

# Restaurants serve up the right recipe for seafood conservation

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VANCOUVER SUN

Sixteen B.C. restaurants have joined a program to help conserve oceans and seafood under various threats.

It's called Ocean Wise and as members, restaurateurs will, in stages, eliminate threatened seafoods or ones that harm the environment. Seafoods endorsed by the program will carry an Ocean Wise logo.

There are various categories, says Patrick O'Callaghan, vice-president of Conservation and Education for the Vancouver Aquarium, which has worked closely with C restaurant to launch this program.

He says some fish are endangered by overfishing, some are caught in ways that damage other species in bycatches, some impact the environment (farmed salmon in ocean pens) and some are fed more protein feed than they provide (fish-fed farmed seafood are typically 10 per cent efficient).

Restaurants that have joined the program are: C Restaurant, Araxi Restaurant and Lounge (Whistler), Aqua Riva, Bis Moreno, Blue Water Cafe and Raw Bar, The Cannery Seafood Restaurant, Chambar Belgian Restaurant, CinCin Ristorante and Bar, DV8 Lounge, Horizons Restaurant, Nimmo Bay Resort (Port McNeill), Ouisi Bistro, Raincity Grill, The Salmon House, Vancouver Aquarium Catering and Food Services, West Restaurant and Bar.

"There's a fair amount of work on both sides," says Sue Alexander, publicist for C restaurant. "Chefs need to know where their fish is coming from, how it's caught, what the Latin name is, common name, whether it's farmed or cultured, how it was caught or harvested and why you use the product."

C Restaurant, for example, took ahi

tuna off until they have a DNA test done to make sure it is the sustainable ahi tuna, "to make sure there is accountability," says Alexander. (Made nervous by the story out of New York where farmed salmon was being hawked as wild?)

The issues are complicated and confusing, making it impossible for consumers to sort through it themselves, says O'Callaghan. Rock fish, for example, is a long-lived fish that is severely overfished. They live 60 to 100 years and take a long time to mature. The problem is, they're called by many different names.

It's the same with tuna. "Some tunas are acceptable and other simply are not," he says. "It's no use even telling me the name as I won't necessarily find it on the banned list."

"That's one of the goals of this program — to reduce confusion. We're asking restaurants to work with their suppliers to provide us with information on how the fish are caught and the Latin names to accurately identify them. Ahi could be one of three different species — one is severely threatened and the other two are fine."

Chilean sea bass and orange roughy are also long-living fish with low reproduction rates. "Their removal is significant. There are long-term impacts," he says.

If caught in trawl nets, prawn fishing can cause severe damage to the bottom of the ocean and have an enormous bycatch (where other fish are dragged into the nets). But Ocean Wise does endorse spot prawns that are trap-caught.

"Someone [in the Ocean Wise campaign] suggested an advertising poster

with a couple ordering prawns and showing the rest of the bycatch with it," O'Callaghan says. "The plate would

be loaded with the prawns as well as bycatch, including sea sponges, sea grass and maybe a turtle thrown in.

"That might be graphic, but it would be accurate. There's a huge incidental catch that's pushed over the side, dead. Prawns are a big culprit in that and one of the biggest challenges."

Currently, Ocean Wise says no to most aquaculture but not to all.

"We've identified some land-based aquaculture operations that are doing a great job. We're not anti-aquaculture. We're pro-ocean, and we're using the best information we can get."

Removing species from menus doesn't have to harm business, he says. The program will be staged. They'll ask member restaurants to start with one species and then in another six months, move to another. "When the entire menu is Ocean Wise, they'll get the logo on the door for recognition."

For further impetus, the Vancouver Aquarium will be promoting the member restaurants to its visitors.

"The one thing C has shown clearly is that good dining is about creativity and that sustainability is about quality," says O'Callaghan. "If you put the concepts together and look for alternative seafoods, it can give restaurants a competitive edge."

"This isn't an exercise in punishment or taking business away. This is for consumers. We're doing work on behalf of the oceans."

Since the initial restaurant list was compiled, O'Callaghan says "many, many, many" others have asked to be included in the program. "We had to turn them away because of the timing."

