

Business Commitments to Sustainable Seafood: *Success Stories and Lessons Learned*

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Photos (clockwise from top left):
 Loblaw; Safeway;
 Peter Trott, WWF-Australia;
 Safeway; Vancouver Aquarium;
 Peter Trott, WWF-Australia.

Cover: Vancouver Aquarium

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Coles and WWF-Australia Partnership

Providing company funding to reform fisheries

Through its Market Transformation Initiative, WWF-Australia has worked to support companies with their commitments of sourcing sustainable seafood and fish oil products by 2015. One partnership in particular, with the Australian supermarket chain Coles, has achieved striking results in improving both the understanding of the company's vast and diverse seafood supply chain and the sustainability level of those seafood products. Since the partnership began in 2011, WWF has helped assess the ecological sustainability of seafood products at Coles and throughout its supply chain, made recommendations for Coles to transition to more sustainable products, and provided guidance for driving improvements in source fisheries.

STEPS OF PARTNERSHIP

The sustainable seafood commitment at Coles has involved steady efforts on the part of staff from both WWF-Australia and Coles. During the initial year of the program's launch, WWF and Coles made a concerted effort to reach out to government agencies and industry bodies as a way to introduce the program with full transparency. According to Peter Trott, policy manager of fisheries markets for WWF-Australia, the partnership process has entailed the following key steps:

- **Conduct sustainability assessments.** At the outset, the partnership initiated a third-party review of all of Coles' seafood offerings (including both aquaculture and wild-capture sources) in order to obtain an ecological sustainability baseline. Over 500 assessments were completed as part of this step. Coles covered the costs of these initial 500 assessments. Based on WWF assessment criteria, Coles products were ranked in three categories: high need, medium need, and low need for improvement. During this relatively hectic stage, numerous independent consultants were involved in conducting the detailed assessments.
- **Target efforts for mutual benefit.** WWF and Coles concentrated efforts on improving fisheries and farms that identified as high need for improvement and those products that were sourced in significant volumes and value to Coles' business. WWF provided recommendations for developing Fisheries Improvement Project (FIPs) and Aquaculture Improvement Project (AIPs) and other improvements to reduce the risk level.
- **Engage stakeholders in improvement.** Both Coles and WWF staff sat down in-person with fisheries representatives, government officials, and industry bodies to review and seek agreement on issues of ecological risks that needed further management. These discussions were solutions-oriented and provided an opportunity for WWF to engage with key industry players, in Australia and around the world. Considering

that Australia imports majority of its seafood, this process was far from trivial, as it involved extensive communications with regional WWF offices and multiple points of liaison throughout the region.

- **Improve seafood supply chains.** The Coles-WWF partnership has identified and developed plans to work with fisheries and farms to address the known ecological risks in the Coles supply chain. Coles has encouraged many fisheries to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to participate in a formal Fisheries Improvement Project (FIP) or Aquaculture Improvement Project (AIP). Coles has also encouraged some fisheries which were identified as good candidates for MSC/ASC to enter into the full assessment.

LESSONS LEARNED

Reflecting on the core takeaways from WWF's partnership with Coles, Trott shared the following highlights:

- **Establish the right expertise on your team.** Staff with key skillsets, from technical capacity to market engagement capacity, will boost an NGO's ability to advise its retail partner.
- **Be transparent with your stakeholders.** Opening the black box and maintaining active communications with suppliers allows them to become part of the process and encourages their early buy-in. As Trott explained, "It's better to get suppliers to sign on to the program, so that they believe in the approach and help drive the course."
- **Set realistic, achievable goals.** Similar to the adage that "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it," it's important to establish clear goals for the commitment and to develop metrics that will indicate signs of progress. By setting clear expectations of goals, an NGO and its partner have a built-in tool for accountability and for making course corrections, if needed.
- **Ensure good governance.** Make sure senior and influential staff are engaged, committed and have the right competencies to strategically direct the partnership at critical times. Develop effective and concise reporting based on pre-agreed metrics across all components of the work, and craft escalation procedures for the inevitable scenario when both organisations cannot agree at an operational level.
- **Process, process, process.** Spend time at the beginning of the partnership to put in the right processes. These should not be administratively burdensome, but should focus the discussions on complex issues around risks, opportunities and the critical components of the partnership.

Unprecedented Government Support for Certification

Coles' involvement in fisheries improvement has extended far beyond the reaches of its own supply chain. Working in concert with other industry actors and NGOs like WWF, the company has engaged with the Western Australian Government, which created a unique public fund to support third-party certification of fisheries.

There are no other known examples of governments providing funding at this scale for all of its fisheries to achieve certification.

In September 2012, the Western Australian Government announced a pledge to spend AUD 14.5 million over four years for all 47 of the state's wild-caught fisheries to gain third-party certification. According to Fisheries Minister Norman Moore, the program is a response to emerging retailer demand and sends a clear public message that the region is committed to delivering sustainable, wild-caught seafood.

"The State Government knows how important third party certification has been to our western rock lobster fishery, which was the first in the world to receive such accreditation from the international MSC," Moore said. "We are confident that this best-practice process will confirm the State's fisheries among the world's best and worthy of the tick of approval that independent certification bodies can provide."

Source:

Coles, 2014. "Responsibly sourced seafood." Accessed July 21, 2014. <http://www.coles.com.au/helping-australia-grow/responsible-sourcing-and-sustainability/responsibly-sourced-meat-and-seafood/responsibly-sourced-seafood>

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Peter Trott (WWF-Australia), Interview by CEA, June 19, 2014.

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http://www.wwf.org.au/our_work/saving_the_natural_world/oceans_and_marine/marine_solutions/sustainable_seafood/

WWF-Australia, 2014. "Strategic partnerships: Coles." Accessed July 21, 2014. http://www.wwf.org.au/about_us/working_with_business/strategic_partnerships/coles/



Photos: Peter Trott, WWF-Australia

Delhaize America and GMRI Partnership

Leveraging internal business leadership to improve fisheries

For many NGO staff and their retail partners, the initial effort to create a sustainable seafood policy and vet thousands of products can amount to long hours behind the scenes and a meticulous review of paper trails. Indeed, collecting detailed data on seafood products represents one of the key steps in the Alliance's Common Vision to achieve environmentally sustainable seafood. The experience of the Gulf of Marine Research Institute (GMRI) was no exception to this rule when it first partnered with Delhaize America to create a sustainable seafood policy and management plan in 2009.

According to Jen Levin, Sustainable Seafood Program Manager at GMRI, the process of reviewing seafood products was exhaustive, to say the least. "The recordkeeping alone was painstaking: there are thousands of products to review and each individual product can have multiple sources." Physically tracking down which products are coming from which sources can be analogous to a vexing jigsaw puzzle. GMRI staff helped develop a list of criteria to track, which were based on Delhaize America's sustainability policy and informed by external standards. Reviewing the criteria for each individual source could take a matter of minutes or several weeks, depending on the available data. For each fishery, GMRI staff verified that products were harvested in accordance with the key principles outlined in Delhaize's sustainability policy.

In the U.S. alone, GMRI has helped review the sourcing of 2,500 fresh, frozen, canned, and packaged seafood products. Although Delhaize America's respective banners—including Hannaford, Food Lion, and Bottom Dollar Food—may target different markets, all adhere to the same bar for sustainability.

LEADERSHIP-DRIVEN CHANGE

Similar to the origins of many partnerships between Alliance members and retailers, the impetus for improving seafood sourcing stemmed from the leadership team within Delhaize. According to Josanna Busby, who is category manager of seafood at Delhaize America, the company sought to take a proactive approach to sustainability, "We wanted to get out in front on seafood sustainability before it became a consumer concern. This was a push from our leadership."

Part of the internal push for seafood sustainability was motivated by the travel experiences of Kimberly Taylor, who is category director of meat and seafood at Delhaize America. When Taylor saw first-hand the sometimes troubling working conditions of fisheries in Asia (more broadly in the region, not necessarily of Delhaize's own suppliers), she recognized that "there was a need to put ground rules on the company's seafood sourcing," as Busby put it.

GMRI collaborated with Delhaize America to create a sustainable seafood policy and management plan in 2009. The GMRI team approached the project as a partner in the process, providing resources to the company and facilitating dialogue about the elements that mattered most to the company's values—rather than presenting Hannaford's leadership with a pre-assembled policy in a top-down fashion.

According to Levin, it's been a remarkable process to see the growth in industry interest and understanding of seafood sustainability issues. "Originally it was all about food safety," Levin explained. "But it's been neat to see the evolution over the past several years and to hear industry say, 'we're working on a FIP in this location and improving management in this fishery.' The change in the knowledge of the industry has advanced considerably."

ENDURING COMMITMENT DURING TIMES OF CHANGE

One inevitable aspect of working with a retail partner is that internal re-structuring may take place within a company, creating unforeseen changes in staff roles and processes. When Delhaize America undertook a major transition to merge internal functions in 2013, there were several changes in staff positions, including at high levels. Additionally, category management for all of seafood was transitioned to the parent company's headquarters in North Carolina.

However, the momentum from GMRI's earlier efforts on the partnership carried through the transition, partly as a result of the company's committed leadership. "Even after a major transition, the new leadership saw sustainable seafood as a priority," Levin said. "We saw strong internal leadership from our partners during the entire transition."

Delhaize staff likewise recognized the mutual benefits of the partnership and relied on GMRI to continue vetting every seafood product through its North Carolina headquarters. "I've leaned on Jen a lot to learn about seafood sustainability," said Busby. "I can feel confident that anything that Jen helps us vet, we can say without a doubt that the product is from a sustainable fishery and we can put it into our stores."

Delhaize's commitment to seafood sustainability has also motivated the company to become an active participant in FIPs for several species, including red snapper, bigeye tuna, yellowfin tuna, and blue crab. Additionally, Delhaize is the only grocery retailer with representation on the Work Group for the Jonah Crab FIP, which was initiated when the company learned that the Jonah crab supply did not meet its criteria for sustainable harvest in order to continue stocking the species in its stores.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE PARTNERSHIP?

Going forward, Delhaize will continue to take steps to ensure the sustainability of seafood sold in its stores, guided by the support and counsel of partners like GMRI. Busby suggests that the company has an appetite to share lessons learned and expand collaboration between Delhaize America and Delhaize Belgium. "I see us in the future as having a lot more conversations around sustainability with our international team going forward," Busby said.

Additionally, the company is seeking to tackle broader issues surrounding seafood sustainability, such as examining human rights and labor issues in its supply chain—a topic that remains relatively under-represented in the media, but one upon which Alliance members such as FishWise are beginning to shed more light.

Busby described Delhaize's commitment to address all aspects related to sustainable seafood policy, "Sustainability is an important part of our business, and we're continuing to delve into the social side of the seafood industry." To this end, the company requires its suppliers to sign a Seafood Master Vendor Agreement stating that the companies are not sourcing any wild-caught fish that has been purchased from boats or processed using either child or slave labor. Delhaize is currently developing a monitoring process with the Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) or a comparable audit standard to perform social audits to verify compliance with the vendor agreement. To date, the company has requested audits from all of its shrimp suppliers and will next pursue audits with its finfish suppliers.

But companies like Delhaize can often face a complex task in their quest to identify human rights abuses, which may be buried deep in supply chains. "We're beginning to use audits to monitor labor issues, but the audits can only go so far back in the supply chain," Busby explained. As forward-thinking retailers begin to explore more intricate issues such as human rights abuses in the supply chain, it is clear that there is ripe opportunity for Alliance members to provide needed tools and expertise to support retail partners eager to engage on these issues.



Photo: Delhaize 2013 Sustainability Report

Source:

Delhaize Group, 2012. "Case Studies: Sustainable Private Brands – Two Sound Approaches to Sustainable Seafood." Accessed August 6, 2014. <http://www.delhaizegroup.com/SustainabilityReport/2012/Performance/SPB/introduction.html>.

Hannaford Press Release, 2012. "Hannaford enacts sweeping sustainable seafood policy covering every seafood product in the supermarket." Hannaford, May 23, 2012. Accessed August 6, 2012. http://www.hannaford.com/catalog/news_pressrelease.cmd?leftNavArea=AboutLeftNav&productInfo=918271.

Jen Levin (GMRI), Interview by CEA, July 29, 2014.

Josanna Busby (Delhaize), Interview by CEA, August 6, 2014.

Seafood International, 2011. "Q and A: George Parmenter." Intrafish.com, Accessed August 6, 2014. <http://www.gmri.org/upload/files/George%20Parmenter%20Hannaford%20Interview.pdf>.

"... it's been neat to see the evolution over the past several years and to hear industry say, 'we're working on a FIP in this location and improving management in this fishery.' The change in the knowledge of the industry has advanced considerably."

Fairmont Pacific Rim and Ocean Wise Partnership

*Educating consumers
one sushi roll at a time*

In addition to educating consumers about seafood sustainability through purchases at the grocery store, Vancouver-based Ocean Wise is leveraging its partnerships with restaurants and executive chefs to deliver a sustainability message to diners grabbing a meal on the town. The Ocean Wise program includes over 550 partners across Canada, of which about 350 are restaurants. The program's goal is to educate consumers about the issues surrounding sustainable seafood and to empower them to make well-informed choices about their seafood options.

CHEFS AS A VOICE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Ocean Wise recently partnered with Fairmont Pacific Rim in downtown Vancouver to convert the hotel's sushi restaurant, The RawBar, into the first sushi venue in the city that sources only Ocean Wise-recommended seafood. According to Ann-Marie Copping, Ocean Wise manager, the partnership represents yet another platform to advance the sustainable seafood movement by using environmentally-minded chefs as a platform for consumer education.

"More and more people are turning to chefs to learn what they should and shouldn't eat. Chefs can open people up to trying new and different things," Copping said.

At the start of the partnership, 80 percent of the seafood items on The RawBar menu were considered Ocean Wise-recommended. The program is based on scores from the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch Program: in order to receive approval by Ocean Wise, wild-capture fish must have a Seafood Watch score of 2.8 or above, and farmed fish must have a score of 5.5 or above. Today, The RawBar sources 21 different fish species, all of which are Ocean-Wise recommended.

From the outset of the partnership, the leadership team at The RawBar was fully on board with Ocean Wise's recommendations. "Chef Taka is very knowledgeable and supportive of the sustainable seafood movement. He wanted to do the right thing on sourcing," Copping said.

ALTERNATIVE SOURCING OPTIONS

After Ocean Wise staff helped assess the seafood offerings on The RawBar menu, the program's greatest value was to provide recommendations on alternative sourcing options in order to achieve a fully comprehensive sustainable seafood menu. Making the transition to 100 percent sustainable can sometimes mean taking some of the biggest sellers off the menu and finding a suitable replacement that still appeals to diners' palates.

In the case of The RawBar, top priorities were finding alternatives for eel, yellowtail, and abalone. Unagi (freshwater eel) features in numerous rolls and is a top menu item for sushi lovers. However, there are currently very few sustainable sources for the eel, as fishers often capture eels that are too young in order to stock farms, ultimately depleting wild populations in the process. Ocean Wise recommended that the restaurant replace BBQ eel with smoked sablefish, while yellowtail was removed completely. For abalone, Ocean Wise relied on an approved partner in Hawaii: in order to reduce import costs, The RawBar found a team of local restaurants in Vancouver to also commit to a purchasing order for the abalone, creating a win-win for all parties.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSUMER EDUCATION

Now, diners at The RawBar can rest confident that the sushi on their plates is an ocean-friendly seafood choice. By making the transition to 100 percent Ocean Wise-recommended, The RawBar menu takes the guesswork out of ordering for consumers.

For Copping and her staff, the quest to advance the sustainable seafood movement continues. Just as Alliance members strive to continually improve the robustness of seafood commitments with their retail partners, Copping sees an opportunity to reach people "outside the sustainable seafood tent" by breaking new ground on partnerships with mid-tier restaurants.

"The opportunity for impact is high with the mainstream family-style restaurants, where the majority of Canadians dine," Copping said. The hope, at least, is that consumers exposed to sustainable menus while dining out may make more informed choices the next time that they visit their local grocer's seafood counter to prepare a meal for their family.

Source:

Ann-Marie Copping and Teddie Geach (OceanWise),
Interview by CEA, July 24, 2014.



Sous Chef Will Lew prepares an order during the launch of The RawBar in 2013. Photo: Vancouver Aquarium

“More and more people are turning to chefs to learn what they should and shouldn’t eat. Chefs can open people up to trying new and different things.”

— Ann Copping, OceanWise manager

Loblaw and WWF-Canada Partnership

*Using market influence
to drive sustainable seafood options*

During the past six years, Loblaw has worked in close partnership with WWF-Canada to set and make substantial progress toward its sustainable seafood commitment. In 2009, Loblaw made a commitment to source 100 percent sustainable seafood across all of its products by year-end 2013. As the largest buyer and seller of seafood in Canada, Loblaw is using its market influence to drive more responsible seafood products from its vendors. This purchasing power has encouraged a greater number and diversity of responsible seafood choices in the Canadian market, for instance being the first in North America to bring MSC-certified cat food to its shelves.

It is an example of putting the Alliance's Common Vision into action: one of the key steps in the Common Vision is for companies to demonstrate environmental leadership by updating their procurement practices to better reflect sustainability priorities. This can take the form of preferentially selling environmentally responsible seafood, or working with operators to proactively improve the environmental performance of fisheries or farms by establishing clear milestones and deadlines for improvement.

SUSTAINABILITY SPECTRUM OF PRODUCTS

In 2013, approximately 88 percent of Loblaw's seafood product sales in core seafood categories were procured from MSC- or ASC-certified sources, acceptable sources with conditions, or sources making meaningful progress toward sustainability.

Through the partnership, the Loblaw team developed a detailed vendor survey that requested from its more than 250 vendors, among other things, information on the scientific name of every fish and shellfish species in vendors' products, the fishing area from which the species were sourced, and the type of

gear used. Using criteria on an internally developed ladder of continuous improvement towards sustainability, Loblaw, WWF-Canada and scientific advisor Dr. Jeffery Hutchings reviewed and assessed the sustainability of more than 100 species and stocks, to help determine which of the 2,500 products did not meet a minimum bar for sustainability. WWF counselled Loblaw to engage Dr. Hutchings, a fisheries biologist at Dalhousie University, to ensure that the decisions were based on sound scientific advice.

According to Juliana Dutkay, strategic partnerships manager at WWF-Canada, the products fell along a spectrum of sustainability, making some choices easy and others more difficult. For example, MSC-certified products were automatically approved for sourcing. On the other hand, five at-risk species— shark, skate, Chilean sea bass, orange roughy, and American red snapper—were temporarily removed from the company's shelves until a sustainable source could be found. But most products fell somewhere in the middle, and rather than using an exclusionary sourcing method to delist these products, Loblaw worked with suppliers to drive fisheries improvements.

Jarmila Becka Lee, sustainable seafood advisor at WWF-Canada, explained the company's approach, "WWF and Dr. Hutchings presented recommendations to Loblaw on which seafood sources were considered sustainable. Loblaw then went to their suppliers and described the kind of conditions that the company required for its sourcing. Rather than not sourcing certain seafood products at all, the company looked to find more responsible sources."

The company is gradually driving progress. In 2010, early in its seafood commitment, the Loblaw stocked 22 MSC-certified products. By 2011, 73 products carried the MSC logo. Today, 133 MSC-certified wild-caught seafood products are on the store's shelves, more than any other Canadian retailer. Loblaw was the first North American retailer to offer ASC-certified tilapia in January 2013 and first to offer ASC-certified salmon in April 2014.

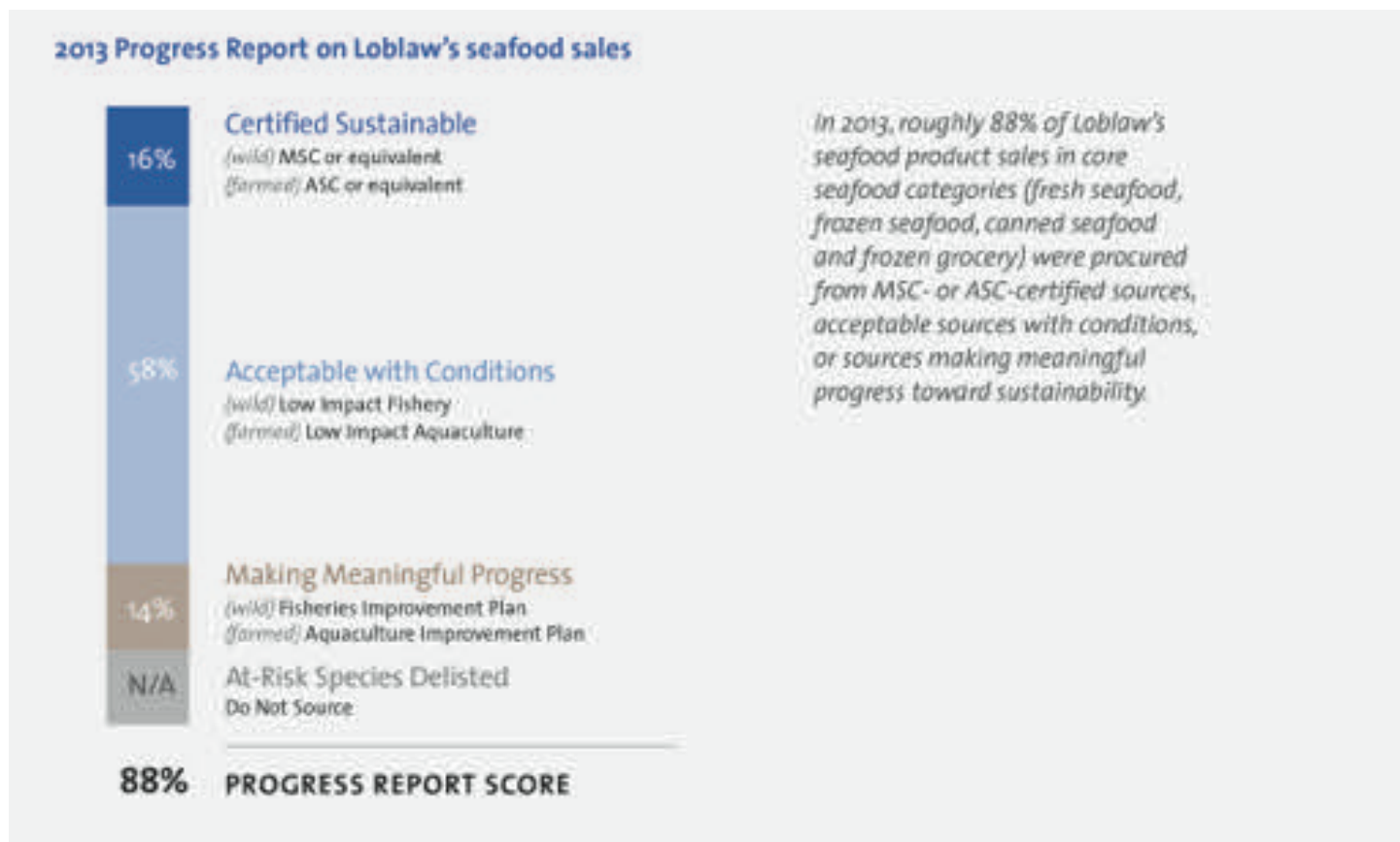
Notable progress has even been achieved with products that initially fell below the sustainability bar. In the case of Chilean sea bass, the company found a suitable alternative two years after removing the species from its stores. In 2012, Loblaw reintroduced Chilean sea bass that could be procured from two MSC-certified fisheries. With WWF and Dr. Jeff Hutchings's strategic guidance, the company continues to seek out ways to play a leading role in driving the seafood industry toward responsible harvesting of both wild and farmed seafood. For instance, supporting the 3PS Cod Fisheries Improvement Project.



Photo: Loblaw

FIP ENGAGEMENT IN THE COD FISHERY

In January 2011, WWF and Icewater, a groundfish company based in Newfoundland and North America's largest processor of Atlantic cod, started Canada's first FIP in the 3Ps cod fishery in Newfoundland. Loblaw supported the FIP by committing to source from it. With most of the cod stocks in the region still depleted or slowly recovering from collapse in the 1990s, the project set out an aggressive conservation action plan over a three-year period. In March 2014, it became Newfoundland's only commercial cod fishery to enter full assessment against the MSC standard, with an anticipated certification in 2016.



Source:

WWF-Canada interviews by CEA, July 28, 2014 as well as Loblaw Companies Limited publicly available information.

Safeway and FishWise Partnership

*Engaging on policy issues
beyond the supply chain*

When it comes to engaging on seafood policy issues, some retail partners are actively involved in topics beyond the limits of their own supply chains. The Fortune-100 company Safeway is a leading example of this trend. In 2009, the company initiated a partnership with FishWise to develop a tailored seafood procurement policy and one year later, it announced its commitment to source 100 percent of its fresh and frozen seafood from responsible and traceable sources by the end of 2015. The company reported that by the end of 2013, it had achieved more than 50 percent progress toward its goal.

FULL-FLEDGED ENGAGEMENT

In addition to Safeway's efforts on its ambitious procurement policy, the company's sustainable seafood program has also taken a public position on a wide range of issues, from habitat conservation in key commercial fisheries to human rights challenges in the imported shrimp supply chain. According to FishWise Executive Director Tobias Aguirre, the comprehensiveness of Safeway's engagement is a hallmark of the company's seafood sustainability program.

In recent years, Safeway has engaged on the following policy issues surrounding seafood sustainability:

- **Support for the Alliance's Common Vision:** In 2010, Safeway was one of the first companies to sign a letter of support for the Alliance's "Common Vision for Environmentally Sustainable Seafood." The Common Vision is a call to action that invites business to source environmentally responsible products and to provide direct support for policies and practices that ensure the long-term viability of the seafood supply.
- **Ross Sea Pledge:** In 2011, the company pledged not to buy or sell seafood harvested from Antarctica's Ross Sea, one of the last pristine marine areas on earth. Safeway joined other retailers, including Wegmans and Harris Teeter, in signing the "Ross Sea Pledge," which is aimed at encouraging member countries of the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources to designate the entire Ross Sea as a Marine Protected Area. According to Aguirre, "This pledge was unique in that the company made a statement that it's not necessary to fish everywhere in the world that fishing is possible. There are some places that are simply too important scientifically, they should be set aside for study."
- **Letter to the British Columbia trawl industry:** In cooperation with the David Suzuki Foundation and Living Oceans Society, Safeway sent a letter in 2012 to leaders in British Columbia's groundfish bottom trawl industry to encourage improved sustainability practices. In 2013, the industry agreed to significant conservation measures, including setting aside 20 percent of fishing grounds for conservation and establishing innovative bycatch limits to protect sensitive species of deep-water corals and sponges. This demonstration of market demand was a key influence that ultimately led to the fishery reforms.
- **Launch of responsibly-caught canned tuna:** Skipjack tuna is often caught using Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs), which attract a diversity of sea life—including juvenile tuna, sharks, sea turtles, and rays—and result in a high incidence of bycatch. In 2012, Safeway was the first major retailer to launch a private label of responsibly-caught canned tuna. The new line is now providing millions of cans of FAD-free tuna per year for American consumers at an affordable price and has prevented over 175,000 pounds of unintended bycatch. In the absence of policies that mandate more sustainable gear, Safeway decided to use its market leverage to convince a supplier to abandon FADs and commit to changing some of its practices in order to meet the Safeway volume.
- **Letter on human rights in Thai shrimp industry:** Following media and government reports of mounting evidence of human trafficking, forced labor, and other human rights abuses in the Thai shrimp industry, Safeway submitted a letter to all of its shrimp suppliers to learn what steps they are taking to ensure forced labor and human trafficking are not taking place in their supply chain.
- **Protection for the Bering Sea Canyons:** As a source for over half of the seafood caught in the U.S., the Bering Sea is known as "America's Fish Basket." Safeway joined other retailers such as Trader Joe's, Ahold USA, and Hy-Vee in support of protecting



Photo: Safeway

a portion of the canyons as a precautionary, science-based measure. The motion to set aside a portion of the vital habitat provides a protective buffer that makes sense from both an ecological and economic perspective.

GAINS FOR CONSERVATION AND COMPANY REPUTATION

For Safeway and other retailers, taking an active stance on certain issues, such as the Ross Sea Pledge, can occasionally lead to criticism by industry opponents. But according to Aguirre, the company remains resolute in its policy efforts. “Safeway is taking a leadership position and is focused on taking the right steps to achieve its goal,” Aguirre remarked.

Aside from isolated critiques, however, engagement on policy issues results in a range of benefits, both for the broader conservation community and for the company’s public reputation. Some of these benefits include:

- **Increased issue salience:** When a leading retailer draws attention to an issue such as harmful fishing practices by the British Columbia trawl industry, the issue assumes higher prominence in media headlines and public consciousness. Additionally, the pressure of market demand can shift industry players to adopt more sustainable business practices, as in the case of the British Columbia groundfish fishery, resulting in a collaborative effort and success.
- **Underlying support for sustainability movement:** In addition to reaffirming its commitment to its own seafood sustainability procurement policy, a retailer’s engagement on external policy issues demonstrates its concern and interest in the broader strength of the sustainable seafood movement. The influence of industry demand can carry weight both in corporate boardrooms and in policymaking circles alike.
- **Public recognition for conservation leadership:** Companies typically receive positive public attention for their sustainable business practices, which can yield returns for the company’s image and bottom line. For its leading role on policy issues and other practices, Safeway was ranked second overall on Greenpeace’s sustainable seafood retail scorecard in 2014 and 2013 (and first in 2012). The company has also received praise from the DOW Jones Sustainability Index, Seafood Choices Alliance, Newsweek Green Rankings, Carbon Disclosure Project, the Cal Academy of Sciences, and Ethisphere Institute.
- **How can other NGOs and retailers replicate Safeway’s success?** According to Aguirre, there are two key ingredients: it requires the identification of issues of high conservation concern that are relevant to the company, and a willingness on the NGO’s part to do the due diligence necessary to assist the company in taking an informed position. “The NGO needs to be discerning in its analysis of the many issues out there, and be willing to make an ask of its retail partner. FishWise has a strong relationship with Safeway, grounded in trust and mutual commitment towards the company’s 2015 Responsible Sourcing Commitment,” Aguirre said.

Timeline of Safeway’s Commitment to Sustainable Seafood

- MAY 2014 *Topped Greenpeace sustainable seafood list with a No. 2 ranking*
- FEB 2014 *Encouraged federal protection of sensitive coral habitat in Alaska’s Bering Sea Canyons*
- MAY 2013 *Received No. 2 ranking on Greenpeace sustainable seafood list*
- OCT 2012 *Launched line of responsibly caught Safeway brand chunk-light canned tuna*
- MAY 2012 *Named most sustainable seafood grocer by Greenpeace USA*
- APR 2012 *Launched Responsible Choice seafood Program*
- SEP 2011 *Pledged not to source Chilean seabass from Antarctica’s Ross Sea*
- APR 2011 *Selected as most sustainable seafood grocer by Greenpeace USA*
- MAR 2011 *Unveiled Safeway’s 2015 seafood policy*
- JAN 2010 *Discontinued sales of grouper, red snapper, orange roughy, shark, Atlantic halibut, and monkfish*
- DEC 2009 *Began working with FishWise*

Source:

Tobias Aguirre (FishWise), CEA Interview, July 24, 2014.

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<http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/Global/usa/planet3/PDFs/oceans/Carting-Away-the-Oceans-VIII.pdf>.

Safeway, 2014. “2013 Sustainability Report Highlights.” Accessed August 14, 2014. http://csrsite.safeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/2013_Sustainability_Report_Highlights.pdf.

Sobeys and SFP Partnership

Stimulating the development of industry-led FIPs

In 2010, Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) and Sobeys Inc. initiated a partnership under the guiding principal of “fix the worst first,” using the approach of implementing improvement plans in the most challenged fisheries. Like many other retail partners involved in seafood commitments with Alliance members, Sobeys holds significant buying power: as the second largest retailer in Canada, it owns or franchises more than 1,500 supermarkets under a variety of banners. Now, SFP is leveraging its relationship with Sobeys to provide publically available resources and drive the formation of industry-led FIPs.

SHARED PHILOSOPHY, NATURAL PARTNERSHIP

As Sam Grimley, Program Manager for SFP’s Buyer Engagement Team puts it, the ideals shared by SFP and Sobeys made the partnership a natural fit from the outset. “It is SFP’s internal philosophy to work with the most problematic fisheries,” Grimley explained. “Sobeys also supports this idea to improve fisheries and works hard to source from FIPs that are meeting the Alliance guidelines.”

In spite of the company’s positive reception, the path to developing a sustainable seafood commitment and engaging with FIPs was not without its challenges. The concept of FIPs were relatively novel at the start of the partnership, which required educational outreach to bring the Sobeys buying team up to speed on appropriate sourcing. Furthermore, there was a degree of internal turnover and several layers of staff involved in seafood purchasing at Sobeys, as one may expect at a large company of this size.

There were also upsides to these challenges, according to Grimley. When the Director of Sustainability assumed his role in 2013, he was committed to driving sustainability improvements, which afforded a smooth transition in the partnership. The collaboration between the Director of Sustainability and the Head of Meat and Seafood at Sobeys created a synergy in translating the company’s policy on paper to an implemented practice. As Grimley framed it, “While it’s important to work with the CSR team at a retailer, it’s also helpful to have the buyers reach out to the suppliers themselves.”

Additionally, SFP maintains ongoing and active educational outreach with the company’s network of buyers. “The company has seven or eight buyers around Canada, and it can be a challenge for SFP to work with multiple buyers at one company,” Grimley described. As a form of continuing education, SFP selects a species of concern every two months and provides updated information on the species to Sobeys’ buying team. This relationship building has created a foundation of trust between both parties. “If the buyers have questions around seafood sustainability, they can turn to SFP for counsel,” Grimley said.

ENGAGEMENT WITH SUPPLIERS AND FIPS

Through its engagement with SFP, Sobeys committed not to sell seafood species with any major sustainability issues by 2013, unless improvement plans are in place to address key concerns. The strategy, coined “beyond certification, to fix the worst first” has improved transparency on sources from 220 fisheries, engaged 150 suppliers, certified 70 private label products, and trained over 2,000 supermarket staff on seafood sustainability.

Though the company is currently in the process of evaluating its progress toward the goal, it has managed to engage 15 FIPs and has leveraged its supplier relationships to convey improvements in FIPs down the supply chain.

SFP and Sobeys are continuing to advance their engagement with suppliers and FIPs. Over the coming months, SFP will be gathering a series of supplier roundtables to examine challenges facing particular species or fisheries, and to identify opportunities for collaborative improvement efforts. Sobeys has participated in some of these roundtables, and has provided support in bringing suppliers to the table for these talks. In addition, Sobeys is also looking to host a Sustainability Summit with SFP during fall 2014, to which the company’s top suppliers will be invited.

According to Grimley, the ability to lean on Sobeys’ influence in reaching out to suppliers has been critical. “The takeaway from it all, in terms of getting suppliers to engage, is that the NGOs are still heavily dependent on our retail partners to get suppliers involved,” he said. “But we are starting to see a change in supplier willingness, with a number of suppliers championing improvement efforts.”

RISE OF INDUSTRY-LED FIPS

Ever since the introduction of FIPs, SFP has been a key player in developing FIPs. However, in the past few years, the organization has shifted its role from leading FIPs itself to encouraging the formation of industry-led FIPs. By using lessons learned from relationships with retailers like Sobeys, SFP has increased the public availability and transferability of its tools. In 2013 alone, dozens of new industry-led FIPs have been created.

According to Kathryn Novak, SFP Director of Buyer Engagement, SFP utilizes a specific approach when working with their retailer and supplier partners who are interested in improving the sustainability of the seafood supplies. The process includes the following steps:

- The retailer or supplier partner develops a public facing sustainability commitment or policy, with guidance and advice from SFP

- SFP works with the partner to conduct a sustainability risk analysis of the partner's source fishery and farms. This assessment utilizes publicly available, science-based information found in Fishsource.com to identify sustainability risks and improvement needs in supply sources.
- The partner then can share this information with suppliers and encourage the action by the supply chain around sustainability improvements.
 - Publicly available tools are available for stakeholders who are interested in developing and implementing a FIP. These include the [FIP Directory](#), which provides a comprehensive catalogue of FIPs globally, as well as resources for FIP participants including background briefs, technical manuals, and a detailed [FIP Toolkit](#) for creating and implementing a FIP.
 - Once a FIP has been developed, FIP participants then report FIP information publicly, using outlets such as the FIP Directory, to facilitate progress tracking.



Creative Commons Photo: Mary St. Germain-Brown

Source:

Bartholomew, Nadine, 2014. "Fishery Improvement Projects: How Retailers and the Supply Chain Advance Seafood Sustainability." Food Marketing Institute.

Hannaford Press Release, 2012. "Hannaford enacts sweeping sustainable seafood policy covering every seafood product in the supermarket." Hannaford, May 23, 2012. Accessed August 6, 2012. http://www.hannaford.com/catalog/news_pressrelease.cmd?leftNavArea=AboutLeftNav&productInfo=918271.

Kathryn Novak (SFP), Interview by CEA, August 1, 2014.

Sam Grimley (SFP), Interview by CEA, August 7, 2014.

According to Kathryn Novak, Director of Buyer Engagement at SFP, there appears to be an eager willingness for industry to develop FIPs. Novak described the recent trend, "There seems to be a strong appetite to create industry-led FIPs. Initially there was a lot of concern about potential costs, but resources have sprung up, such as the [Sea Pact](#). Consultancies have approached us; SFP has provided public tools; and several new industry-led FIPs have started in just a short time."

SFP public resources for FIPs

1. [SFP FIP Toolkit](#): *This toolkit is presented in three parts—initiation, implementation, and communication—to help guide users through the FIP process.*

2. [The Seafood Industry Guide to FIPs](#): *This guide provides an introduction on establishing and running a FIP. It also includes templates, such as sample budgets, workplans, and FIP agreements.*

3. [WWF FIP Handbook](#): *Published by WWF, this handbook is intended to support fishery stakeholders in developing and implementing comprehensive FIPs. It also includes templates such as sample scoping documents, FIP action plans, and reporting plans.*

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