

Aquarium seafood sustainability program ready to go national

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Charlie Chin, sous-chef at The Refinery, serves sustainably caught salmon to hungry visitors at the Vancouver Aquarium yesterday.

The Vancouver Aquarium is so committed to serving sustainable seafood, even its fish eat the highest quality sashimi-grade spot prawns money can buy.

Monday, visitors were treated to the same calibre of cuisine enjoyed by the fish there, as the aquarium celebrated the fourth anniversary of its Ocean Wise program.

The conservation program, which partners with local restaurants and markets to serve environmentally friendly seafood choices, is on the cusp of becoming a national initiative, said Mike McDermid, Ocean Wise program manager.

He said, "2008 was our biggest year ever, with 73 new partner businesses (joining us), some from outside B.C."

"We should have an official (national) program launch in Toronto in the spring."

McDermid said one of the most influential new partners is the Compass Group, which has brought the program to 1,700 locations across Canada, including hospitals, college and university campuses and cultural venues, like the Toronto Zoo.

"The first change (the company) made was to remove unsustainably caught Atlantic cod, which accounted for a quarter of a million pounds (of fish), which is pretty phenomenal," said McDermid.

"It's becoming more and more our responsibility to be conscious of where our food is coming from and chefs ... want to feel good about what they feed people. (This program) is just a matter of giving them the tools and support (to do that)."