

Overfishing Fact File

Fish are central to the health of our ocean and the livelihoods of fishing communities.

Many fish stocks are in a state of serious decline. With added pressure from climate change and pollution, we're moving into dangerous waters when it comes to the fish of the future.



Threats from unsustainable fishing

Overfishing

Overfishing happens when we catch fish faster than they can reproduce. Today, over 90% of world fish stocks are fully or over-exploited from fishing. The more that fish stocks become depleted, the greater the risk that they won't recover at all, which can be devastating for fishers' livelihoods and the marine environment.

Damage to marine habitats

A wide range of fishing methods are used throughout the world to catch different types of fish. Fishing methods like trawling or dredging can cause long-lasting damage to the sea bed and marine habitats. Although the UK has 377 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), which cover over a third (38%) of UK seas, only 38 of the designated MPAs have bans in place that stop the use of bottom-towed gear across the whole of the site.

Bycatch

In UK waters, thousands of rare and threatened marine animals continue to be caught, killed or injured as 'bycatch' in fishing gear every year, caught on fishing hooks, entangled in nets, or wrapped up in ropes.

These animals can include dolphins, sharks, whales, seabirds, skates and rays, as well as young fish deemed too small. Longlining, gillnets, trawl fisheries and creel pots are largely responsible for bycatch in the UK. An estimated 40% of global marine catches consist of bycatch.

Did you know about 80% of seafood sold in the UK comes from just 5 species groups? These are cod, tuna, haddock, salmon and prawns



Trawler

📷 NarissaFotoSS via Shutterstock



Species caught as bycatch

📷 Ivan Sarenas via Shutterstock

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Sustainable seafood

We need to change how we fish, farm and purchase seafood to help protect our seas and sustain livelihoods and food security into the future.

There are several ways that better management of fishing can help:

- Quotas based on scientific evidence on how many and what type of fish can be caught can help limit overfishing
- Fishing practices and gear can be modified to avoid vulnerable species as much as possible, including avoiding fishing at certain times, adding sections for small fish to escape from nets, using specially shaped hooks or utilising visual and sound deterrents
- No-take zones (NTZs) or Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs), where no fishing activity is allowed, can help fish populations to recover and support the protection and restoration of habitats
- Managing fishing activities to ensure everyone is sticking to the rules is challenging, which means technology plays a big part in fisheries management



Responsible consumption

97% of UK households eat fish. When consumers choose sustainable seafood, it encourages supermarkets and restaurants to demand it from their suppliers. This demand can reward fishers and fish farmers who adopt sustainable practices and encourage governments to improve fisheries management.

In the UK, about 80% of seafood sold is from just 5 species groups (cod, haddock, salmon, tuna and prawns). Diversifying your seafood choices can reduce pressure on wild populations and support local fishers and producers.

The [Good Fish Guide](#) can help! Use the simple traffic light system to make more informed choices about the seafood on your plate.