

# Fish and Sustainability

Eating fish responsibly = a clear conscience

Is there still enough fish in our seas?

How can I see that fish has been caught responsibly?

Sustainably caught fish: What does sustainably mean?

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Eat fish twice a week?



The fishing industry forms an important part of Dutch culture. And that is something we can all be proud of. The sector produces a broad range of fish, crustaceans and shellfish, which are not only appreciated for their culinary merits but can also make a major contribution to our health.



*"Fishermen, government and environmental organisations share the ambition to promote and achieve sustainable fishing"*

**Advice:**

## **Eat fish twice a week!**

Research has shown that people in the Netherlands only eat fish once every 3 weeks on average. The current consumption pattern is in stark contrast to the advice of the Dutch Health Council to eat fish twice a week (preferably including at least one meal of fatty fish). For the sake of comparison: our eastern neighbours eat more than twice the amount of fish the Dutch eat, and Spaniards even eat seven times as much.

### **Fresh Omega-3**

There are many different kinds of fish. Large and small, lean or fatty. Lean fish fits into everyone's diet, especially when you are a bit more conscious of the fat content of your food. Fatty



fish, on the other hand, is particularly healthy because of the Omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA it contains. These are healthy fatty acids that reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases and also help to lower the level of cholesterol. There are also indications that Omega-3 fish fats decrease the risk of dementia and other brain disorders. In addition to those fats, fish contains several valuable nutrients, such as high-quality proteins, iodine, vitamins and minerals.

**Fish stocks:**

## **But is there still enough fish in our seas?**

Overfishing is a global problem. However, there are major differences in

terms of fish species and the areas where those species can be found. Because of overfishing proper management is required, and in that respect there are global differences as well. In many fishing areas around the world fish stocks are recorded and analysed, quotas are agreed and monitored, and waters and ports are inspected. In spite of all this, the situation is a cause for concern.



▶ On the basis of annual research by biologists, the permitted catches are determined for the Dutch fishing industry, which are based on the available quantities at European level. Fishing in the North Sea is subject to strict regulations and catch quotas (the total amount of fish that may be caught within a year), adherence to which is monitored by means of equally strict inspections. This means, then, that all fish in the Netherlands has been caught within acceptable margins. In other words, North Sea fish has been caught responsibly and the consumer can eat it with a clear conscience.

Dutch fish importers also comply with the prevailing legislation and regulations. They also apply a common code of conduct which imposes additional requirements in terms of product quality, transparency, social conditions and the environment.



## Farmed fish:

# And what about farmed fish?

Farmed fish is essential if we want to be able to continue to meet the demand for fish in the future. Did you know that nearly half of all the fish introduced on the market is now farmed fish? The other half is wild-caught fish.

All over the world, fish-farming is the fastest growing food-producing sector. Fish-farming - or aquaculture - has also been introduced in the Netherlands, where it comprises a modest, innovating sector. Species such as tilapia and catfish in particular are produced in fish farms.

Fish-farming can lead to advantages, as there is less impact on natural populations and the underwater environment. However, farming can also cause environmental problems.

What these problems are depends on the farming method and the species. A number of farmed species depend on wild-caught fish for their feed. The extent of this problem has now been greatly reduced, in particular through the use of a large percentage of vegetable oil in relation to the required percentage of fish oil. There are also species that only eat plants; developments in the composition of feed for fish are taking place rapidly.



*"The question is not whether we need sustainable fish, but how soon"*

## Critical response:

# Why is there a critical response from environmental and pressure groups?

Life in the North Sea is no longer as it used to be. People have used this area intensively for years, e.g. for shipping, the extraction of oil and gas, sand extraction, cabling for telephony and fishing. The number of activities continues to grow; a recent activity has been that of wind farms. Politicians, biologists, environmental organisations and fishermen all agree that no unnecessary damage should be done to the environment, nature or fish stocks, and they are working together towards sustainable fishing.

## Urgent need

In the past, environmental organisations quite rightly pointed out the urgent need for the fishing sector to focus on socially responsible entrepreneurship. Nowadays everyone is convinced of this need. Fishermen, government and environmental organisations share the ambition to promote and achieve sustainable fishing. This common goal has been laid down in a partnership agreement.

## Undesirable by-catch

One point that deserves attention is the prevention of undesirable by-catches. Dutch fishermen are constantly looking for adjustments to fishing methods, such as the use of different nets, placing escape hatches in the nets for non-desirable species, and returning living fish that have been caught unintentionally to the sea more quickly. They try to target their catch as precisely as possible.

## New methods

The Dutch fishing industry is based to a large extent on catching sole and plaice. These flatfish lie on the seabed. In order to catch them, nets (such as trawl nets) are used that drag along the bottom of the sea. Some types of seabed may be damaged by their use. That is why experiments are taking place with various new methods for catching those fish species while sparing the seabed and its fauna. This requires a great deal of research, investment, testing and time. However, fishermen are very positive about the possibilities offered by much lighter fishing nets and alternative fishing methods. In combination with the adaptation of ship engines, this also results in a reduced use of energy.



## Sustainably caught fish:

# What does sustainably mean?



Sustainability has become a buzzword over the past couple of years. Sustainable (or responsibly caught) fish complies with three important standards:

1. The numbers of a fish species should be such that the species can survive through reproduction.
2. The fishing method must spare the environment as much as possible.
3. The method must target the species as precisely as possible, resulting in as little undesirable by-catch in the nets as possible.

In short, sustainability is based on three pillars: **People, Planet and Profit**. In fact, these three Ps mean that we manage our planet in such a way that our grandchildren can live on it healthily and safely. Or in other words: entrepreneurship with a long-term vision and with an eye not only for staff but also for society, making a profit over a lengthy period, and also causing as little impact on the planet as possible.

The most important challenge for the Dutch fishing sector is that of trying to find a balance between earning a good living by selling fish on the one hand, and careful management of fish stocks so that there will be enough fish for future generations on the other. The fishing sector is working hard to increase the supply of 'environmentally responsible fish'. Over the past few years, a number of activities have taken place in the field of socially responsible entrepreneurship.



## What can I do to contribute to sustainable fish?

By not buying fish species offered for sale in Dutch shops you will tend to achieve the opposite effect. The Dutch fishing sector abounds with initiatives that aim to advance sustainability:



▶ saving on fuel, new fishing methods, different nets, research (often in collaboration with biologists) into fish stocks, methods for improvement, certification systems, offering alternative fish species. This usually requires a great deal of investment and

time. If their fish is no longer sold, this will deprive the people of the financial resources necessary to take essential measures that contribute to the proper management of our fish stocks. So: 'It is business as usual while the renovation work is taking place'.



## MSC Quality Mark: How can I see that fish has been caught responsibly?

There are now several quality marks which guarantee various aspects of sustainability.

A relatively well-known international quality mark is the Marine Stewardship Council or MSC Quality Mark. Products with this logo offer a global guarantee for fishing methods that do not have an unnecessary impact on the environment. In order to obtain this quality mark, an entrepreneur must undergo a very thorough assessment procedure, which takes time. Globally, nearly 10 % of all fish caught for human consumption is now certified, and the number of products is rising fast. The MSC quality mark is an excellent independent initiative, but it is not immediately available for every fish supplier. It is therefore not realistic for

a consumer to ask for MSC certified fish only.

The MSC quality mark is only awarded for wild-caught fish. This label cannot be applied for when farmed fish is involved. There is, however, farmed fish on the market with a quality mark, as is the case with catfish and tilapia farmed in the Netherlands, which have the Dutch 'Milieukeur' quality mark.



If you have any questions, please contact the Dutch Fish Marketing Board, tel. +31 (0)70 336 96 55 or e-mail [info@visbureau.nl](mailto:info@visbureau.nl).

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