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UK shoppers ‘Caught Out’ by fish feed scandal

Supermarkets failing consumers and the oceans according to new report

- UK consumers indirectly and unknowingly consumed 177,000 tonnes of wild fish in 2019 by eating popular farmed seafood products including salmon and prawns, which are fed on fishmeal and fish oil (FMFO).
- On average, UK shoppers buying the top six farmed fish species in 2019 consumed a ‘hidden’ 172g of wild fish for every 100g of farmed fish eaten.¹
- New ranking finds that UK supermarkets are failing to properly set supply-chain standards to reduce the impact of farmed fish diets on the health of wild ocean ecosystems.
- Farmed seafood linked to extractive FMFO supply chains, which use fishing practices that are stripping the oceans bare and damaging marine ecosystems to feed aquaculture industry.
- ‘Caught Out’ report highlights poor overall performance of UK supermarket chains, with seven out of ten top retailers, including Waitrose, scoring under 30%.

UK shoppers are unknowingly consuming 2.5x more fish than they think, according to a new report which ranks the top ten UK supermarkets according to the sustainability of the farmed seafood that they sell.

‘Caught Out’, by the Changing Markets Foundation and Feedback, reveals that UK supermarkets are failing in their responsibility to protect our oceans, as seven out of the ten supermarkets received less than 30% on the fish feed sustainability scorecard, with ALDI finishing bottom of the list on 12%, Waitrose receiving just 22% and only Tesco achieving a score over 50%.

The report also found that UK shoppers indirectly and unknowingly consumed 177,000 tonnes of wild fish in 2019 by eating the top six farmed fish species including salmon and prawns, which are fed on fishmeal and fish oil (FMFO). That equates to a ‘hidden’ 172g of wild fish consumed for every 100g of farmed fish eaten,² almost all of which could have been eaten directly by people.³

These farmed seafood products are contributing to the collapse of wild fish stocks and taking a key source of protein away from some of the world’s poorest communities. That’s due to the aquaculture industry’s reliance on FMFO for fish feed, as revealed by Changing Markets’ in [‘Fishing For Catastrophe’](#). That report found links between illegal and unsustainable fishing practices in India, Vietnam and The Gambia and farmed fish and seafood products sold by UK retailers.

¹ See appendix A of ‘Caught Out’ report.

² See appendix A of ‘Caught Out’ report.

³ Wild fish is used to produce fish oil and fishmeal. This figure is based on the [103,000 tonnes of the top farmed species](#) (salmon, trout, seabass, seabream, prawns and basa) consumed by the UK population in 2019. It was calculated by quantifying the wild fish needed to produce fish oil required for salmon, trout seabass and sea bream consumed by the UK population. In the model, prawns and basa were fed on fishmeal created in the process of producing fish oil.

With most UK seafood purchased in supermarkets,⁴ and 70% of shoppers keen to buy sustainable fish, retailers have a duty to lead the way on ocean stewardship; however, 'Caught Out' has found that UK supermarkets are failing in this responsibility.

Jessica Sinclair Taylor from Feedback said: "Supermarkets have enormous power over supplier standards and the choices their customers make, and seafood selection is no different.

"By prominently marketing farmed seafood like salmon and prawns which are fed on wild fish and crustaceans, retailers are promoting an extractive industry which is threatening the long-term health of our oceans.

"Behind the blue planet rhetoric, supermarkets need to get real about the impact of aquaculture, and commit to targets to end the use of wild fish in aquaculture feed."

Natasha Hurley from Changing Markets, said: "UK supermarkets make bold claims about the sustainability of the farmed fish that they sell, however, our research has found that these claims are not backed up by the reality of how their farmed fish is produced.

"Our investigations have shown that the UK's leading retailers are linked to highly destructive fishing practices in Africa and Southeast Asia which are devastating marine ecosystems and depriving people of food.

"UK shoppers will be shocked to learn that for every 100g of farmed fish they are eating, they are consuming more than 172g of wild fish as well, which is taking food away from vulnerable communities and causing disastrous environmental impacts.

"By turning a blind eye to this, retailers are both failing in their responsibility to preserve the oceans and misleading their customers by hiding the true impact of their products."

ALDI

In 2018, ALDI was ranked no. 1 in the MSC League Table for having the highest percentage of MSC certified wild-caught products, however the discounter received the lowest score in the report, at just 12%. That was due to the supermarket's failure to label information on the origin of the farmed seafood sold; the failure to introduce binding requirements on fish feed and the lack of a senior member of staff responsible for seafood or aquaculture.

The company also failed to respond to the questionnaire for the report – a lack of engagement reflected in its wider failure to recognise the importance of ending farmed fish reliance on wild-caught marine ingredients, and a lack of serious corporate engagement with research on alternative feed ingredients.

Waitrose

One of the most surprising findings of the report was the poor performance of the high-end supermarket Waitrose, which received just 22% on the scorecard.

Like other retailers, Waitrose is heavily reliant on certification as a proxy for sustainable seafood supply chains. It also demonstrated limited transparency overall, failing to disclose information on any aspect of its farmed fish supply chains and claiming that the information requested was 'commercially sensitive'. It also lost points as its farmed-fish feed policy lacked substance.

⁴ https://seafish.org/media/State_of_the_Nation_Full_Report-web2.pdf

Jessica Sinclair Taylor from Feedback said: “Waitrose trailed other supermarkets, failing to live up to its glossy marketing about the sustainability of the seafood it sells.

“We were particularly disappointed that Waitrose didn’t clearly label farmed seafood products on their shelves, so it is impossible for shoppers to know what they’re buying and the impact it might have.

“Waitrose must remedy this and adopt strong policies to end its reliance on wild-caught fish to feed farmed seafood including a target to eliminate wild-caught fish in its supply chain no later than 2025.”

*Analysis of all ten of the UK’s top supermarkets can be found in notes to editors.

Oceans in crisis

In 2015, 93% of the world’s marine fish stocks were either fished to their limit or overfished.⁵ The farmed fish industry claims to be a sustainable solution to this crisis, however research has shown that this is far from the case, as a fifth of global fish landings are being used to produce FMFO to supply industrial livestock and aquaculture, and demand is set to grow as the aquaculture industry expands.⁶

Lack of transparency

Customers’ decisions about which products they buy are heavily influenced by the marketing, labelling and options provided by retailers in their buying choices.

However, at the store level, there was a lack of accessible information for customers regarding methods of production and provenance. In many cases it was not easy to tell if the fish was farmed but wild-caught fish was clearly labelled as such.

In every store that the investigations team visited, the variety of (mainly farmed) salmon products on offer far outweighed the variety of other seafood products and they were almost always prominently placed at eye level on shelves.

Stocking and marketing sustainable alternatives to farmed seafood fed on wild marine ingredients is a key step towards shaping consumer tastes in the right direction. While some retailers stocked a broader range of seafood than others, none provided a range of alternatives to rival the dominance of farmed products such as salmon and prawns.

Calls to action

The report calls on supermarkets to:

- Phase out the use of FMFO sourced from wild-caught fish in its aquaculture supply chain by 2025 at the latest.
- Commit to offering a wide range of seafood – including a greater diversity of sustainably caught wild fish and farmed seafood that doesn’t rely on wild fish in feed, such as mussels.
- Adopt high standards of transparency and corporate policy on their suppliers, including full disclosure of suppliers – from source fisheries upwards.

⁵ <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>

⁶ <http://changingmarkets.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CM-WEB-FINAL-FISHING-FOR-CATASTROPHE-2019.pdf>

- Reduce reliance on certification as a proxy for sustainability by developing their own robust and transparent standards for sustainably produced seafood, including farmed seafood.

The report calls on customers to:

- Diversify their consumption of seafood to include a wider range of sustainably fished wild species, as well as farmed species (such as mussels) that do not rely on feed containing FMFO.
- Stop buying farmed salmon and prawns until products are available that incorporate sustainable alternatives to wild marine ingredients.
- Show companies they care by contacting retailers requesting higher standards on farmed seafood.
- Sign the petition at [fishingthefeed.com](https://www.fishingthefeed.com)

ENDS

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Notes to Editors

About Changing Markets Foundation

The Changing Markets Foundation partners with NGOs on market-focused campaigns. Its mission is to expose irresponsible corporate practices and drive change towards a more sustainable economy.

www.changingmarkets.org

About Feedback

Feedback is an environmental campaign group that works to regenerate nature by transforming our food system. We believe that securing nutritious, delicious food for all can and should go hand in hand with regenerating our planet.

www.feedbackglobal.org

Indicators & Methodology

Indicators

To assess UK retailers, Changing Markets and Feedback developed a set of indicators:

- How they set corporate policies and criteria for sourcing farmed fish.
- How transparent they are at a corporate level in terms of the farmed fish they source and who they work with in their supply chain.
- How they market, position and sell different farmed seafood in-store, and how this compares with the marketing of non-farmed fish or more sustainable farmed fish options.

Methodology

The evidence of action from the top 10 UK supermarkets was compared against a set of 14 criteria, chosen to represent the steps which a retailer committed to the health of the oceans and providing transparent information to their customers, should be taking in relation to their aquaculture products.

The analysis drew on:

- Direct engagement with retailers (a questionnaire to assess policies and actions on aquafeed).
- Desk-based research of publicly available information and data on supermarkets' websites and in the media.
- 'Mystery shopper' visits by Feedback and Changing Markets staff to stores, to gather information on how supermarkets are promoting seafood to customers and influencing their purchasing habits. These visits also assessed the level of information supermarkets provide at store-level to their customers regarding farmed seafood products.

Retailer rankings

ALDI (12%)

- Despite being ranked no 1 in the MSC League Table for having the highest percentage of MSC certified wild-caught products, there is no senior staff member responsible for seafood or aquaculture and they did not respond to the questionnaire.
- It's corporate policy on fish and seafood includes some recommendations for fish feed, but unlike other aspects of its policy these are not binding requirements and do not go far enough.
- ALDI scored a point for signing up to the Oceans Disclosure Project (ODP) and for clear labelling of which fish was farmed but needs to extend the information it discloses to include farmed seafood and wild-caught species used in feed.

Iceland (14%)

- Iceland provides transparent information regarding the quantities of farmed fish sold, including certification status, however this is not extended to wild fish used in feed for aquaculture products.
- It is in the process of developing an updated Fish and Seafood Sustainability Policy for suppliers, which will cover feed for farmed fish document.
- Iceland lost points for not making it clear on packaging which fish was farmed, and which was wild.

Asda (16%)

- Asda did not respond to the survey. Their policy provides no explanation regarding reducing the impacts of aquaculture systems.
- It was the only retailer to disclose information on its farmed fish supply chain throughout the ODP.
- It plans to publish information on all seafood sourcing including indirect sourcing such as aquaculture diets through the ODP.
- Points were scored for differentiating between wild and farmed products and providing information on provenance.

Morrisons (16%)

- Morrisons lost points for a lack of transparency regarding its suppliers.
- It does not have a member of staff designated to oversee aquaculture supply chains and relies on certification as a proxy for sustainable seafood supply chains.
- It provides no clear differentiation between farmed and wild products and no clear information on country of origin.
- Through the ODP, it has provided information on its wild-caught fish but not for farmed and wild-caught species used in feed.

Sainsbury's (20%)

- Sainsbury's was "unable to provide specific supplier and commercial information for business sensitive reasons." and failed to complete the questionnaire.
- It is not signatory to ODP.
- It's prawn policy recognises the need to develop targets and monitor feed conversion ratio but this does not apply to all products.
- Sainsbury's scored a point for investing in sustainable alternative ingredients. It has a dedicated aquaculture and fisheries manager and provided some level of transparency regarding the provenance of aquaculture products.

Waitrose (22%)

- Waitrose is heavily reliant on certification as a proxy for sustainable seafood supply chains.
- It is not a signatory to the ODP and demonstrates limited transparency regarding its aquaculture supply chain.
- Waitrose scored points for having a Farmed Fish Feed policy and its investment into sustainable alternative feeds. However, the policy lacks substance. Wild fish was clearly labelled as such, but it was difficult to tell what fish was farmed.

Lidl (28%)

- Lidl scored points for providing information on the suppliers of its farmed fish and seafood and for differentiating clearly between wild and farmed products.
- It also scored points for providing some information on the country of origin and, in some cases, the identity of the supplier.
- It forfeited two points for not having a designated aquaculture champion. It also relies heavily on third party certification as a proxy for sustainable seafood supply chains.
- It provides information on its wild-caught fish to the ODP but needs to extend the data it discloses to include farmed seafood and wild-caught species used in feed.

Co-op (32%)

- Co-op is heavily reliant on certification as a proxy for sustainable supply chains.
- It appears to recognise the need to go beyond certification and launched a Scottish Salmon Farming Group in 2017 which aims to "build more strategic, long-term relationships with its Scottish suppliers whilst also focusing on best practice and performance, in support of its new Salmon farming standard."
- Co-op stated it has a feed risk assessment tool which holistically evaluates existing and novel feed ingredients.
- It was easy to tell what fish was farmed and what was wild, and it also scores a point for being a signatory to the ODP but needs to extend the information it discloses to include farmed seafood and wild-caught species used in feed.

M&S (44%)

- M&S has its own code of practice for aquafeed, which went beyond relying on external certification and supplied detailed information.
- It is actively investing in and researching alternative feeds and has publicly commented that it is phasing out the misleading "Lochmuir" 'fake loch' brand.
- It has sent mixed messages concerning the need to remove wild-caught fish from aquafeed. M&S has previously spoken out against the ASC standard for asking the retailer to reduce the amount of fish oil in its products, arguing that this would reduce Omega 3 levels and that fish oil comes from fisheries certified as sustainable. However, it also claims to 'support the standards' aim of reducing the use of forage fish in salmon feeds, and will only use oil and meal from fisheries which have been certified by a third party as 'sustainable'.
- M&S should develop a clear target for reducing and ultimately eliminating whole wild-caught fish in feed.

- Points were lost for unclear marketing regarding whether fish is farmed or wild.

Tesco (60%)

- Tesco supplied the most detail of all retailers, including a breakdown of data on volumes of farmed fish species sold as well as its aquaculture supplier names.
- It was the only retailer to provide Fish In Fish Out calculations for its top five aquaculture products.
- Tesco is a signatory to the ODP where it shares information on its wild-caught species; it plans to share data on its farmed species in Q1 2020.
- Tesco showed reports and ODP entries with limited clarity on its aquafeed supply chain and needs to report this information and data on feed ingredients for all farmed species and develop at target for eliminating whole wild-caught fish in feed.
- Tesco shows an understanding of the need to go beyond certification to ensure the sustainability of its aquaculture supply chain. It is developing farmed salmon standards that will include targets to reduce the amount of wild-caught fish that is fed to the salmon it sources.
- It also supports the research and development of alternative feeds and displays which fish are wild and which are farmed.