

# SEAFOOD



**Consumption of fish by humans both as food and as a wider source of protein for agriculture, industrial processes and the pet food industry, has seen worldwide fish consumption double since 1973. This has implications for the viability of global fish stocks and the people who rely upon them.**

## The issues

Hundreds of millions of people in the tropics and subtropics live in coastal areas where their livelihoods are based on inshore fish and other marine resources. Much of this fish does not enter world markets, but the fish we import has an impact on these people and their livelihoods. In particular, increased demand for fish products from these areas has led to:

- vastly increased production of prawns and shrimps from coastal farms;
- new offshore fisheries exploited by boats from developed countries which have damaged the inshore fisheries that support local people.

Here we focus on three types of seafood products; farmed prawns, farmed fish and wild caught fish. These categories have been chosen because they have significant poverty-related impacts and the availability of clear standards or initiatives which allow procurement choices.



### Prawns

Prawns (here we use the terms prawn and shrimp interchangeably) are farmed in shallow brackish pools created on flat coastal margins (such as mangrove forests) and adjacent land. Most of the world's farmed prawns are grown in the tropics and sub-tropics along the coasts of Latin America, south-east Asia, Bangladesh and India where they have major impacts (both positive and negative) on the well-being of poor communities. Farmed prawn production has grown 12,000% between 1975 and 2005, increasing from 22,000 tons per annum to more than 2.6 million tons. In 2005, 44% of worldwide prawn production came from farms.

Prawn farming has brought jobs and much needed economic development to many areas, but the rapid rate of increase has led to several significant problems, such as:

- destruction of coastal mangrove forests (more than half of the world's mangrove forests have vanished over the last century)
- displacement of farmers from coastal areas
- pollution from pesticides adversely affecting workers and wetlands, reducing biodiversity and affecting food and water supplies of local people
- poor farm working conditions.

However, because of the economic benefit farmed prawn production can bring to poor communities, boycotting tropically farmed prawns is not the right approach. Indeed there is a case to be made for actively seeking out products with the right credentials.

#### Why are mangroves important?

Mangroves support the livelihoods of many poor coastal communities in the tropics by providing fish and timber. They are also biodiversity hot spots: important areas for spawning fish which also help prevent coastal erosion.

### Organic production

Some farmers have taken an organic route, certified by the Soil Association or more commonly by Naturland, the German organic certification organisation, which has given organic status to prawn farms in Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia. Organic status considerably reduces environmental impact and Naturland certification also provides comprehensive cover of social issues. It is also possible to specify prawns from particular sources taking account of social issues such as, for example, Graig Farm –an Ecuadorian Organic farm, or Granjas Marinas in Guatemala.

### Farmed fish

Fish farming or aquaculture (predominantly salmon and trout but also increasingly other species), has grown rapidly in recent years. Over 40 per cent of the world's fish production already comes from aquaculture, and 50 per cent of fish sold in UK supermarkets comes from farms.

Farmed fish can have both positive and negative implications for poverty. Farming carnivorous fish such as salmon and cod can require the use of food fish (rather than feed pellets) which can negatively impact local supplies of wild fish otherwise used for food or to sell. However, many parts of the developing world have used fish farming to generate income and alleviate poverty.

## Wild fish

At the global level, recent data from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) noted that 69% of fish stocks are either fully or over exploited by fishing activities. This situation has two main implications:

- the range and quantity of fish that will be available in the future will be greatly diminished, with an impact upon health, nutrition and choice;
- collapses of viable fish populations marine ecosystems will create imbalances in food chains, leading to massive population increases in key prey species such as jellyfish.

## Possible solutions

With the recent formation of the Aquaculture Stewardship Council, WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature) has helped develop certifiable standards for aquaculture. This aims to reduce the environmental and social impacts of farming 12 species: salmon, shrimp, tilapia, trout, pangasius, seriola, cobia, abalone, mussels, clams, oysters and scallops. Though it has been widely criticised by a range of other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the scheme is expected to be in operation by 2011 and will certify farms in compliance with standards for responsible aquaculture, allowing them to use an eco-label similar to the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC, see below).



## Sustainable fishing

Fish are a renewable resource, and wise stewardship can lead to healthy populations which can be harvested with no overall damage to their long-term future or that of the wider ecosystem. Over the last decade, a number of initiatives have been developed to improve the sustainability of fishing and ensure better outcomes for people and the environment, mainly focussed on standards for fishery management and practice. Established in 1999, the most prominent and widely used standard is the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) scheme. The MSC provides guidance and a standard with an independently verified label. The MSC scheme applies globally and certifications have been achieved for several hundred fisheries and fish products which are entitled to use a blue MSC Eco-label.

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## Recommendations

- ◎ *Prawns - there is no uniform system of labelling or verification to ensure tropically farmed prawns have not damaged people or the environment. Consequently, ask suppliers to demonstrate they are sourcing prawns that meet the equivalent of Naturland standards or the International Principles for Responsible Shrimp Farming.*
- ◎ *Other farmed fish/shellfish - monitor the introduction and take-up of the Aquaculture Stewardship Council label.*
- ◎ *Harvested wild fish - buy only Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Certified products.*

### FURTHER INFORMATION

ASC: [www.worldwildlife.org/what/globalmarkets/aquaculture/council-faqs.html](http://www.worldwildlife.org/what/globalmarkets/aquaculture/council-faqs.html)

International Principles for Responsible Prawn Farming, see: [www.thefishsite.com/articles/245/international-principles-for-responsible-shrimp-farming](http://www.thefishsite.com/articles/245/international-principles-for-responsible-shrimp-farming)

MSC: [www.msc.org](http://www.msc.org)

Naturland: [www.naturland.de/naturland\\_fish.html](http://www.naturland.de/naturland_fish.html)

One Fish – general information on fishing and development: [www.onefish.org](http://www.onefish.org)

### GLOSSARY

ASC – Aquaculture Stewardship Council

Aquaculture – farming of fish and other seafood

MSC – Marine Stewardship Council

NGO – Non Governmental Organisation