

# Thrifty's adopts Ocean Wise program

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Mike McDermid wouldn't be anywhere near as enthusiastic about his job if he thought problems facing the world's oceans and fish stocks were insurmountable.

"It's absolutely essential that something be done, but it's not too late," McDermid said from his office at the Vancouver Aquarium, where he manages the Ocean Wise sustainable seafood program.

"The changes that we've seen are truly impressive," he said. "We really are seeing changes from consumers down to the industry level."

Those changes took a major step forward last week when Thrifty Foods announced plans to begin labelling sustainably caught seafood with the Ocean Wise label.

The move means shoppers at Thrifty Foods' 22 outlets will have the option of buying seafood that is fished and harvested in an environmentally responsible manner.

According to the Ocean Wise website, qualifying products must be abundant and resilient to fishing pressures, managed in accordance with current scientific research, caught in ways that limit accidental bycatch of other species and harvested or cultured in ways that limit damage to aquatic environments.

Customers will be able to identify Ocean Wise approved products by a small logo on the item's price ticket, said Dave Sherwood, the grocery retailer's seafood manager.

Sherwood said the company's decision formalizes Thrifty Foods' long-standing emphasis on fresh, locally sourced and sustainable fisheries whenever possible.

"Customers want to know what is sustainable, they want to know the options," he said. "If things are farmed or harvested in a sustainable manner there'll be fish around for my kids and my kids' kids."

“Our seafood division is jazzed about this.”

And that’s probably a good thing given that a 2006 study published in the journal *Science* determined that all current and commercial fish and seafood species risk total collapse by 2050 if steps aren’t taken to protect biodiversity in the world’s oceans.

Thrifty Foods is one of the largest companies to sign on to Ocean Wise, a non-profit program the Vancouver Aquarium has targeted at restaurant owners and select “progressive retailers.”

With 2,400 locations serving Ocean Wise-certified products across Canada, McDermid and fellow program coordinators hope consumers’ clout will trickle down to individual fishers and help them adjust to a changing marketplace, rather than a changing environment.

“Highlighting positive options is something I think everyone wants,” McDermid said.

“Whatever consumers buy is what [fishers] will go and catch. If consumers just said we are not buying a certain type of seafood anymore, then there’s no incentive anymore.”

The Ocean Wise list is updated every six months based on the latest information on fish stocks and harvesting methods. More information about the program is available at [www.vanaqua.org/oceanwise](http://www.vanaqua.org/oceanwise).