

The Seafish guide to the Responsible Fishing Scheme

Introduction

In a series of guides covering topical issues affecting the UK fishing industry, Seafish takes a practical look at the Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS). This guide outlines how the scheme works and how to become certified. There are also profiles on two fishermen whose vessels are certified under RFS. The skippers comment on the practical benefits of joining the scheme and how being part of it has helped them.

There are other Seafish guides on related topics including sustainability, responsible sourcing, Marine Protected Areas, bottom trawling and discarding.

What is the Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS)?

The Responsible Fishing Scheme was launched in May 2006. It is an independent, audited assessment of the application of good practice by a vessel skipper and crew in their fishing operations. It has been developed to raise standards in the catching sector and demonstrate a vessel operates to industry good practice guidelines.

The scheme helps to meet the needs of the seafood supply chain. The sector needs to provide tangible evidence and a practical demonstration of their commitment to the responsible sourcing of seafood. This scheme does just that. A vessel's certification to the scheme is an assurance that the fish landed by that vessel has been caught responsibly. It will also give the vessel a tool to allow them to positively position itself in the global marketplace.



Based on a Publicly Available Specification developed by Seafish in collaboration with the British Standards Institution (BSI), the Responsible Fishing Scheme is a means of recognising responsible fishing practices for individual vessels operating in a diverse range of fisheries under international agreements. It covers five key areas, namely: environmental issues, fishing practices, crew competence, vessel criteria and record maintenance. Ultimately it is designed to promote and recognise good practice.

As of March 2009 the scheme boasts 585 vessels in various stages of assessment with over 300 certified.

RESPONSIBLE FISHING PRACTICES

The fishing industry in the UK has undergone huge change in recent years. For a fishery to demonstrate responsible fishing practices it must adhere to management guidelines and comply at the very least with the minimum management or legal requirements governing a particular fishery.

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 fishing hangs. FAO clearly states that '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.'

Fishermen understand 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 that responsibility. An important step in this process is the certification of fishing operations or vessels as seen in the Responsible Fishing Scheme.

Independent certification schemes, such as the Responsible Fishing Scheme, are becoming increasingly important to the seafood industry. Over time, certification will become a condition of supply with major retailers announcing their future intention to source all seafood from independently accredited resources.

An independent, audited assessment of the application of good practice by a vessel skipper and crew in their fishing operations.

Complying with the specification

The Responsible Fishing Scheme certifies vessels that respect and achieve the standards set out in the British Standards Institution Publicly Available Specification (PAS 72:2006) covering good practice for fishing vessels.

The scheme covers all aspects of fishing vessel operation including:

- **Environmental issues**

Consideration should be given to lost fishing gear recovery, vessel discharges and marine litter recovery. It is also important to use selective fishing gear technologies and best practice to minimise capture of non target species; such as cetaceans, seals, turtles, seabirds and undersize fish, as well as reduce discard levels.

- **Fishing practices**

This covers storage, hygiene standards, quality control methods and traceability onboard the vessel, as well as the fishing methods used to catch the fish

and how selective fishing gears are utilised.

- **Crew competence**

It is essential that all crew members have completed the mandatory Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) approved basic safety training courses in sea survival, fire fighting, first aid and safety awareness, which are stipulated for all fishermen working on UK-registered fishing vessels.

All skippers and mates must undertake all other training requirements as necessary for the size of vessel. This also covers the requirement for crew to have catch handling and food hygiene experience.

- **Vessel criteria**

All equipment that comes into contact with the catch, such as boxes, knives, gloves and sacks, must be of a hygienic standard and safe for use in food preparation and storage. The requirements also relate to any parts of the vessel coming into contact with, or used for, catch storage.

- **Record maintenance**

Skippers must keep a record of all crew members and maintain an up-to-date log of all fishing activity. Additionally, appropriate records need to be kept to verify the application of controls to maximise and maintain the levels of catch quality and safety.

How the audit process works

Skippers interested in the scheme contact Seafish, who will arrange for a pre-audit visit by a qualified coach. Seafish conducts this preliminary audit free-of-charge and the findings are fully discussed with the skipper. Any non-compliant areas will be identified and remedial actions recommended. Once any non-compliant areas have been addressed, the vessel owner will arrange for an audit to be carried out by an independent certification body.

On successful completion of the audit, the vessel will be certified a responsible fishing vessel under the Responsible Fishing Scheme. This certification lasts for three years, with the requirement to submit to a surveillance audit after 18 months.

The Responsible Fishing Scheme in action

**Be recognised
for being
responsible**

The Responsible Fishing Scheme was launched in May 2006. As of March 2009 the scheme boasted an impressive 585 vessels in various stages of assessment with over 300 certified. The scheme is unconstrained by fishing method or vessel size and can be applied to mixed fisheries. All types of vessels have been audited ranging from pelagic trawlers in the north east of Scotland to specialist sardine netters in Cornwall.

Budding Rose - Peterhead

Peter Bruce is skipper of the *Budding Rose*, a 24 metre pair-seine vessel, which sails out of Peterhead. The *Budding Rose* typically catches whitefish; mostly cod, haddock, whiting and saithe, with a little monkfish, halibut and turbot.

Peter has owned the *Budding Rose* for 17 years. The vessel was certified to RFS in 2007.

"It was the right time for us to join," said Peter. "Ultimately it's what the consumer wants. Retailers have a lot of influence on the marketplace. They want to be able to say their suppliers are being responsible in the way they catch their fish and now we are certified to say just that.

"This sort of scheme is the way forward and any skipper not believing this isn't in the real world. Sustainability, provenance and how the seafood has been handled are absolutely crucial.

"RFS is the first step towards getting further accreditation.



"Being a part of the scheme has changed the way we fish to a certain degree, in that we have sharpened up on the practices that have always been in place on the boat anyway.

"I think that fishermen have vastly improved the way they handle their catch in recent years, and this has gone hand in hand with RFS. Shorter trips and icing seafood to keep the quality has been beneficial. We have always abided with the legislation stipulating quotas and real time closures. I am very conscious of the role of fishermen in managing the seas.

"I get a real buzz from landing a good quality catch and getting the reward for it in the marketplace. That is the most satisfying part of my job and where RFS has really helped. 75% of our fish goes on the open market and we put a RFS tallie on the boxes, the rest goes in direct sales. One of our direct sales wouldn't happen if I wasn't in the scheme. It was a condition of supply. Some suppliers will even pay more for RFS in our direct sales," said Peter.

www.buddingrose.co.uk

Crystal Sea - Newlyn

The *Crystal Sea* is an excellent example of a vessel operating in a diverse range of fisheries catching 20 different species including haddock, John Dory, squid, red gurnard, lemon sole, megrim, monkfish, cuttlefish, brill and seasonally turbot.

Skipped by David and Alec Stevens, the *Crystal Sea* is a 21 metre trawler operating out of Newlyn. The vessel joined RFS in 2008.

"It was really pressure from the supermarkets that pushed us into joining RFS, but that is a good thing. We were already doing a lot that met the requirements of the scheme anyway. Certification now gives us something that we can use to prove to others that we are acting responsibly," said David.

"We have not changed the way we fish at all. It's not a conscious part of the day – it's our common practice. We were already fishing responsibly. RFS vessels have to work within the management



regime. We own our quota and we work within it. The fishing for litter side of things has been a real success. We always collected the litter and brought it back ashore, but now it is a more formal system.

"All our fish goes to Plymouth market and certification to RFS has given us a marketing advantage and given us a route to market for our haddock - RFS was a condition of this supply chain.

"When we go to haul, knowing whether you've got it right or not – is it going to be a big haul – that is what fishing is all about. That has not changed in the 20 years I have been fishing.

"But the fishing industry as a whole has changed. There is no doubt that these schemes are the way forward as long as they keep up-to-date and continually strive to endorse best practice," said David.

www.crystalseatrawling.co.uk

Benefits for all

The Responsible Fishing Scheme benefits the whole supply chain and ensures a quality product reaches the consumer.

For fishermen

The scheme allows fishing vessels to prove their responsibility to the onward supply chain, show their ability to follow good practice and allow them to differentiate themselves and their catch. It allows skippers to demonstrate that their catch has been sourced by a vessel which complies with current good practice, and it satisfies a potential future requirement for certification to be a condition of supply. The RFS website lists all certified vessels with their full details.

For processors

Confidence in a seafood supplier is paramount for the processing sector. Fishermen in the Responsible Fishing Scheme are a step ahead of the competition and should be an obvious choice for processors who want to ensure the seafood they buy is caught responsibly and by fishermen who care about the

environment. This can assist with quality assurance requirements and in the demonstration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

For the retail sector

Retail customers want quality produce, but increasingly they also want to 'feel good' about the fish they eat and be assured that it comes from sustainable sources. By sourcing seafood from a vessel certified through the Responsible Fishing Scheme, customers get exactly what they want. By getting behind the scheme retailers can demonstrate responsibility and at the same time show support for one of the UK's core industries.

For the foodservice sector

When it comes to eating out, customers want good quality food and they like the idea that the seafood they eat was caught responsibly.

KEY CONTACTS FOR INDUSTRY

Mick Bacon

- Responsible for day to day management of the scheme
- Technical enquiries
- Liaison between vessels, coaches, auditors and industry organisations
- Website upload of vessel data and website data accuracy

Contact:

Tel: 07972 222936

Email: m_bacon@seafish.co.uk

Jo Dunlop

- Marketing initiatives and advice

Contact:

Tel: 0131 524 8684

Email: j_dunlop@seafish.co.uk

Stephanie Antezana

- Responsible for Seafish industry communications
- Promotes RFS via the media

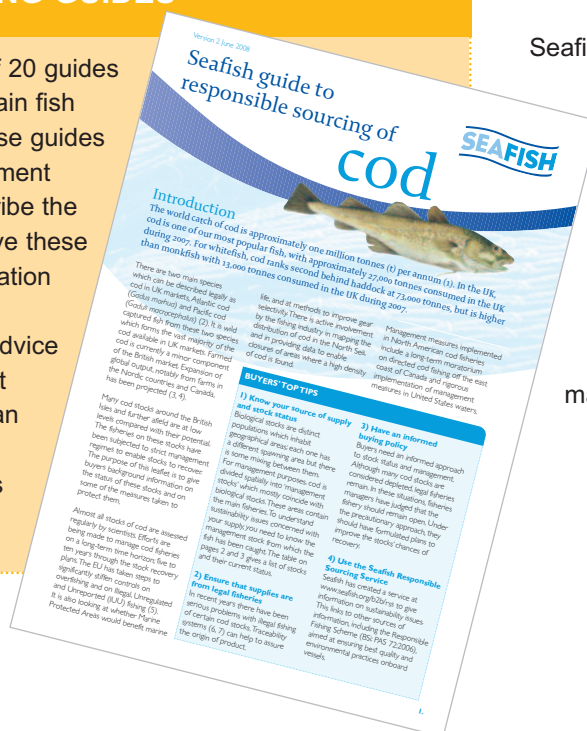
Contact:

Tel: 0131 524 8667

Email: s_antezana@seafish.co.uk

RESPONSIBLE SOURCING GUIDES

Seafish has produced a series of 20 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 and accreditation through to account management and legislative advice for the seafood industry.

Contact Seafish at:

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