

The Seafish guide to responsible sourcing

Introduction

As part of a series of guides covering topical issues affecting the UK fishing industry, Seafish looks at what responsible sourcing means to the seafood industry, and how that industry is becoming more responsible in its practices.

There are other Seafish guides on related topics including sustainability, the Responsible Fishing Scheme and bottom trawling.

Doing the right thing

Being responsible, according to the dictionary definition, is all about 'doing the right thing'. The word has connotations of being called to account, being good, reputable and respectable. The phrase 'responsible sourcing' has become something of a byword for how we protect the world and its natural resources for future generations, but the reality is that the phrase can be interpreted very differently according to how it is applied.

When the words 'responsible' and 'sourcing' are applied to the fishing sector the phrase takes on personal connotations, because fishing is a

human activity – an organised effort by humans to catch fish or other aquatic species conducted within defined, geographical boundaries.

This naturally makes fishermen the 'stewards of the sea'. It is in their interests to conserve their livelihood, which means 'doing the right thing and doing it right', and fishing responsibly, if not sustainably, is the right thing. Conserving stocks and protecting the environment, as well as making fishing operations profitable, are the key factors for the modern fishing fleet.

WHAT IS RESPONSIBLE SOURCING?

Responsible sourcing, or in this instance, responsible fishing, can be expressed in many ways and be used to describe fisheries in a range of conservation conditions. The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries is the 'handbook' for being responsible.

Responsible fishing does not necessarily relate to sustainability in that a fishery could be legal (and therefore the measures being taken for it are responsible) but it may not be sustainable. To be properly worthy of the name, a sustainable fishery must unequivocally be able to maintain fish stocks at a manageable level while maintaining ecosystem health.

At the very least a fishery that is sourcing fish responsibly takes into account, and exceeds, the minimum management or legal requirements governing a fishery. This could be by increasing mesh sizes, reducing environmental impact and implementing technical measures that reduce bycatch.

A responsible fishery will take into account sustainability criteria and observe when resources may need to recover. Fishermen understand very well that they have to be part of the movement to manage marine resources better; they have to both act responsibly and be able to demonstrate what is happening.

Charles Darwin wrote:

“It is not the strongest species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change.”

FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries

“The right to fish carries with it the obligation to do so in a responsible manner so as to ensure effective conservation and management of the living aquatic resources.” FAO, 1995

What is the Code?

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries is the ‘lynchpin’ upon which the whole ethos of responsible sourcing hangs. Adopted in 1995, this is a voluntary code, although parts of it are based on relevant rules of international law. It is aimed at everyone working in, and involved with, fisheries and aquaculture.

The Code consists of a collection of principles, goals and elements for action by fisheries authorities. Governments, in co-operation with their industries and fishing communities, have the responsibility to implement the Code.

The Code seeks to ‘set out principles and international standards of behaviour for responsible practices with a view to ensuring the effective conservation, management and development of living

aquatic resources, with due respect for the ecosystem and biodiversity.’

Its fundamental principles

The Code recognises that the long-term sustainable use of fisheries resources is the overriding objective of conservation and management. The Code advocates that countries should have clear and well-organised fishing policies in order to manage their fisheries.

It sets out a number of fundamental parameters for fisheries management which are designed to maintain or restore stocks at levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield:

- Excess fishing capacity is avoided and exploitation of the stocks remains economically viable.
- The economic conditions upon which fishing industries operate promote responsible fisheries.

- The interests of fishers, including those engaged in subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fisheries, are taken into account.

- Biodiversity of aquatic habitats and ecosystems is conserved and endangered species are protected.

- Depleted stocks are allowed to recover or, where appropriate, are actively restored.

- Adverse environmental impacts on the resources from human activities are assessed and, where appropriate, corrected.

- Pollution, waste, discards, catch by lost or abandoned gear, catch of non-target species and impacts on associated or dependent species are minimised.

www.fao.org/fishery/ccrf/1

Defining the code

The FAO Code of Conduct is further defined in a number of documents.

- **UN Fish Stocks Agreement, 1995.**

Relates to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks.

http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/fish_stocks_agreement/CONF164_37.htm

- **European Code of Sustainable and Responsible Fishing Practices, 2003.**

Directed at fishing operators and builds on the framework established by the FAO Code of Conduct.

<http://govdocs.aquake.org/cgi/reprint/2004/1017/10170060.pdf>

- **FAO Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries, 2003.**

A voluntary instrument designed to provide a framework, strategy and plan for the improvement of knowledge and understanding of fishery status and trends.

www.fao.org/fishery/topic/3456/en

- **FAO Guidelines for the ecolabelling of fish and fisheries products from marine capture fisheries, 2005.**

Outline general principles that should govern ecolabelling schemes.

Ecolabelling provides the assurance that fishery products have been sourced from a stock that can reasonably be expected to maintain good status for the foreseeable future. This is currently followed by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC).

www.fao.org/docrep/008/a0116t/a0116t00.htm

Responsible sourcing in action

For a fishery to demonstrate responsible sourcing it must adhere to management requirements and comply at the very least with the minimum management or legal requirements governing a particular fishery.

Adhering to the FAO Code of Conduct sets a very high bar, so fisheries quite legitimately prioritise particular issues. While indispensable core values must be followed including compliance with legal requirements, quality issues, waste management and discard reduction, there are a whole host of measures or schemes that answer specific corporate, consumer or other concerns, all of which illustrate how the modern fishing fleet actively demonstrates responsible sourcing practices.

Fisheries control and management

Fisheries are subject to government controls to conserve stocks and prevent overfishing. Controls on these fisheries are based on regular monitoring and assessment of the status of individual stocks, conducted by independent and Government-based scientific organisations. Stocks are then managed through Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limits and by limiting the number of days boats can spend at sea.

In addition, closed areas and closed seasons can be introduced. One very good example is the North Sea 'Cod Recovery Plan' which has been in place since 2001 involving a series of different short and longer-term measures to ensure the renewal of the cod stocks in the North Sea.

Technical conservation measures

This is the term used to describe the various ways of controlling fishing effort. These are predominantly aimed at reducing bycatch. These can include modifying fishing gear to be more selective to avoid capturing certain species, or to help unwanted catch to escape alive once caught.

In 2007, WWF and Seafish joined together in the UK 'Smart Gear'™ fishing gear competition to reward simple and innovative solutions to bycatch problems. The global competition was won by a team from Rhode Island for the 'The Eliminator' net which captures haddock while reducing the accidental netting of other species.



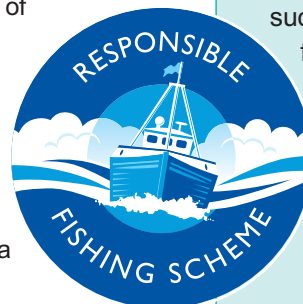
Certification of sustainably managed fisheries

There are many fisheries that are well-managed and sustainable. With regards to actual certification the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), recognisable by its distinctive, 'blue tick' logo, provides an environmental standard for sustainable and well-managed fisheries. As at May 2009, there were more than 2,300 MSC-labelled seafood products sold in 42 countries worldwide.

In addition, the Friend of the Sea ecolabelling scheme certifies and promotes seafood from sustainable marine capture fisheries and aquaculture. The Naturland Standards for Sustainable Capture Fisheries cover unprocessed products from both freshwater and marine fisheries, namely species of finfish, invertebrates, and plant.

Certification of fishing operations

The certification of fishing operations or vessels is exemplified in the Responsible Fishing Scheme which audits the application of good practice by a vessel, skipper and crew. The scheme, which was launched in May 2006, now boasts over 300 certified vessels and a further 200 going through assessment.



WHAT IS A FISHERY?

Fisheries can be defined in a number of ways, including:

A **resource** with the focus on the fish targeted such as a deep-sea shrimp fishery.

A **technique** with the focus on the method of fishing such as a semi-industrial Mediterranean purse-seining fishery.

A **sector** with the focus on the category of fishing activity and on the fishing fleet or community responsible for the fishery such as an offshore flatfish trammel netting fishery.

A mean of **production** with the focus on the socio-economic aspect of the fishery whether industrial/commercial or family run such as a family-scale fishing and rice field fisheries.

A **jurisdictional** area with the focus on the level of jurisdiction within which the fishery operates such as a Commonwealth fisheries, Alaska fisheries.

Fisheries management

Fishermen, Government, scientists and all those involved in fisheries management co-operate to make the fishing process deliver better conservation outcomes. In Europe there have been changes to the way fisheries are managed on an EU and regional basis.

New EU Directorate

In March 2008 EU fisheries management took a new direction with the reorganisation of the directorate responsible for maritime policy and fisheries. The former DG FISH is now known as DG MARE. As part of the reorganisation three geographic Directorates have been set up to cover: the Arctic, Atlantic and outermost regions; the Mediterranean and Black Sea; and the North Sea, Baltic Sea and landlocked countries.

Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMO)

Building strong regional fisheries bodies significantly improves management of fisheries. Thirty intergovernmental regional fisheries management organisations or arrangements have been created to establish fisheries conservation and management measures.

An independent panel is working on developing a 'model' for improved governance of RFMO's.

Regional Advisory Council (RAC)

There are seven RACs which cover the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the North Sea, north-western waters, south-western waters, pelagic stocks and the high seas and long distance fleet.

Sea Fisheries Committee (SFC)

There are changes planned but at the moment there are 12 SFCs in England and Wales which are responsible for the management of inshore waters up to six nautical miles offshore. The SFCs are likely to be given powers to introduce quicker, more effective management measures under the Marine Bill.

SOURCES

Association of Sea Fisheries Committees
www.asfc.org.uk

BSI British Standards
www.bsi-global.com/en/

European Union
www.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/index_en.html

Friend of the Sea
www.friendofthesea.org

International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)
www.ices.dk

ISEAL Alliance
www.isealalliance.org

Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
www.msc.org

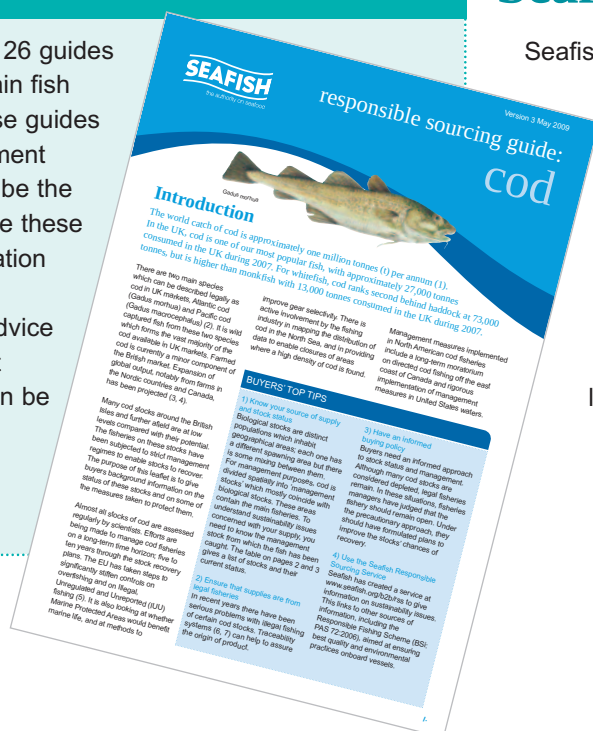
Naturland
www.naturland.de/naturland_fish.html

Regional Advisory Councils
http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/governance/racs_en.htm

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)
www.fao.org

RESPONSIBLE SOURCING GUIDES

Seafish has produced a series of 26 guides which outline the status of the main fish stocks consumed in the UK. These guides explain the science and management behind each fish stock and describe the measures being taken to conserve these stocks. By bringing all the information together in a consistent format, management and conservation advice is set in the context of the current seafood market. All the guides can be downloaded from the Seafish website: www.seafish.org/b2b/rss



Seafish: who we are

Seafish, the authority on seafood, was founded in 1981 by an act of parliament and supports the seafood industry for a sustainable, profitable future. Our services range from research and development, economic consulting, market research and training through to account management and legislative advice for the seafood industry.

Contact Seafish at:

www.seafish.org
<http://sin.seafish.org>