



“The first step in changing human behavior is raising **awareness** of the issues—to local communities, global audiences, major industries and niche markets.”

—Stone Gossard, Performer & Songwriter, Pearl Jam

Seafood Diet for a Small Planet

Human innovation has proven that we have the ability to harvest the ocean’s bounty at a much faster rate than it can replenish itself. The ocean’s fish and wildlife resources appear to be losing the battle of sustainability and spiraling downward on a path toward depletion. Many of the top predator fish, like swordfish, marlin, and some species of sharks and tuna, have been vastly overfished, and stocks are diminished to the lowest levels in history. The number of sea turtles captured by industrial fishing is staggering—estimated at 250,000 per year, mostly from industrial high seas longlining, though 100,000 turtles per year are estimated caught in shrimp trawls in Central American waters alone. So what can we, as individuals, do about it?

- 1. Eat Less Seafood.** As a species whose population continues to grow, we need to reduce our overall fish consumption even as we switch between seafood choices. Moreover, the seafood we purchase and consume (or not) makes a difference, either encouraging or discouraging harmful fishing practices. To help make responsible seafood choices, we can follow sustainable seafood guidelines such as those found in Seafood Watch’s sustainable seafood wallet cards (www.seafoodwatch.org); these provide specific recommendations for how to steer clear of the more depleted or endangered species and focus consumption instead on alternatives that are less detrimental to our oceans—and the welfare of sea turtles.
- 2. Eat Lower on the Seafood Chain.** Twenty years ago, Frances Moore Lappe’s *Diet for a Small Planet* was published, selling 3 million copies and inviting an entire generation to consider the ecological, social, and personal significance that our food consumption habits have every time we sit down to a meal or shop at the supermarket. Its take-home message was that we could improve our own health and the health of our environment by eating more grains and less meat (i.e., lower on the food chain). The message is the same with seafood, especially considering that the fishing techniques that are used to capture top ocean predators—swordfish, shark, tuna, and others—are also responsible for incidentally killing countless other marine animals, including sea turtles.
- 3. Avoid Trawled and Farm-Raised Shrimp.** While shrimp may not be high on the food chain, it is high on the list of seafood to avoid.



The billions of hooks set on longlines throughout the world’s oceans each year injure and kill millions of animals other than the fishers’ targeted fish species. Sea turtles, sharks, albatross and other seabirds, and dolphins, seals and other marine mammals are among the victims of longline fishing. © STEPHEN NASH / CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

- Most shrimp are caught by trawling, a technology that is deadly to sea turtles and a host of other marine life. Turtle excluder devices have mitigated the problem when they are properly used, but their proper use may be more the exception than the rule. Much farm-raised shrimp has been associated with the destruction of mangrove ecosystems, a critical nursery-ground for many marine species. More sustainable, trap-caught shrimp can be found in local seafood markets and in natural food stores.
- 4. Demand Action from Government.** Our government representatives need to hear from us that we must better regulate industrial fishing in order to make it sustainable for target species, as well as sea turtles and other victims of bycatch. By informing your local and national officials of your concern, you can help to encourage sustainable ocean management.

Todd Steiner, Executive Director of Turtle Island Restoration Network, is a wildlife biologist and environmental activist working to create healthy ocean ecosystems and protect endangered salmon and their watersheds.