

Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood (RASS)

The Sea Fish Industry Authority's (Seafish) Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood (RASS) provides seafood buyers and processors with information on the biological status of fish stocks for fish which are either landed or imported into the UK, and the environmental impacts of fisheries catching these stocks. Aquaculture information and a social-ethics risk assessment are also in development.

Background

Advice on 'which fish to eat or avoid' is currently available from many sources (notably from the NGO sector) often through scoring systems or eco-labels. This advice can vary and be at differing levels of detail. Varying or conflicting advice has created confusion for the supply chain and consumers alike.

There is a need from seafood buyers for robust, up-to-date, and structured information on the environmental risks when sourcing seafood. Depending on a buyer's needs this may encompass the risks to the health of a particular stock, or the risks associated with the wider environmental impacts of different fisheries such as by-catch and damage of vulnerable seafloor habitats.

What is RASS?

RASS is an online tool which enables buyers to make informed choices, and comply with their own corporate social responsibility requirements by providing information relating to many aspects of responsible sourcing of seafood. Despite being online, it is still possible to print off and / or download PDFs of profiles.

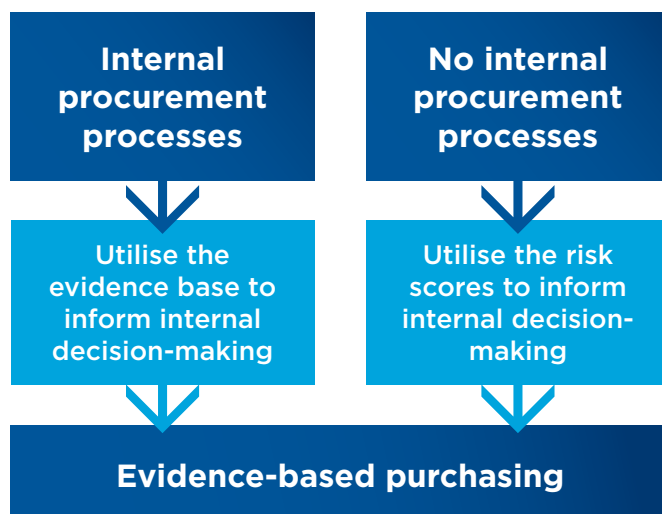
What does RASS do?

The fisheries risk assessment forms the core part of RASS profiles. We provide risk scores for four individual components of a fishery that are pertinent to your procurement; stock status, management efficacy, bycatch, and habitat impact.

Seafish only provides risk scores — we do not make any judgements on whether a particular assessment is ‘good’ or ‘bad’.

Unlike ‘traditional’ seafood guides, RASS offers no overall rating or score and will never declare ‘buy’ or ‘don’t buy’. Our view is that if seafood is legally harvested then it is legitimately available for purchase. Whether you choose to buy it depends on your own internal policies; RASS aims to provide a forward-facing resource through which commercial operations can assess their exposure to reputational hazards and make informed decisions.

A unique selling point of RASS is that there are two ways in which it can be used. Firstly, if your business already has seafood procurement rules or guidelines (i.e. stocks must be ‘healthy’), then the evidence utilised to generate the risk scores can be used to determine whether the seafood in question meets your requirements. If you do not have an internal seafood procurement system then you can use the risk scores directly; either



case-by-case or to develop your own internal guidelines (i.e. “we will only purchase seafood with a stock status risk of low or very low”).

RASS risk scoring

The rationale behind our scoring system is that many seafood buyers who use RASS will not have the knowledge (or time) to make sense of qualitative fisheries/environmental information. As such, Seafish have developed mechanisms for each of the four risk factors to translate evidence (or lack of) into a risk score. Supporting evidence in the form of a referenced narrative will provide justification and context.

RASS assesses the relative risks associated with sourcing seafood to allow the user to make an informed buying decision based on their own tolerance to risk.

RASS aquaculture profile development

A new aquaculture facet to RASS is under development. This will highlight the most important environmental risks that buyers need to be aware in relation to farmed species of importance to the UK market. We will also provide information on mitigation strategies, including sign-posting of eco-labelling schemes, and highlighting best practice.

Unlike RASS wild-capture profiles, no risk score methodology will be developed and no risk scores given, as aquaculture profiles will not be at farm level. Three draft profiles for Atlantic salmon, mussels, and turbot have been made, and will inform the basis of the web design.

RASS ethics development

The Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch programme, the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) and Seafish are partnering to scope out the development of a risk assessment tool for social responsibility in fisheries, a first of its kind. Using information found in the public domain about various social issues in fisheries around the world, it will analyse the results and generate scores in low, medium and high categories of risk. The methodology will focus only on the 'at sea' part of the seafood supply chain, and address wild-caught seafood only. The organisations are working together to ensure the methodology is globally relevant and designed to present results for fisheries worldwide. To validate the methodology, it will be piloted with fisheries representative of the global market.

The partnership was born out of a requirement to design a tool that allows for straightforward integration into Seafood Watch, SFP's FishSource and the Seafish RASS programmes. In addition, to maximise its use, the tool will have a dedicated website to allow other programmes to make use of the results.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Seafish?

Seafish is a non-Departmental Public Body set up by the Fisheries Act 1981 to improve efficiency and raise standards across the seafood industry. Seafish is funded by a levy on the first-sale of seafood products in the UK, including imported seafood.

Why has Seafish developed RASS?

In our 2012-15 Corporate Plan, Seafish was tasked with developing a robust database to provide objective, scientifically derived environmental information on fish stocks to enable buyers to make informed choices when buying seafood. RASS is our database.

What sources of information are used in the risk assessment?

The predominant source of information used in RASS comes from fish stock assessments and subsequent scientific advice. Other sources of information, such as governmental and nongovernmental reports, and academic literature have also been used as evidence in the assessment. All information sources are fully referenced.

Will this work on my phone/tablet?

Yes.

Does a low risk score mean a fishery is sustainable?

There are different accepted definitions of what makes a fishery sustainable or unsustainable. The purpose of RASS is to provide information for users to make informed decisions about their seafood purchasing based on their own policies or views.

How often is the database updated?

Profiles will be updated when there are changes to data and information, normally annually. Profiles are time stamped and fully referenced to let you know when they were last updated.

What do you mean by ‘risk’?

We assess the risk of damage to a buyer’s environmental credentials when they source a particular fish species from a specific fishery. We examine this risk in the context of four factors: 1) the status of the stock, 2) the effectiveness of stock management, 3) the bycatch impact of the fishery, and 4) the seafloor habitat impact of the fishery.

How accurate are your assessments?

Our assessments try to be as accurate as possible but we welcome all feedback. If we have missed any data sources we will gladly make amendments and update as necessary.

How can I use this information?

There are two ways you can use the information in RASS. Firstly, if you have an in-house policy for purchasing seafood you can directly use the evidence we have utilised to generate our risk scores to determine whether you wish to source a particular seafood item. Alternatively, if you do not have an internal policy or similar, you can utilise our risk scores as a means of assisting your decision making.

We do not make any recommendations on whether a fishery is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ or ‘too risky’ — that is up to you and your own tolerances.

How does the Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS) relate to this tool?

In the future we will be expanding RASS to include a social-ethics risk assessment. There may be opportunities to recognise the RFS in this risk assessment.

Why are there no aquaculture profiles on this website?

We are currently developing aquaculture profiles for the species of most commercial interest to the UK market. Profiles will cover the key risks (these will differ according to species and production method), as well as highlighting best practice.

Why are social measures not included?

A social-ethics risk assessment method is currently being jointly developed by Seafish, Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, and Monterey Bay aquarium’s Seafood Watch programme. RASS will draw on this information when it becomes available.

Do I have to pay to use this database?

The update and maintenance of the database is funded by Seafish levy. As such, there is no fee to users.

Is this database aimed at consumers?

RASS is primarily intended for commercial buyers of seafood but will be accessible to everyone, including consumers.

Full details on RASS can be obtained from the Seafish RASS Manager, Alex Caveen.

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For more information, please visit:

www.seafish.org/rass