



PLENTY MORE FISH IN THE SEA?

Legal sustainability standards for seafood purchased by public bodies



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The Good Food for Our Money campaign is calling on Government to support the “Public Bodies (Procurement of Seafood) Bill”, introduced to Parliament by David Drew MP on 24 February 2010. This Bill would legally require that all seafood purchased by the public sector is proven to have come from sustainable sources.

Please show your support for this Ten Minute Rule Bill by signing Early Day Motion 226: ‘Purchase of Seafood by Public Sector Organisations’.

SEAFOOD: THE GLOBAL PROBLEM

The international threat to seafood, particularly some fish species, is well-documented. There is consensus that fish stocks need careful management and a recognition that fisheries that are over-exploited can collapse suddenly and with irreversible damage. For example, a collapse of this kind occurred off the east coast of Newfoundland in 1992 when cod stocks vanished, the local industry evaporated and 40,000 people lost their jobs. To this date, the cod have not returned.

Data from the United Nations Fisheries and Aquaculture Department paints a very bleak picture for the state of our oceans. It estimates “80% of the world’s fish stocks for which assessment information is available are reported as fully exploited or over-exploited and, thus, requiring effective and precautionary management”¹.

In British waters, we face an urgent problem. In the North East Atlantic, the majority of commercial stocks are fully exploited, overexploited or depleted², while British salmon stocks are considered to be fully or over exploited and North Sea plaice, cod and sole are considered to be outside safe biological limits.

PURCHASE OF SEAFOOD BY PUBLIC BODIES

The public sector is a big consumer of seafood, but it is not an ethical consumer of seafood. At the present time, public sector organisations are not required to meet ANY legally binding sustainability standard for the seafood that it buys. There is government guidance, but no rules. In fact, the government does not even require the public sector to meet the rules it introduced under the ‘Fish Labelling Regulations’, by which retailers must clearly label the origin and species, including the method of production, for all fish and fillets sold.

It is because of this that public sector organisations, often unknowingly, are buying unsustainable seafood. Some examples of this include the purchase of haddock in prison food without any assurance of its sustainability, and the serving of tiger prawns, dogfish and swordfish – which are often produced particularly unsustainably – in hospitals and to our armed forces.

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN DO

The “Public Bodies (Procurement of Seafood) Bill” introduced to parliament by David Drew MP on 24 February 2010 would address this situation, and act to support the sustainability of global fish stocks and species, by making it a legal requirement that public bodies in the UK can buy only seafood that is proven to be sustainable. It would achieve this by ending the purchase of seafood in the public sector from the Marine Conservation Society’s “Fish to Avoid” list. It would also require that all wild-caught fish purchased by the public sector comes from stocks that meet the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation’s Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which includes fish that meets Marine Stewardship Council sustainability certification.

1. UN FAO, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department 2008, ‘The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture’

2. UN FAO, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department 2005, ‘Review of the State of World Marine Fisheries Resources’

The Bill would achieve three very important things.

1. Supporting the sustainability of seafood rather than putting it at risk

Legal standards would ensure that government spends public money on seafood in a responsible way, which acts to support the marine ecosystem and protect the sustainability of popular fish species, rather than cause harm to them.

2. Leading by example

Seafood purchased by the public sector should lead by example and serve to educate through best practice. These mandatory standards would guarantee that the public sector generates greater awareness of this issue and demonstrates to those who eat and prepare public sector food what sustainable fish is and how it can be purchased.

3. Supporting responsible industry

The sheer purchasing power of government has the capacity to drive the market for sustainable seafood, supporting the best of the British seafood industry, and supporting the recovery of precarious fish stocks to pave the way for a sustainable seafood industry for the future.

YOUR SUPPORT

There can be little doubt that the future of popular global fish stocks lies precariously in the balance. The introduction of mandatory standards for the purchase of sustainable seafood in the public sector would ensure that the millions of pounds of public money spent on seafood every year (we estimate £40m per year, although no authoritative figure exists) is invested in a way that can help transform the long-term sustainability of seafood species throughout the world.

Please show your support for David Drew MP's Ten Minute Rule Bill by signing Early Day Motion 226: 'Purchase of Seafood by Public Sector Organisations'.

For further information please contact Alex Jackson, project officer of the *Good Food for Our Money* campaign at Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming on **020 7837 1228** or by email at **alex@sustainweb.org**.

