

Good Fish, Bad Fish: There's a Catch to the Catch of the Day

by John McCosker, Ph.D
(excerpt)

In North America and Europe, except for an occasional meal of deer, duck, trout or bass, we have largely given up hunting for our food. Only from the sea do we still regularly capture our fare from nature. But two or three decades ago, we rapidly began to exceed the endowment income of this resource and are now consuming the precious capital.

More than 70 percent of the world's fish stocks are overfished, depleted, or extinct as a food resource.

Many conservation-minded organizations are leading the charge to inform consumers about the ecological significance and consequences of their next meal. The National Audubon Society's Living Oceans Program, the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch, the Seafood Choices Alliance and the recently-formed Passionfish, provide timely advice and an excellent listing of the right fish for consumers and restaurateurs.

Retail seafood outlets are beginning to take notice of fishing's environmental costs. Although Chilean sea bass has been one of its most popular items, Whole Foods Market announced that they would stop selling the fish until fishing methods and fish stocks improve. And some of the country's finest restaurants now subscribe to Seafood Choices so they can make informed decisions about the seafood they serve.

The current list of sustainable, edible marine species is not long. We at the California Academy of Sciences will attempt to update this list in order to keep you aware of changes in fish abundance or fishery methods. For example, when this was first published in California Wild (Winter, 2002), the Pacific swordfish (a moderately well-managed fishery) was placed on the "iffy" list and the Atlantic swordfish (severely overfished) was not to be eaten until the stocks recover. Sadly, changes in the fishing method for Pacific swordfish have resulted in the bycatch and death of many albatrosses and endangered leatherback sea turtles, and for that reason we discourage you from eating any swordfish. Unless consumers convince fishery managers and the governmental agencies that manage them to fish sustainably, this list is likely to become even shorter. Your thoughtful patronage will make a difference.

Eat wisely. And bon appetit.

John McCosker is the former director of the Steinhart Aquarium and is the Chair of Aquatic Biology at the California Academy of Sciences.

This article was originally published in California Wild magazine, Winter 2002. The complete article can be accessed at www.calacademy.org.

C A L I F O R N I A
A C A D E M Y O F S C I E N C E S

GOOD FISH

Anchovies
Bass, Bluenosed
Bluefish, Atlantic
Catfish, farmed
Cod, Pacific
Crayfish (crawfish, crawdad)
Crab, Dungeness
Herring & Sardines
Halibut, Pacific, Alaskan
Hoki
Mackerel †
Mahi-mahi (dorado, dolphinfish)
Mussels, black & green-lipped, farmed
Oysters, farmed
Pollock, Pacific (surimi, krab)
Prawns, white-spotted
Salmon, wild, Alaskan & Californian
Scallops, farmed
Shrimp, pink
Squid (calamari)
Striped bass, farmed
Sturgeon, farmed
Tilapia, farmed
Trout, farmed
Tuna, Pacific albacore (tombo tuna) †
Tuna, yellowfin (ahi) †

IFFY FISH

Crab, Alaskan King
Crab, Snow
Lobster, clawed, American, Maine
Snapper, tropical (huachinango)
Sole, petrale, English, Dover
Spiny Lobsters (crayfish)

BAD FISH

Beluga Sturgeon (beluga caviar)
Chilean Seabass (Patagonian toothfish)
Clams, dredged
Grouper
Lingcod
Monkfish
Orange Roughy (slimehead)
Oysters, dredged
Rockfish (Pacific red snapper, rock cod)
Salmon, Atlantic
Scallops, dredged
Shark (shark cartilage, shark fin) †
Shrimp & Prawns, farmed, trawled
Swordfish †
Tuna, bluefin (maguro) †

DEFINITIONS

What it means when we say...

GOOD FISH

Fast-growing, abundant, sensibly managed, minimal bycatch and ecological impacts, minimally polluting farming methods

IFFY FISH

Heavily fished or overfished, capture methods damage habitat and result in excessive bycatch

BAD FISH

Overfished and unmanaged, ecologically destructive capture destroys habitat and kills massive amounts of non-target wildlife

† = U.S. FDA Mercury Warning

CALIFORNIA
ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

SEAFOOD GUIDE



Sockeye Salmon
Oncorhynchus nerka

UPDATED NOVEMBER 2004

This listing mainly concerns seafood sustainability. For health and safety references see www.calacademy.org



wallet-sized clip & carry