

# Sustainability in Canned Tuna

---



Consumer awareness of seafood sustainability is at an all-time high here in the United States, and concerned seafood customers around the country are asking more questions than ever before about the ramifications of their seafood choices. While there is still a great deal of progress to be made, the growth of sustainable seafood awareness in the United States has come a long way over the past few years.

One of the most significant developments is the expansion of grocers' sustainability policies: once confined solely to the seafood department, these guidelines and sourcing benchmarks are finding their way into the aisles, and shelf-stable seafood is coming under a new level of well-deserved scrutiny.

For years, the application of seafood sustainability principles at a grocery store seemed to end abruptly, bumping up against the walls of the freezer and petering out among the parsley strewn about the edges of the wetcase. Little or no attention was paid to the massive amounts seafood available in shelf-stable categories: fish encased in tin cans or vacuum-packed plastic was simply not on the radar of most people working on seafood sustainability, either in the NGO community or within the industry itself. Thankfully, this is beginning to change.



Canned tuna is one of the largest seafood categories in the world. Historically, it was the most popular seafood item in the United States until being eclipsed by farmed shrimp in the 1990s. Even so, it remains the penultimate seafood item of choice in the US market, and accounts for thousands of tons of seafood sales every year. Unfortunately, the canned tuna industry is fraught with environmentally devastating practices—a state of affairs that must be addressed.



For example, the skipjack purse seine fisheries in the Pacific Ocean rely heavily on fish aggregating devices, or FADs. About 20% of their total take is actually juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tuna rather than skipjack. Given that bigeye tuna has now been classified as a “vulnerable” species by the IUCN—“vulnerable” begin defined by that group as “at risk of extinction in the wild”—the situation is growing more perilous. Add that to the countless sharks, rays, turtles, seabirds, and other animals slaughtered by FAD-associated purse seine boats and conventional tuna longliners every year, and we have a massive threat facing our oceanic ecosystems.

# Sustainability in Canned Tuna

But there is hope. We have seen incredible progress on this front on a global scale—markets such as the United Kingdom have made tremendous changes, with all major market players authoring public pledges to transition to pole-and-line and/or FAD-free tuna sources in the coming months and years. Similar leaders are emerging in continental Europe, Australia, Canada, and even here in the United States. Even though at the time that this report went to press, the “big three” US tuna companies—Chicken of the Sea, Bumble Bee, and StarKist—had still refused to offer sustainable tuna options to the US market, two key retail brands—Whole Foods and Safeway—have taken it upon themselves to provide their customers with better options. Whole Foods’ 365 brand tuna is fully pole-and-line, and Safeway’s private label skipjack is FAD-free purse seine caught—an option that is not quite to the level of pole-and-line in terms of environmental management, but still vastly better than FAD-associated purse seines and conventional longlines.

Greenpeace celebrates the progress that Whole Foods and Safeway have made, and strongly encourages other retailers to follow suit. Companies like Target, Costco, and Walmart have well-developed private labels and have also taken strong steps towards seafood sustainability in their other categories. Perhaps it is time close the loop and to adopt pole-and-line sourcing for their canned tuna products?

**Until conventional canned tuna companies like Chicken of the Sea agree to offer a better and more environmentally responsible canned tuna product on the US market, Greenpeace encourages consumers to consider other options.**

**For better skipjack “chunk light” products: consider purchasing Whole Foods’ 365 pole-and-line skipjack or Safeway’s Safeway Select FAD-free skipjack.**

**For better albacore “solid white” products: consider purchasing high-quality boutique brands such as Wild Planet pole-and-line albacore and other similar domestic labels**

