

CONSERVATION ALLIANCE  
FOR SEAFOOD SOLUTIONS

# A Common Vision for Sustainable Seafood

Six steps businesses can take to develop and implement sustainable seafood commitments that improve the health of ocean ecosystems and protect our long-term seafood supply.

*[solutionsforseafood.org](http://solutionsforseafood.org)*



# A Common Vision for Sustainable Seafood

In 2008, the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions created the Common Vision for Environmentally Sustainable Seafood to provide guidance to businesses on developing and implementing sustainable seafood policies.

Today, more than 80 percent of the North American retail and institutional food service markets have adopted sustainable seafood policies using the Common Vision as a guide. Seafood businesses throughout the supply chain are working to meet their customers' demand for sustainable products by helping producers improve their practices. There are now more than 100 fishery improvement projects around the world, and aquaculture improvement projects are growing. Sustainability has become a critical part of doing business.

While we applaud this progress, significant challenges remain.

**Fishery and aquaculture improvement projects.** We need to expand fishery and aquaculture improvement projects and employ other tools including policy reform to help fisheries and farms address challenges.

**Addressing social issues.** Human rights violations, labor exploitation, and other social and economic issues impacting seafood supply chains are an increasing concern in the seafood industry. There is a need for an expanded vision of sustainable seafood that embraces both social and environmental protections. Socially responsible seafood as defined by the Alliance<sup>1</sup>, includes the following key components: (1) Protecting human rights, dignity, and respecting access to resources; (2) Ensure equality and equitable opportunities to benefit; and (3) Improving food and livelihood security. All companies, regardless of size, sector, or operating context, at a minimum must adhere to all legal and policy requirements protecting human rights. Over time, businesses can go further by ensuring their sourcing has a net positive impact on the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of fisheries and communities.

**Traceability and transparency.** There is strong agreement that the ability to trace seafood back to its source is critical to both environmental and social improvements, but we still lack the tools to implement traceability across the industry. And we need a better understanding of the collective impact that sustainable seafood commitments have.

The Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions remains committed to working with businesses that buy and sell seafood to achieve sustainable fisheries and aquaculture production. This ongoing partnership is one of the critical elements to achieving the long-term viability of the seafood supply that is essential for business and that we all depend on as a global community.

<sup>1</sup> Kittinger J, Teh L, Allison E, Bennett N, Crowder L, Finkbeiner E, Hicks C, Scarton C, Nakamura K, Ota Y, Young J, Alifano A, Apel A, Arbib A, Bishop L, Boyle M, Cisneros-Montemayor A, Hunter P, Cornu E, Levine M, Jones R, Koehn Z, Marschke M, Mason J, Micheli F, McClenachan L, Opal C, Peacey J, Peckham S, Schemmel E, Solis-Rivera V, Swartz W, Wilhel T. 2017. Committing to socially responsible seafood. *Science* 356(6341): 912-13. Available from: <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/356/6341/912>.

To support our work with seafood businesses, we developed an updated version of the Common Vision that companies can use as a resource for deepening sustainable seafood commitments. The Conservation Alliance greatly appreciates the feedback that companies throughout the seafood supply chain, as well as experts on social and economic issues, provided as we worked to update this document.

**The following are six steps companies can take to develop and implement a sustainable seafood commitment. Seafood sustainability is a journey, and we encourage companies to strengthen commitments to accelerate our collective progress.**



### **Make a Public Commitment**

Develop a comprehensive commitment on sustainable seafood that includes time-bound objectives for addressing environmental and social issues and traceability.



### **Collect Data on Seafood Products**

Monitor the sustainability of seafood products and assess labor and human rights risks within the supply chains you source from.



### **Make Responsible Sourcing Decisions**

Support sustainable and improving seafood sources through purchasing decisions.



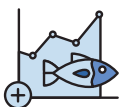
### **Be Transparent**

Make information regarding the environmental and social performance of seafood products publicly available and report on progress against your sustainable seafood commitment.



### **Educate Staff, Customers, and Vendors**

Educate employees, customers, suppliers, and other key stakeholders about sustainable seafood, including the importance of addressing environmental and social issues and working toward full traceability.



### **Support Improvements in Fisheries and Aquaculture**

Engage in policy and management reform that leads to positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes in fisheries and aquaculture production, including ensuring implementation of core labor standards.

# Steps to Achieve a Common Vision for Sustainable Seafood

The Common Vision for Sustainable Seafood identifies six critical areas where businesses that buy and sell seafood can demonstrate leadership and take action to ensure a sustainable seafood supply. We've outlined specific actions to address these areas below.



## Make a Public Commitment

Creating a company commitment on sustainable seafood shows an important commitment to action and provides essential guidance for company practices.

### **A sustainable seafood commitment should:**

- Commit to address both environmental and social issues and improve traceability in the seafood your company buys and sells.
- State the scope of the business included (*e.g., all divisions or a subset*).
- State the seafood products covered by the commitment (*e.g., wild-caught, farmed, fresh, frozen, shelf-stable, private label, branded, value-added, nonfood items such as pet food and supplements, specific menu items, etc.*). If the commitment doesn't include 100 percent of a company's seafood, include the percentage covered by volume.
- Identify the criteria you're using to measure the performance of the seafood you source.
  - » If you've developed your own company criteria, make that public.
  - » If you're using external certification or ratings programs, state the ones that meet your sustainability commitment.
  - » If you're sourcing from fishery improvement projects, state whether basic, comprehensive, or both types of FIPs meet your sustainability commitment.

- Include specific objectives and deadlines.
- Outline activities your company will undertake to address the critical areas of data collection, transparency, procurement, education, and supporting improvements in fisheries and aquaculture.
- Make the full sustainable seafood commitment, including information about all elements above, public (*e.g., posted on your website, annual reports to shareholders, on your NGO partner's website, or in your place of business*).

Companies can make sustainable seafood policies stronger by including a broader range of seafood products, setting more ambitious objectives and deadlines, and including activities that cover all steps in the Common Vision. We recommend that efforts to address human rights abuses, labor violations, and other social issues apply to all seafood a company sells.

## Example Objectives

The following are examples of a range of sustainable seafood commitment objectives businesses can adopt.

### Environmental:

By X date, transition 100 percent of fresh and frozen wild-caught and farmed (or aquaculture) products sold in store to Marine Stewardship Council or Aquaculture Stewardship Council certified; Seafood Watch green or yellow rated where certified product isn't available; or in a comprehensive FIP.

### Social:

Conduct an independent risk assessment of working conditions and labor rights in supply chains that includes meaningful feedback from workers and develop a plan to address issues in highest-risk seafood sources.

### Traceability:

By X date, 100 percent of all fresh and frozen seafood products sold in store, including private label and brand, will be fully traceable to their source.





## Collect Data on Seafood Products

Detailed data collection on seafood products is critical to know if you are meeting your commitment. It also contributes to protecting your long-term supply of seafood. Understanding your products and where they come from enables you to assess the sustainability of your products, measure changes, and take action to improve supply over time.

As technologies, regulations, and consumer expectations continue to advance, best practices for fisheries monitoring and seafood traceability are in a state of rapid evolution. All companies can strengthen their seafood purchasing by adopting traceability and product information policies that begin with commitments to basic practices and that continuously improve as industry best practices evolve.

**At present, basic information to collect and monitor includes, but is not limited to:**

### **What:**

- Species common and scientific (Latin) names.
- Volume of product purchased.
- Whether the product is rated or certified (*e.g., Seafood Watch rating, certified by Marine Stewardship Council with Chain of Custody code 1234*).
- Name of supplier.

### **Where:**

- Fishery location (if within EEZ): [FAO Major Fishing Area](#) + country EEZ.
- Fishery location (if outside of EEZ): FAO Major Fishing Area + flag of vessel + RFMO or high seas name.
- Farming location: Country of farming.

### **How:**

- Wild-caught or farmed designation.
- Fishing methods or aquaculture production methods used (*e.g., [FAO Fishing Gear type](#), [FAO National Aquaculture Sector Overview maps collection](#) – pg. 28*).

Companies can collect additional important information to support specific traceability, risk-assessment, and improvement efforts. As this information is used to support specific initiatives, companies need not collect this data for every product. At present, this information includes, but is not limited to:

### Who:

- Producer/processor names.
- Flag state and unique identification number of vessel (International Maritime Organization number when possible).
- Catch certificate and/or fishing vessel license.
- Name of fishing vessel(s), and if transshipment at port or at sea occurred the identifying information of the vessels involved in the exchange.

### What:

- Quantities of product at time of harvesting/production, landing (if wild-caught), and processing.
- Unique identifiers (*e.g., lot numbers, batch codes, serial numbers, etc.*).
- For aquaculture: Details on feed sources, including the basic information listed above for all wild inputs to the feed.
- Name of fishery improvement project or aquaculture improvement project.
- Products and/or supply chains at high risk for illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing or human rights and labor abuses, including:
  - » [Trafficking in Persons tier](#) for the country where the product is harvested and processed.
  - » For wild-capture: IUU status of the country where the product was harvested.

### Where:

- For aquaculture: Name and GPS location of farms.
- For wild-capture: Port/location of landing and vessel satellite tracking records.
- Country of origin labeling (see [United States Department of Agriculture rules](#)).

### When:

- Date(s) of fishing or aquaculture production.
- Date(s) of landing (and transshipment if applicable).
- Date(s) of processing.

### Worker Information:

- Worker manifest at sea.
- Duration of work at sea between returns to port.
- Contract provisions, including hours and conditions of work, payment, and deduction protocols.
- Labor recruitment channels (*e.g., government or private, and if private names of the private recruitment agencies/brokers*).
- Third-party validator or auditor of worker information.
- Direct reports from workers before and after they are at sea through confidential interviews and grievance mechanisms that include protections against reprisals.

The seafood industry has historically operated using paper-based systems to track product information. It is important that companies work toward electronic, automated data capture and traceability systems to allow for real-time information sharing.



## Make Responsible Sourcing Decisions

Companies that buy and sell seafood can make a significant difference by changing buying practices and communicating expectations to vendors. Procurement options include seafood that is certified, rated, and engaged in improvement projects. For additional information on the certification and ratings programs that Conservation Alliance members recommend, please visit their websites, accessible via the Conservation Alliance [members web page](#).

**Certified seafood:** Preferentially sell seafood that is certified to address local, regional, and global concerns regarding environmental and social performance.

**Rated seafood:** Preferentially sell seafood with a “buy” rating by a member of the Conservation Alliance.

**Improving seafood:** If purchasing seafood that is not sustainable, source from operators that are working proactively to improve the environmental and social performance of fisheries or farms, and can demonstrate significant progress in fixing problems by meeting clear milestones and deadlines for improvement. Some specific ways to address environmental and social challenges include:

**Improvement projects:** For companies that source from fishery improvement projects (FIPs) or aquaculture improvement projects (AIPs):

- Source from FIPs that meet the Conservation Alliance [guidelines](#) for basic or comprehensive FIPs. Require that FIPs you source from meet at minimum the criteria for basic FIPs, be listed on the forthcoming public Fishery Progress tracking website, and demonstrate progress over time. Encourage fisheries developing new projects to pursue the comprehensive FIP model and encourage basic FIPs to transition to comprehensive over time.
- Source from AIPs that have clear objectives and timelines, a baseline needs assessment, a work plan, and a mechanism for publicly reporting progress on a regular basis.
- Ask FIPs and AIPs to include social improvement criteria.

**Addressing social challenges:** Work with your suppliers over time to resolve human rights and labor abuses and support sustainable livelihoods for producers. Specific steps include:

- Ensure suppliers meet minimum social standards in management practices as recommended in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), the [International Labour Organization’s Conventions and Recommendations](#), and Social Accountability International’s [SA8000 Standard](#).



- Establish due diligence procedures to verify that all labor necessary for products is voluntary (*i.e., no human trafficking, slave, child, underage, forced, bonded, or indentured labor*).
- Establish effective grievance mechanisms for labor abuses and worker safety that meet the minimum standards set forth in the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) and include a meaningful role for workers themselves in the monitoring of workplace conditions and resolving disputes.
- Develop corrective action plans with suppliers found to violate human or labor rights.
- Include requirements in purchasing agreements and contracts that suppliers will respect fundamental labor rights, including freedom of association and right to collective bargaining, and will pay workers a living wage.
- Support the [UN FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries](#).
- Ensure that fishing activities benefit coastal communities adjacent to the resource.

**Seafood that fails to improve:** Stop selling seafood products with serious ongoing environmental and/or social impacts. Phase out fisheries, producers, and suppliers that fail to improve their environmental and social performance in accordance with agreed-upon action plans.

**For all seafood you buy, work to improve traceability:** Fully traceable seafood is crucial for ensuring food safety, verifying environmental performance, and avoiding products that are at high risk of being illegally harvested or associated with human and labor rights abuses. Knowing where and how your seafood is caught will help you determine whether it is sustainable, improving, or failing to improve. Companies should:

- Ensure all products are traceable back to legal sources (*i.e., vessels or farms*) and that aquaculture inputs such as hatchery stock and feed are also legal and traceable.
- Verify source information and full-chain traceability by researching high-risk items (*e.g., items from countries on the EU and U.S. IUU lists, and items with complex supply chains with multiple processing or mixing events*), conducting traceability desk audits, or pursuing third-party traceability certifications.



## Be Transparent

Being transparent about your supply chain and actions you're taking to achieve your sustainable seafood commitment will help your customers understand your actions and aid in tracking progress all companies are making. Best practices for transparency include:

- Provide an annual public update on progress (*e.g., on your website, social media, annual business report, newsletter, etc.*) that summarizes progress toward your objectives, as well as activities completed and planned for the next year. When reporting progress, be as accurate as possible and provide evidence for all claims you make about progress.
- Make sustainability information (*i.e., common and scientific name, country of origin and harvest, fishing or farming method, rating or certification if appropriate, or other items noted in the complete list in the Collect Data on Seafood Products section above*) regarding your seafood products easily accessible to customers and other interested parties. This includes:
  - » Labels on products sold in your store.
  - » Information on your menu or product list.
  - » Information shared via your website or on signs or other materials in your place of business.



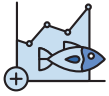


## Educate Staff, Customers, and Vendors

Ongoing education of staff, customers, and vendors will increase their understanding of sustainability.

You can do this by:

- Regularly training management and employees about sustainable seafood issues. This includes training staff when they are hired and on an ongoing basis throughout their employment.
- Preparing sales and wait staff to help customers choose sustainable seafood items.
- Sharing educational materials (*e.g., signs, brochures, web content*) with customers about your sustainable seafood commitment and why you made it.
- Setting expectations with vendors about social and environmental seafood issues, improvement mechanisms, and the requirements of your sustainable seafood commitment. This includes:
  - » Including in contracts the expectations that vendors will support efforts to achieve your sustainable seafood commitment, such as committing to comply with federal and international laws on human rights and legal seafood sourcing.
  - » Educating vendors about the importance of engaging workers and their organizations in a meaningful way in the monitoring of workers' rights and welfare.
  - » Conveying concerns to vendors when you have them.
  - » Working collaboratively with vendors to develop a plan to address concerns and agree upon a timeline for improvements.
  - » Providing direct support (*e.g., training, resources, etc.*) to help implement the plan and improve performance.



## Support Improvements in Fisheries and Aquaculture

To ensure a long-term supply of seafood, fisheries and farms need to improve their practices. We also need strong management of fisheries and aquaculture and policies that ensure seafood is legal and traceable. There are many ways companies that buy and sell seafood can support these improvements, including:

- Advocating for fisheries and aquaculture policies and management to be more environmentally sustainable. Examples include:
  - » Voicing support for policies at the local, state, national, or international levels by writing letters, making calls, or attending meetings.
  - » Asking others, such your vendors or a trade association, to speak up about a policy issue.
- Collaborating with other companies and conservation or human rights organizations to develop solutions to challenges in wild and farmed seafood. Examples include:
  - » Providing input to strengthen certification and ratings programs.
  - » Participating in roundtables on key issues, such as traceability.
  - » Supporting research on improvements to fishing or aquaculture practices.
- Working with suppliers or producers directly to improve fishing or farming practices to meet environmental and social sustainability standards or obtain credible certification. One way to do this is by participating in fishery improvement projects or aquaculture improvement projects. If participating in a fishery improvement project, encourage it to meet at least the basic criteria outlined in the Conservation Alliance's [guidelines](#).
- Engaging with governments and international organizations on expectations related to human rights, labor rights, and sustainable livelihoods. Examples include:
  - » Sharing best practices, approaches, and tools you find to be successful in supply chain sustainability programs.
  - » Identifying risks and solutions in partnership with national and international trade unions.
  - » Sending clear, unified messages to national governments about social concerns, leveraging the role that businesses play in providing employment opportunities and economic development.
  - » Advocating for policies that enable safe and fair working conditions.

1 - The International Labour Organization has identified four categories of rights at work that should be respected for all workers regardless of location or sector of employment: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced or compulsory labor, the abolition of child labor, and the elimination of discrimination in respect to employment and occupation.