



Shellfish
Association of Great Britain



Richard Benyon MP and Jim Paice MP
Department for the Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs (Defra)
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR

Dated: 20 January, 2011

Sustainable seafood and the new Government Buying Standards

Cc: Roy Norton and Dominic Pattinson, Defra

Dear Richard Benyon MP and Jim Paice MP,

We wish to express our concern about the very weak sustainable seafood commitment in the consultation documents issued by Defra on the new Government Buying Standards for food served by Central Government. Effectively, the proposals in the current Government Buying Standards consultation would mean that – at best – less than two-thirds of fish bought by Central Government would be covered by sustainability standards, and only one in five fish bought in the whole public sector would be covered by sustainability standards, meaning four in every five fish bought with taxpayers' money would not. We believe this is wholly unacceptable.

Given the worrying status of fish stocks and marine ecosystems, and high levels of public concern, we believe Central Government should make a commitment to using 100% sustainable fish (in line with the policies adopted by progressive industry, London government and its functionary bodies, and the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games), not the 60% target set out in your current consultation document, which in turn applies to only one third of food bought in the public sector.

The draft of the Government Buying Standards circulated to consultees in December 2010 demonstrates worse seafood sustainability standards than those adopted by leading private-sector catering organisations, including the London Metropolitan Police, Transport for London and McDonald's. They also do not live up to the seafood standards for London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic catering, on which our organisations advised, and to which Defra contributed.

We ask you to take immediate action to improve the seafood sustainability procurement standards for central Government and the wider public sector, to demonstrate leadership to all catering professionals and fish-buying organisations. We would like to arrange a meeting with you, at your earliest convenience, to resolve this important issue and to help you resolve any questions you may have on barriers to adopting a 100% sustainable seafood policy.

The Government Buying Standards state that central Government will aim for a target of 60 per cent sustainable seafood, a figure that we understand was chosen as the average already attained for sustainable seafood in government departments and other public sector agencies. There are several problems with this:

1. Sixty per cent is an inadequate target. Given the very serious conservation status of world fish stocks, on which millions of people worldwide depend for their livelihoods and well-being, we

see no justification for aiming any lower than 100% sustainable fish. At the very least, you should ensure that central Government stops buying endangered fish (as defined by the Marine Conservation Society in their ‘fish to avoid’ list), with immediate effect, which would have no cost implications. You should also aim to achieve 100% demonstrably sustainable fish (as indicated by inclusion on the Marine Conservation Society in their ‘fish to eat’ list, or certified by, for example, the Marine Stewardship Council and the forthcoming Aquaculture Stewardship Council) over an agreed and practicable timeframe.

2. Central Government procurement covers only one third of the public sector. In effect, your new procurement standards will mean that only one in five fish sold in the UK’s public sector will be covered by sustainability standards. Four out of every five will not. We believe this is wholly unacceptable.
3. The Government Buying Standards consultation states “sustainable seafood” but gives no definition. How can we support such a standard if we do not know the details? Previous initiatives by government to improve public sector food sustainability (such as the buying standards of the Office of Government Commerce) demonstrated highly questionable seafood sustainability standards, as several of our organisations have pointed out in previous correspondence with your departments and advisors. Why not adopt the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic catering standards for seafood?

We support the government’s aim to be “the greenest government yet”, and look forward to working with you to resolve these very serious problems.

Yours sincerely,



Kath Dalmeny, Policy Director
Sustain (for coordination and correspondence)
Email: kath@sustainweb.org



Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall
Fish Fight



Andy Hickman
Senior Campaigner
Environmental Justice
Foundation



Shellfish
 Association of Great Britain

Tom Pickerell
Director
Shellfish Association of GB



Peter Duncan
Aquaculture and Fisheries
Programme Manager
Marine Conservation Society

Cc: Defra: Roy Norton, Dominic Pattinson, Matt Sowrey, Anna Mayne

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