



SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD SOURCING

Sustainability has joined seasonality and format as a key consideration when sourcing fish and seafood. We consider the factors to take into account before making a buying decision



With approximately 21,000 species of fish and shellfish in the world and about 100 varieties available in the UK, according to seafood authority Seafish, today's chefs have so much choice when deciding what to put on the menu and careful sourcing is vital.

There are various factors to take into account when buying fish and seafood. Seasonality of species, format – wet, frozen, smoked, and so on – and quality issues have always been considerations, but in recent years the issue of sustainable and responsible sourcing has grown in importance.

“The sourcing of fish and seafood is particularly under the microscope,” says Gulam Uddin, business unit controller for Birds Eye Foodservice. “Consumers are consciously thinking about where their fish has been caught, how it has been trawled and what impact their meal has on the industry as a whole.”

Paul Murray, food service director at Lyons Seafoods, concurs. “Consumers are becoming increasingly interested in the provenance of their food and how it's sourced when eating out of home,” he says. “Fish and seafood are no exception, especially following high-profile media coverage on the subject, so it's vital to bear sustainability in mind when buying seafood for your business.

“Recent research by the Sustainable

EXPERIMENTING

Silla Bjerrum, founder, Feng Sushi

Danish-born Silla Bjerrum first started introducing a sustainable sourcing policy to her sushi business, Feng Sushi, after a visit to a Scottish salmon farm around ten years ago. "When I was on the walkway the salmon were rattling the cages and seemed so generally unhappy" she says. "It forced me to reconsider where I got my salmon from."

That prompted her to put sustainably-farmed Loch Duart salmon on the menu. And when her sales of salmon went up 20% after a 2003 health scare on normal farmed salmon, she decided to start looking at sourcing other species of fish

sustainably. "Then I knew that my customers cared and that was very encouraging," she explains.

Most fish on the menu is now MSC-certified, and the chain's most recent Fish to Fork rating is 4.5/5 – one of the highest in the country. The sustainable fish is certainly more expensive – around 10% of Bjerrum's turnover.

She counsels businesses who are thinking of introducing more sustainable fish to start with the most popular species, and to offer customers a choice. "You could have sustainable farmed salmon and normal salmon," she says. "Are they willing to pay £1 extra for better quality? That is what you need to test. I am trying not

to preach to my customers what they should and should not eat but I make it available to them."

But she also warns that finding good, sustainable sources of fish is a "minefield" and that no one person has all the answers. "It takes a long time. Fish to Fork criticised us for serving eel even though I believe we were serving the best sustainable eel, so recently I took eel off," she says.

"It is important to keep in mind that there are no finite answers. You have to keep experimenting and you need to review. The only way things can improve is by dialogue. Different operators need to share their experiences." www.fengsushi.co.uk



Restaurant Association shows that consumers believe sustainable sourcing of fish is the fourth most important area for restaurants to focus on in terms of sustainability, so it clearly pays to have a sound sustainable seafood sourcing policy that you and your staff understand and can communicate."

Don't be afraid to ask your supplier lots of questions is the message from Paul Gower, director of Seafood Holdings, which works

alongside 3663. He says: "Ask questions on the quality, freshness of the products and find out where the fish was caught and how. They should be able to give you detailed answers and these will help you to determine whether the fish was caught sustainably."

Certified sustainable schemes such as the Marine Stewardship Council's make it easy to promote your fish-friendly credentials right down the supply line and some standards will now certify catering facilities, although Stuart Shotton, consultancy services manager for food law consultancy FoodChain Europe has some advice on this.

He says: "Checking the scope of the certification, what it allows and doesn't allow you to claim on marketing material and menus, is essential as the unauthorised use of another organisation's logo can result in both civil and criminal action."

With the help of various suppliers and organisations, *Caterer* has compiled a list of factors to take into account before making a buying decision.

SUSTAINABILITY

- Avoid purchasing any species on the



TEAMWORK

Kenvita Bengali, executive chef at Marriott's 140 Park Lane, London

Marriott International became the first big hotel chain to adopt a sustainable fish policy when it launched its Future Fish programme in July 2010, committing its hotels to ensure that at least half their fish supplies came from sustainable sources.

However, its five-star flagship hotel in Park Lane has gone one better by banning all over-fished species from its menu in what it hopes will serve as a blueprint for the group's 3,600 hotels worldwide. The initiative has already won the hotel a coveted four-blue-fish rating from Fish2Fork, a score bettered by only three other restaurants in Britain.

The switch to 100%

sustainably-sourced seafood followed a presentation to Marriott chefs in Germany by supplier M&J Seafood, whose green approach includes eschewing endangered species such as shark and blue fin tuna and promoting Marine Stewardship Council-certified species and under-utilised fish such as gurnard, dab and pout.

The supplier worked closely with executive chef Kavita Bengali and her team to determine how the menu needed to change and where the restaurant could obtain adequate and reliable seafood. As a result, dishes made from threatened species such as smoked European eel and wild North Atlantic halibut have been replaced by those such as South Coast Lemon Sole with Canadian potted shrimp.

"M&J Seafood really opened

our mind to the possibility of being 100% sustainable," said Gareth Marsh, director of operations at the Marriott Park Lane, who believes the issue needs big brands to show their commitment.

"We now hope that 140 Park Lane sets an example to other Marriott hotel restaurants in Britain and abroad to put marine sustainability at the heart of their menus."

Mike Berthet, seafood director at M&J, said he had been "extremely impressed" by the "enthusiasm, approach and commitment to make changes" displayed by Bengali and her brigade. "They bit the bullet and they are truly on board serving quality fish and seafood from sustainable and well managed fisheries from around the world."

www.marriott.co.uk

IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) Red List of Endangered Species, which includes orange roughy, Mediterranean bluefin tuna and North Atlantic swordfish.

● Know which fishing method was used. Your supplier should be able to confirm which fishing method was used to catch each species, for example, line caught or pole and line caught tuna, hand-gathered, rope-grown or dredged mussels, hand-dived or dredged scallops, "farmed at sea" sea bass or farmed onshore bass, farmed or wild salmon, trawled haddock, and so on.

● Ask your supplier for a list of species they ban because they consider them endangered. This ensures that your supplier is actively engaged with the issues of sustainability and source responsibly. Also ask for a list of certified sustainable fish and seafood.

● Ask to be kept up-to-date with sustainable species as they are uncovered, for example, Cornish sardines, which have now won MSC status or Isle of Man Queen scallops which are currently being assessed for MSC status.

● If sourcing direct from fisheries ensure that they have sustainability certification. Seafood sustainability standards are generally split into two areas: fisheries and the supply chain, so ensuring fisheries have recognised certification such as the MSC or GlobalGap aquaculture standards is critical.

● Check the species on the certification. Certifications generally cover specific fish species which are named within the certification. Any species not named are not usually covered within the scope and should not be labelled as "sustainable".

● Is the fish certified to a recognised sustainability chain of custody standard? There are a number of schemes linked to sustainability that cover the whole supply chain and require sustainable seafood to be protected and traced throughout, ensuring that seafood from non-sustainable sources does not enter.

● Continue to verify and audit your suppliers. Checking certification throughout the period in which they supply you helps to identify potential issues and forms part of a business's due diligence defence if it transpired that a misleading sustainable claim had been applied to products which would not meet sustainable criteria.

● Segregation within the kitchen. It's important to ensure that sustainable seafood is kept apart from non-certified seafood and that both are easily identifiable.



BANNED SPECIES

Ask for a list of banned species. M&J Seafood has banned supply of:

- Roundnose grenadier
- Snapper, cubera
- Snapper, mutton
- Snapper, northern red
- Starry smoothhound
- Sturgeon, caviar (wild caught)

- Tuna, bigeye
- Alfonsinos
- Argentine or greater silver smelt
- Black scabbardfish
- Chilean seabass
- Greater forkbeard
- Marlin, black
- Nursehound

- Picarel
- Orange roughy (Hoplostethus atlanticus)
- Shark (All Species)
- Mediterranean bluefin tuna (Thunnus thynnus)
- North Atlantic halibut (Hippoglossus)
- Eel (Anguilla anguilla and Anguilla japonica)

MOONWATCHER

Andrew Baird, head chef, Longueville Manor, Jersey

As a fully qualified dive-master, Andrew Baird has witnessed at first hand the devastation that trawling inflicts on the sea bed. This awareness underpins his sourcing strategy at Jersey's only five AA red-star hotel where he has, over the past 20 years, built up close relationships with local seafood suppliers and fishermen to ensure the hotel serves only the freshest, most sustainably-caught, non-endangered species.

"No one wants to see fish favourites disappear from dinner plates, but that is what the future holds unless we change the way fish is being caught," says Baird, who supports a return to ocean-friendly methods such as spear fishing, scallop diving,

long lines and low water netting.

"As chefs we can play a positive role in creating demand for sustainable seafood by educating our customers and creating delicious dishes from more sustainable options."

Baird's approach is to work sympathetically with local fishermen and with nature. Regular trips to local fishermen familiarises him with the different methods they use.

His seafood selection process begins each evening when he checks the position and phase of the moon to predict the effect of the tides on the type of seafood that is likely to be caught that night. Armed with this knowledge and his projected menu, he then contacts the relevant suppliers to place his orders.

Conscious that each fishing

haul is ultimately unpredictable, Baird is always prepared to tailor his menu to accommodate the seafood that is available on the basis that "the taste and freshness of the fish, and the fact that they were sourced in a sustainable and sympathetic way, is the most important aspect".

He sees his system as a blueprint for the role that chefs, as professional purchasers of seafood, can play in protecting the ocean's resources.

"At Longueville Manor, we keep a clear line of information and traceability at the restaurant and know exactly where the fish comes from, how it was caught, and even who caught it. We can then pass that assurance on to our customers," says Baird.

www.longuevillemanor.com

QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

● Seafood is available to buy in a variety of formats, the main ones being wet/fresh, frozen and cured/smoked. If required, suppliers should be happy to prepare wet/fresh fish for a chef in exactly the way they want; supplied whole, or filleted, in steak form, and so on.

● Check seasonality. Although seasons are often not an exact science, your supplier should provide you with an overview of seasonality to enable you to plan your menus. Ask them for tips and advice to ensure you're offering the best fish and seafood to your customers at the best time, for example, avoid flat fish at spring time when they're spawning.

● Whole fresh fish should have eyes that are bright and not sunken. The skin should have a shiny, moist, firm appearance. There should

also be a pleasant sea fresh aroma if the fish is really fresh.

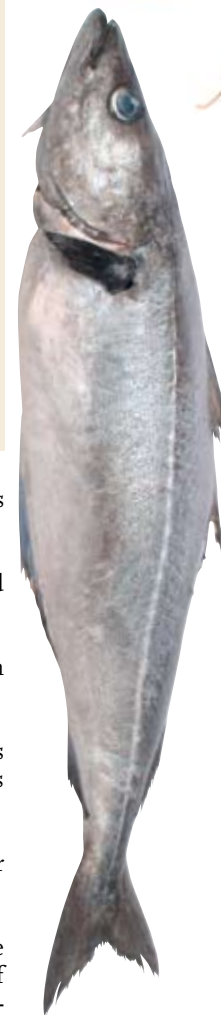
● When buying fillets look out for neat, trimmed fillets and a white translucent appearance.

● Smoked fish should look glossy with a fresh smoky aroma.

● When selecting shellfish choose shells which are tightly closed and without any gaps or cracks.

● Lobsters and crabs should feel heavy for their size.

● When buying frozen seafood check that the fish or seafood is frozen solid with no signs of thawing. Make sure that packaging is undamaged and there is no sign of freezer burn.



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Good Catch Guide

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International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

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