Overfishing has been a characteristic of the Australian fishing industry for

decades, but now state governments, including New South Wales and Queensland, are 'buying back' commercial fishing licences in order to reduce catch effort.

We're at a point in time where there simply isn't enough fish in the sea. With over three-quarters of our global fish stocks either overexploited or fished right up to their limit, there are only a few fisheries that will be able to serve up the planet's increasing demand for seafood.

Above: Mussels - though originally caught wild along the southern coasts of Australia, commercial stocks were damaged by over-exploitation and mussels sold today are all farmed. The commercial species in Australia is blue mussel, while green mussels are imported from New Zealand. Import regulations mean that green mussels have been frozen and will be dead, while local mussels are sold live and whole in the shell. They are available year round from aquaculture in NSW, VIC, SA, Southern WA and Tasmania.

Aquaculture, or farming seafood, is often held up as the solution to the global fishing crisis.

However, with a continued requirement for wild-caught fish to feed fish grown in captivity, there is still a cap on how much farmed produce can provide.

There have been over 6,000 marine species recorded in Australian waters and our isolation has produced many which are endemic to Australia.

Australia is renowned worldwide for its unpolluted waters and good fisheries management regimes that ensure the highest quality, sustainable seafood.

Commercial fishing is Australia's fifth largest food production industry. It is worth more than \$2 billion to our economy every year. Australia has a number of high-value fisheries such as rock lobster, tuna, abalone, Patagonian toothfish and a variety of prawn fisheries, which are highly sought after and generate valuable export dollars from a variety of overseas markets.

Put simply, 'sustainable seafood' is fish or shellfish that reaches our plates with minimal impact upon fish populations or the wider marine environment.

It's not just the numbers of fish left in the ocean that matters, it's the way in which the fish are caught, the impact on the seafloor, other marine wildlife and how fishing affects the healthy and natural functioning of marine ecosystems.

The state of Australian fisheries

Less than one percent of Australia's marine environment is fully protected from fishing and mining. Many of Australia's commercially caught fish are fully or overexploited, and more marine species become threatened every year. Important habitats such as coral reefs and inshore areas are also under pressure because of the effects of land clearing, climate change and irresponsible coastal development.

How can you help – sustainable seafood

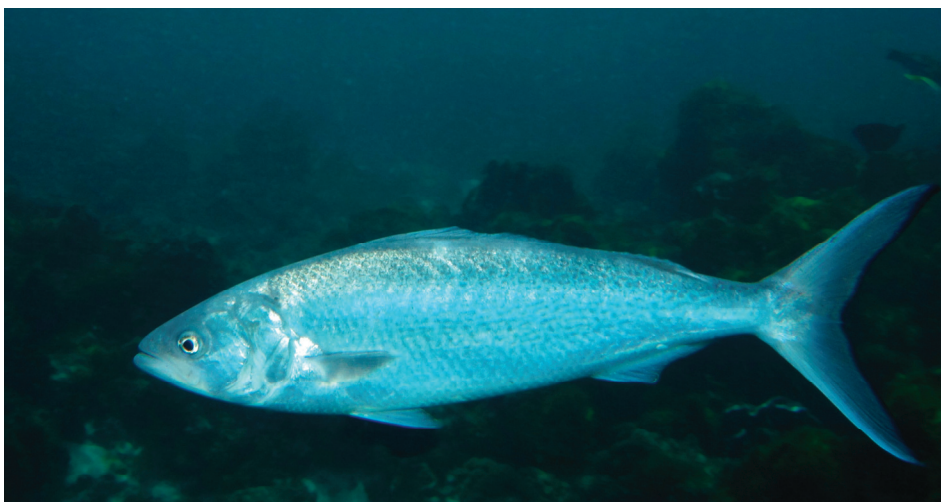
Ask before you buy – start a sustainable seafood conversation. Ask questions of fishmongers, supermarket assistants and waiters before you buy. Retailers may not have all the answers, but by starting a conversation we are encouraging our seafood suppliers to find out more about the product that they supply from our oceans. The more our suppliers hear questions about the sustainability of



Bream - mainly wild caught estuary fish, but are also found in inshore coastal waters. They are available year round, with individual species peaking at different times of the year.



Blue swimmer crab - there are many species of crabs but the main three you will see at market are mud crab, blue swimmer crab and spanner crab. Crabs are usually sold either live or cooked, as they deteriorate rapidly when stored dead. They are caught using baited pots and other traps, and as bycatch of trawl fisheries.

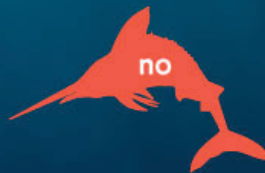


Australian salmon - under-utilised and not especially well regarded by chefs or consumers. Because of this they are a low priced seafood option. If they are fresh and handled correctly Australian salmon are moist and very enjoyable. They are also very high in Omega-3 fatty Acids.



Australia's Sustainable Seafood Guide


A guide to choosing your seafood wisely...




Enter seafood name



 Search

 A-Z Listing

 By sustainability

 Donate

It can be confusing for consumers to know what is sustainable and what isn't; that's why AMCS produces the only comprehensive sustainable seafood guide in Australia. They make it easy to access with online, phone app.

their products, the more they start asking questions of their suppliers.

The ripples of demand for sustainable seafood then pass up the supply chain and become waves, helping drive change in the way our fish and shellfish are caught or farmed.

It is up to all of us to help make our seafood sustainable.

What should I ask when buying seafood?

"Is the species overfished?" – if it is, then say "no thanks". Give overfished species a break by making an alternative choice.

"How was it caught or farmed?" – did that method damage the environment or catch large amounts of marine wildlife? Choose seafood from fishing or farming methods that have low impacts on the marine environment, its species and habitats.

"Is it a deep-sea, slow-growing or long-lived species?" – deep-sea species are generally slow-growing and long-lived. This makes them particularly vulnerable to fishing pressure, and means that they take longer to recover from impacts on their populations. Give these species a break too.

"Where is it from?" – local is not always more sustainable. Knowing where the seafood comes from is one of the key questions in helping make an informed seafood choice. Australian and imported species are assessed separately in this guide to help you make a better choice.

Overfishing and illegal fishing

Overfishing has already decreased part of Australia's fish stocks to dangerously low levels. Two major factors account for this problem: the fact that some areas have low biological productivity (and hence fish stocks do not regenerate quickly), along with intensive fishing efforts by commercial and recreational fisheries.

Eighty-two species that were assessed in Australian waters were classified as overfished. Species that remain subject to overfishing include the southern bluefin tuna, blue warehou, silver trevally, orange roughy, and bigeye tuna in the Pacific and Indian Oceans beyond the Australian Fishing Zone.

Illegal fishing places further pressure on some species, with Patagonian toothfish in the Southern Ocean and shark (for fins) in northern Australian waters being the worst affected.

Illegal fishing covers a wide range of activities. It can involve fishing off-season, trawling in prohibited waters, netting protected species, using banned equipment, exceeding catch quotas, fishing by unlicensed or stateless vessels, and the use of flags of convenience to avoid regulation. Unauthorised fishing is linked to other types of organised crime, including the transport of illegal drugs and weapons.

Longline fishing

This is controversial in some areas because of bycatch, fish caught while seeking another species or immature juveniles of the target species. This can cause many issues, such as the killing of many other marine animals while seeking certain commercial fish. Seabirds can be particularly vulnerable during the setting of the line. Mitigation techniques include the use of weights to ensure the lines sink quickly, the deployment of streamer lines to scare away birds, setting lines only at night in low light (to avoid attracting birds), limiting fishing seasons to the southern winter (when most seabirds are not feeding young), and not discharging offal while setting lines.

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

AFMA uses a range of approaches to protect our fisheries, including monitoring our vessels, tracking our catch and cooperating with other countries to protect shared fish stocks.

An effective monitoring, control and surveillance program is not just about policing. The setting of rules, collection of information, making sure rules are being followed, and educating fishers and fish buyers of the rules are all important aspects of combating illegal fishing.

Supporting AFMA compliance programs are strong fisheries legislation, including strict rules and regulations with clear penalties and sanctions.

Fishers and fish buyers caught breaking rules can be fined on the spot, their licence to fish can be suspended or, for the more serious cases, they can be prosecuted or have their catch seized.

By making the choice to only buy and eat sustainable seafood, consumers can contribute to the long-term health of our oceans. This choice also supports those fisheries operating sustainably and encourages others to follow suit.

The Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) is the voice for Australia's ocean wildlife. AMCS is Australia's only national charity dedicated to protecting ocean wildlife and their homes.

They are an independent charity, staffed by a committed group of professional and passionate scientists, educators and advocates who have defended Australia's oceans for 50 years. Their paid and volunteer staff work every day on behalf of the community to protect our ocean wildlife.

AMCS works on the big issues concerning the sea – to recover our threatened species, make our fisheries sustainable and create marine national parks, places in the sea where our wildlife is safe from harm.

Our oceans are under pressure from unsustainable fishing practices but everyone can make better choices about the seafood they eat so we can continue to enjoy the seafood we love in the future.

It can be confusing for consumers to know what is sustainable and what isn't; that's why AMCS produces the only comprehensive sustainable seafood guide in Australia. They make it easy to access with online, phone app and printed versions including an easy-to-carry and free printed 'mini guide'.

AMCS continues to drive the sustainable seafood movement in Australia. There have been some genuine positive changes in the sustainable seafood industry over recent years, championed by AMCS and responsible Australians who love their seafood and also love their oceans.

Australia's Sustainable Seafood Guide is the only comprehensive, up-to-date, reliable and credible source of information on the sustainability of Australian seafood. AMCS haven't only assessed the health of the fish stock, but also the whole impact of fishing or farming methods on the marine environment in order to pass on comprehensive advice to consumers.

AMCS recommends that when you're next at the supermarket, fishmonger, restaurant or fish and chip shop, you use Australia's Sustainable Seafood Guide to make a better choice about your seafood purchase. The guide features a simple traffic light system: green-listed species are a Better Choice, Eat Less of amber species and Say No to red-listed seafood. To make it as easy as possible the guide is available as a smart phone app, online and in printed form.

Every time you use the guide and ask questions about seafood sustainability at the point of sale you are helping to drive the changes in fisheries and aquaculture management needed to ensure a healthy future for our oceans, seafood and the long-term future of people who rely on seafood to make a living.

Continuing to assist the public to make informed choices via the Australian Sustainable Seafood Guide and outreach to restaurants, chefs and suppliers via the Good Fish Project are key to maintaining the momentum for a sustainable future for our oceans.

Relevant links are:

www.marineconservation.org.au

www.sustainableseafood.org.au

www.goodfishproject.com.au