

What's the best catch? Sustainable fish to eat.

Earth First article

Yvette Black

Firstly, why do we eat fish? It is a healthy source of proteins, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins and minerals; it is easy and versatile to cook; and it is tasty and easy to digest. To be able to keep enjoying fish on your table, we have to start making smarter choices about which fish we choose. You don't have to research for long before the dire situation of our seas becomes evident.

Years of over fishing has left many species in critically low numbers and close to extinction. The Food and Agriculture Organisation reports that nearly 70% of world's fish stocks are fully fished, over-fished or depleted.

These are the "fish to avoid" as they need time to rebuild their numbers in the wild.

- Blue Warehou (labelled Trevally or Sea Bream)
- Gemfish / Hake
- Orange Roughy (labelled Deep Sea Perch or Sea Perch) This fish breeds at the age of 25-30 years and can live to 100)
- Oreodory (sometimes labelled Dory)
- Redfish
- Shark / Flake / Skate (or boneless fillet)
- Silver Trevally (often labelled Silver Bream or White Trevally)
- Southern Blue Fin Tuna (unspecified "tuna". Their population has decreased by 80% since 1960)
- Swordfish

How our fish are farmed or caught is another important consideration to make when selecting fish for the dinner plate. Trawlers release large drag nets that catch all in its path including bi-catch often including threatened marine species like sharks and seals. Line fishing doesn't produce the same amount of bi-catch, but long-line fishing can hook and drown many significant species such as penguins and albatross that were never intended for our dinner plate.

Farming fish in sea cage aquaculture can have negative effects such as introducing non-native fish species and disease to unaffected ocean ecosystems. Types of fish commonly farmed in sea cages include: Atlantic salmon (not native to Australia), Ocean Trout (not native to Australia), barramundi, mulloway, snapper, and yellowtail kingfish.

Land-based tanks and ponds are the best options for consumers if the farms are managed well and are not utilising wild species of fish as feed. Pond or tank farmed seafood includes barramundi, mussels, and oysters.

The most sustainable choices of fish for us to purchase are:

- Australian salmon

- bream
- calamari / squid
- flathead
- leatherjacket
- mullet
- mulloway
- trevally
- whiting
- yellowtail kingfish

Questions to ask

Don't be afraid to ask questions of your seafood merchant, such as:

1. Was that species sustainably caught and farmed?
2. What is the full name of the species?
3. What is the name of the company that caught or farmed the species?
4. What fishing gear or farming practice did they use? (e.g. seabed trawling, handline, or sea cages)

It is also important to avoid imported species unless environmentally certified, and ask about fish species that are in abundance at certain times of the year.

When considering tinned fish, always look for the blue and white logo of the Marine Stewardship Council which indicates that the fish is sustainably caught.

By buying fish supported by the Marine Stewardship Council when you go to the supermarket, you are making a responsible and sustainable choice, and you can enjoy your meal in the knowledge that you are not putting marine species under greater threat.

Useful guides and websites

- Guide to Fish: Choosing and Cooling Sustainable Species by Hilary McNevin
- Marine Stewardship Council www.msc.org
- Australian Marine Conservation Society www.amcs.org.au; www.fishnames.com.au; www.marineconservation.com.au Freecall 1800 066 299

Dates for the calendar:

August 22nd – 31st Keep Australia Beautiful week.