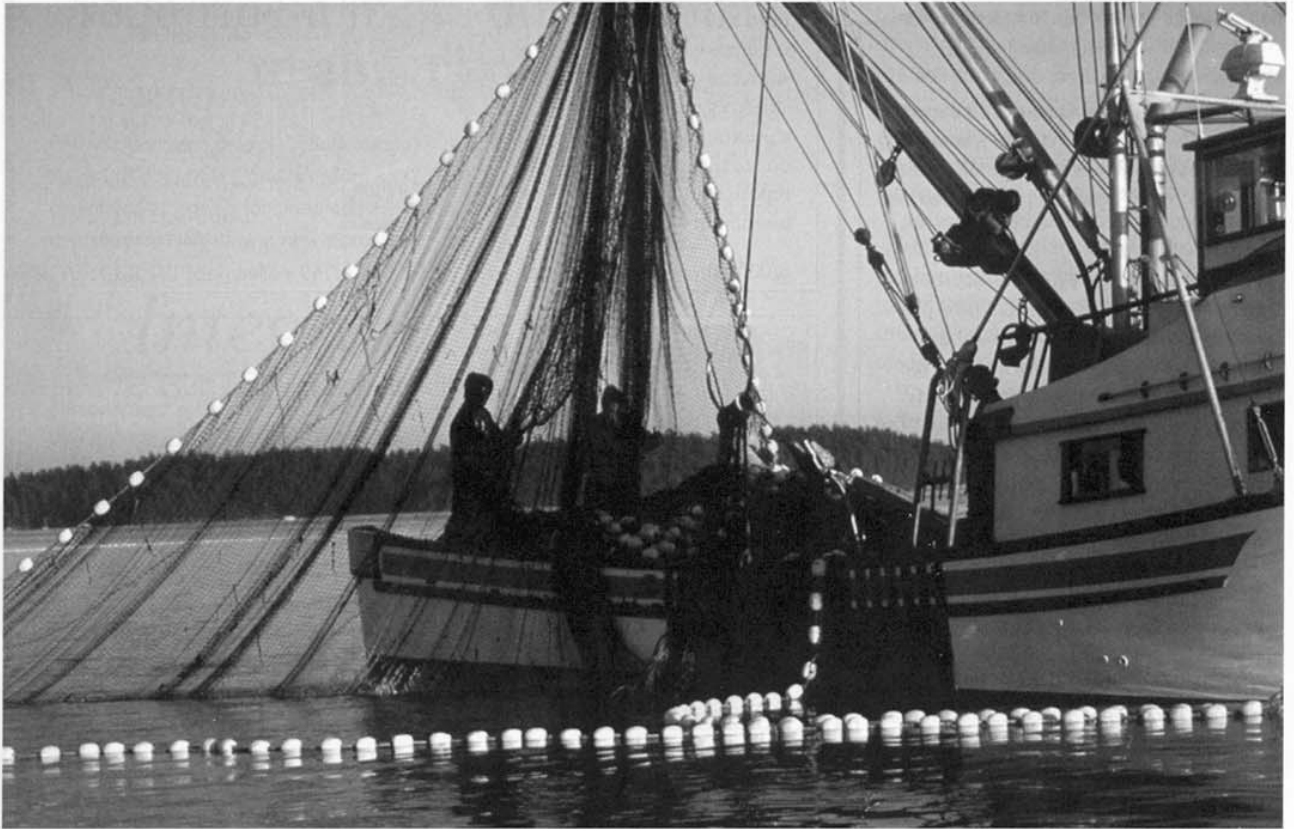


## Dining



## Sustaining Our Seafood

### Chicago Chefs Promote Ecologically-sound Fishing

Worldwide, the seafood industry removes more than 88 million tons of seafood from the oceans each year, according to the website for Seafood Choices Alliance, [www.seafoodchoices.com](http://www.seafoodchoices.com). The sheer numbers removed are enough to cause a dramatic impact on the bio-diversity of our oceans and fresh waters, not to mention a host of other problems. A particular type of fish is offered on a menu or at a market, because of its high public demand, not always correlating

#### By Suzanne Boothby

to the health and livelihood of that species. Many groups, like the National Audubon Society and the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch Program are now trying to raise awareness about these issues.

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A recent campaign started in San Francisco called "Take a Pass on Chilean Sea Bass" has now been adopted by more than 50 Chicago-area chefs. Modeled after the success of a similar campaign to save swordfish, this action is meant to lower demand for certain fish that are in danger of commercial extinction. When the

consumer demand goes down, so does the price paid for fish, allowing time for populations to grow or to implement new fishing practices.

The Chilean sea bass, which is actually not a bass but a Patagonian toothfish, is a slow-growing, deep-ocean species that has gained popularity in the restaurant circuit for its moist and tender texture. Most of the species caught today weigh about 20 pounds, but a full-grown adult can weigh as much as 250 pounds. Most Chilean sea bass are caught before they have a chance to reproduce, they reach maturity at 10 to 12 years, making them more prone to overfishing. They live in deeper parts of the ocean, also making regulation harder. Almost 80 percent of the Chilean sea bass sold in the world market has been illegally obtained, according to the National Environmental Trust, one of the groups supporting the campaign.

But the toothfish is not the only fish in trouble. With growing ecological and health concerns associated with certain types of seafood, here are some basic questions to guide your choices:

1. Is the wild population large enough to sustain fishing?
2. What are the levels of wasted catch or bycatch?
3. Is the fish caught or farmed in ways that protect the environment?

Women, in particular, have another reason to avoid eating certain types of fish. Illinois health officials issued a statewide advisory in April warning women who are pregnant or of child-bearing age to cut down on the amount of sport fish they eat due to high levels of methylmercury found in the fish's muscle tissue. The mercury absorbed in a woman's system could have devastating effects on the developing brain of a fetus. The advisory stated that women and children under age 15 should not eat large predator fish like striped bass, flathead catfish, northern pike and others more than once a week. Similarly, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has warned pregnant women to avoid swordfish, shark, tilefish and king mackerel, but recommends consuming up to 12 ounces of other fish per week.

A growing company called Ecofish, based in New England, has provided sustainable fish to its customers for almost 10 years. Ecofish works only with healthy, well-managed fisheries offering customers ecologically sound seafood. All fish is flash-frozen within two hours of harvest and sent to chefs, grocery stores and homes throughout the country. The Ecofish line includes three of the top ten most popular varieties of seafood including albacore tuna, wild Alaskan salmon and Pacific halibut, as well as mahi mahi. Stores in Illinois that sell Ecofish are Heritage Health Foods, 4051 183rd St., Country Club Hills, 708-957-0595 and McHenry Health Food Store, 4059 W. Elm St., McHenry, 815-363-6848. To order home delivery go to the website at [www.ecofish.com](http://www.ecofish.com)

## Fish to Avoid

**Atlantic Cod:** Cod has been used for many years in fish and chips baskets, but its popularity has led to poor management, overfishing and destruction of undersea habitat. Rebuilding plans are in the works, but for now this fish needs a break from dinner tables.

**Bluefin Tuna:** In the past 10 years, the Atlantic bluefin tuna population has dropped to 10 percent of what it was. International

management efforts have failed to create a recovery of the species.

**Caviar:** Caviar comes from the eggs (roe) of sturgeon, that are sieved to remove fatty tissues and membranes. Sturgeon are found mostly in the Caspian sea. One large sturgeon can produce hundreds of pounds of roe, but some of the most popular types of caviar—beluga, sevruga, and osetra—come from sturgeon that are endangered. Russian wildlife officials seized 75 tons of illegal caviar in 2000, but this is only a fraction of the illegal catch. Also, about 90 percent of the fish killed for caviar contain no eggs. Alternative: Seek out roe from farmed paddlefish, a close relative to sturgeon.

**Farmed Salmon:** Wild Atlantic salmon in the U.S. are virtually extinct and Pacific salmon populations are listed as endangered. The majority of Atlantic salmon sold in the U.S. come from farms. But many problems exist with this aquaculture. Salmon escaping from farms is frequent and poses risks to natural populations like disease transfer and interbreeding. The farms also cause pollution and use large amounts of wild-caught fish as feed.

**Red Snapper:** Seen mainly in the Atlantic, red snapper are found in waters near Massachusetts and in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, especially in offshore reefs or banks in the Gulf of Mexico. They spend their first two years of life over sand and mud bottoms feeding on shrimp, squid and small fish. As a result, baby snappers are readily taken as bycatch in shrimp trawling. In the Gulf alone, about 35 million red snapper are caught each year and discarded, usually after they have died.

**Shark:** Once a rarity, shark has now become a popular dish. But sharks are another slow-growing fish that produce few offspring and cannot survive high demand and overfishing. More than 100 million sharks are killed each year, mostly to make shark-fin soup. No management exists for sharks in international waters and of the 125 fishing nations only 4 regulate shark fishing.

## Good Alternatives

**Alaskan Halibut:** Halibut from the Pacific ocean are considered abundant and the Alaskan fishery in particular is well-regulated and uses longlines with little bycatch. At Alaska's fishery, scientists

use survey data to determine a strict quota of fish that can be caught each year to keep the population healthy.

**Alaskan Salmon:** Alaska's wild salmon fishery has been certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) as the most environmentally sound choice. It was the first U.S. fishery to be certified as sustainable by the MSC. California's wild-caught salmon are also managed effectively and the fishing season is regulated to maintain the population.

**Albacore Tuna:** This tuna, also known as tombo tuna, cannot be filleted because of its unusual bone structure. It is mostly canned and is the only type of tuna labeled as white. Most albacore tuna in U.S. markets is from Pacific fisheries that work to keep the tuna at sustainable levels, but be aware of overfishing in the North Atlantic ocean.

**Catfish:** All catfish found in this country are farm-raised in fresh water ponds mainly in the South. The catfish eat a plant-based diet and are raised with little impact on the environment. It is the fifth most-consumed fish in the U.S.

**Mahi Mahi:** This Hawaiian fish is known for breeding rapidly, so the species can withstand a healthy amount of fishing. Populations are known to be healthy; however, no future management plan is in place to prevent overfishing in the future.

**Rainbow Trout:** This fish is native to coastal streams and lakes of western North America, but has grown in popularity because of its farming. Trout farming is the oldest form of aquaculture in the country dating back almost 150 years. They are farmed inland using closed systems that don't release polluted water.

**Tilapia:** A native to Africa this fish was introduced to Arizona for aquaculture in the 1960s and is now farmed worldwide. It is a favored fish for farming because of its high growth rate and frequent tendency to reproduce. Tilapia farming is considered to have the least environmental impact of any farmed fish due to enclosed systems and water controls.

*\*compiled from Monterey Bay Seafood Watch Program and The Seafood Choices Alliance Seasense database.*