

EATING FISH with HEALTH and THE ENVIRONMENT in mind

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Why be a card-carrying fish consumer? When it comes to fish and seafood, the challenges of environmental responsibility and personal protection are complex and constantly changing. It is virtually impossible to keep up with it all and adequately weigh and consider all issues:

Overfishing. Some natural fish stocks are overfished, or depleted. Others are not. Overfishing is a disaster for marine ecosystems, as well as for the humans around the world who depend on plentiful oceans and lakes for food and livelihood.

Bycatch is unwanted or unintentional catch which is discarded to die. One out of four animals caught in fishing gear is bycatch—these can be other fish, porpoises, seals, whales, turtles, and birds. Some fishing methods can greatly reduce the bycatch. So how the fish is caught can make a big difference.

Mercury-poisoning. Mercury from smokestacks and other sources settles on the water and ends up in the bodies of marine animals. Fish at the top of the food chain may have dangerous amounts of accumulated mercury in their tissues. This is not good for anybody, but can have a subtle to devastating effect on a developing child or fetus.

Destructive Fish Farms. Some farm-raised fish, such as tilapia, are a very responsible choice, but some fish farms cause more problems than they solve. If the farmed fish are fed smaller fish, the result can be a net loss of protein from the ocean. Fish are crowded in net pens resulting in disease, large-scale antibiotic use, and fecal pollution.

Escapees can spread disease to wild stock, take over their territory, and compromise their genetic strain. (Note: Salmon labeled "Atlantic" is farm raised, not wild.) Other fish farms avoid these problems.

How can you make heads or tails of all this? The easiest and most reliable approach is to find an organization that you can trust, and follow their recommendations. Many organizations offer a fish-choice card. (Remember to periodically check back for updates, as conditions change.) Some good sources of cards and information can be found at:

GREENGUIDE

www.thegreenguide.com/doc.mhtml?i=103&s=fish - SEAFOOD LOVER'S GUIDE

www.audubon.org/campaign/lo/seafood/index.html - SEAFOOD WATCH

www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp - SEAFOOD SELECTOR

www.environmentaldefense.org/seafood/fishhome.cfm - MARINE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

www.msc.org/

(The information in this handout was obtained from the five listed websites, but they contain much, much more.)

What can you do, as a consumer? Ask your fish seller, and the restaurant where you order fish, where the fish came from, and how it was caught. And tell them why you want to know. Write a letter to the manager of the store or restaurant.

Get a fish-choice card, and carry it with you.