

## Get Ocean Wise with your fish



(Feb 21, 2008) Scientists have been warning us for years that fish stocks are depleted and shortages are ahead if something doesn't change. Vancouver's [Ocean Wise](#) program is helping locals choose sustainable options.

### Ahead of the game

Launched in 2005 by the [Vancouver Aquarium](#), Ocean Wise works directly with restaurants, markets, and other food-related facilities to help them buy ocean-friendly fish. The program also helps consumers make informed choices and avoid fish on the endangered list.

Since its inception, Ocean Wise has blossomed from a local initiative to program with international influence -- in 2007, Australia kicked off its own version of Ocean Wise.

Looked at all the options

It's based on the successful Sustainable Seafood Initiative pioneered by the South Carolina Aquarium that worked with local restaurants to get them to nix iffy choices like orange roughy, Chilean sea bass and shark.

Helping consumers and business

"We wanted to design a program that would take this one step further and make it easier for consumers to identify the sustainable options," says Mike McDermid, the Vancouver Aquarium's Ocean Wise Coordinator. "We hope that this 'consumer demand' will create a positive atmosphere that will allow fishers and farmers to conduct operations more sustainably and get value for their product."

Helping to get sustainable

The first step to being designated Ocean Wise is for the restaurant to have a

menu assessment. Most start off by removing one unsustainable item while highlighting a sustainable item using the Ocean Wise logo and build from there.

The Ocean Wise staff also helps by determining which stock offered by suppliers is sustainable. That in turn helps chefs and buyers plan their menus. In order to be included in the program, the fish or seafood being sold must be in abundant supply and harvested without damage to the habitat or other species.

Among the program's recommended choices in B.C. are West Coast seafoods like Dungeness crab, sablefish, spot prawns and farmed clams.

#### Outstanding restaurants

The program is proving a success for many restaurants. One of the founding members, Vancouver's high end [C Restaurant](#), has a menu that is 100 percent Ocean Wise and has become so popular it was included in new edition of 1,000 Places to See Before You Die.

Another top seafood restaurant, Blue Water Café, hosts an annual February Ocean Wise celebration featuring Ocean Wise. This year's offering include grilled herring fillets, baked sardines and "sweet and sour" mackerel.

#### Growing in popularity

Ocean Wise is also a hit with restaurants in the Lower Mainland and throughout B.C., with some Alberta spots also getting on board. Other members include large-scale food service companies like those that serve Simon Fraser University and General Motors Place, as well as private clubs, cooking schools, markets and home delivery companies. As of early 2008, Ocean Wise had 120 participating members, with the Panago chain slated to join and increase membership to 270.

The Aquarium is also working with the fish and seafood industry. "Over the past year, we have grown to include over 10 local suppliers involved with the program," McDermid explains.

#### Rest of Canada

The benefits are obvious so why hasn't this caught on across the rest of the country? McDermid notes that it's difficult to make blanket statements about the sustainability of a species Canada-wide (like "don't eat scallops"). Each region and situation is different depending on the fishery involved or the method of catch.

#### Look for the symbol

In the meantime, when you're heading out to partake in a Vancouver seafood dinner, look for the Ocean Wise symbol on menus and display cases. You can also log onto their website for a [complete restaurant listing](#). Enjoy your guilt-free fish.