

● **SEAFOOD** CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENT BEFORE DECIDING WHICH FISH TO EAT

# Proceed with caution

**Gaelin Rosenwaks**  
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Your mind is overwhelmed by the variety of seafood as you stand in front of the fish counter at the market.

What should you buy for dinner? You think of frolicking dolphins and sea lions, jumping salmon heading upstream to spawn, killer whales cruising in the kelp, soaring bald eagles and all of the beauty and natural wonders along Canada's vast coastlines and surrounding waters.

What can you eat without hurting the marine environment? What is sustainable? What can you do to ensure that you can enjoy seafood for years to come?

## Education

To be an educated consumer, the SeaChoice program of Sustainable Seafood Canada outlines three questions to ask when purchasing seafood, "what type of seafood is this, where was it fished or farmed, and how was it caught or farmed?" The criteria for choosing your seafood are based on the impacts that the fishery or aquaculture site are having on the ocean ecosystem.

For wild harvest fisheries, the first question to ask is whether the stock is over-harvested or healthy and sus-

tainable. This information is available on the SeaChoice website, [seachoice.org](http://seachoice.org).

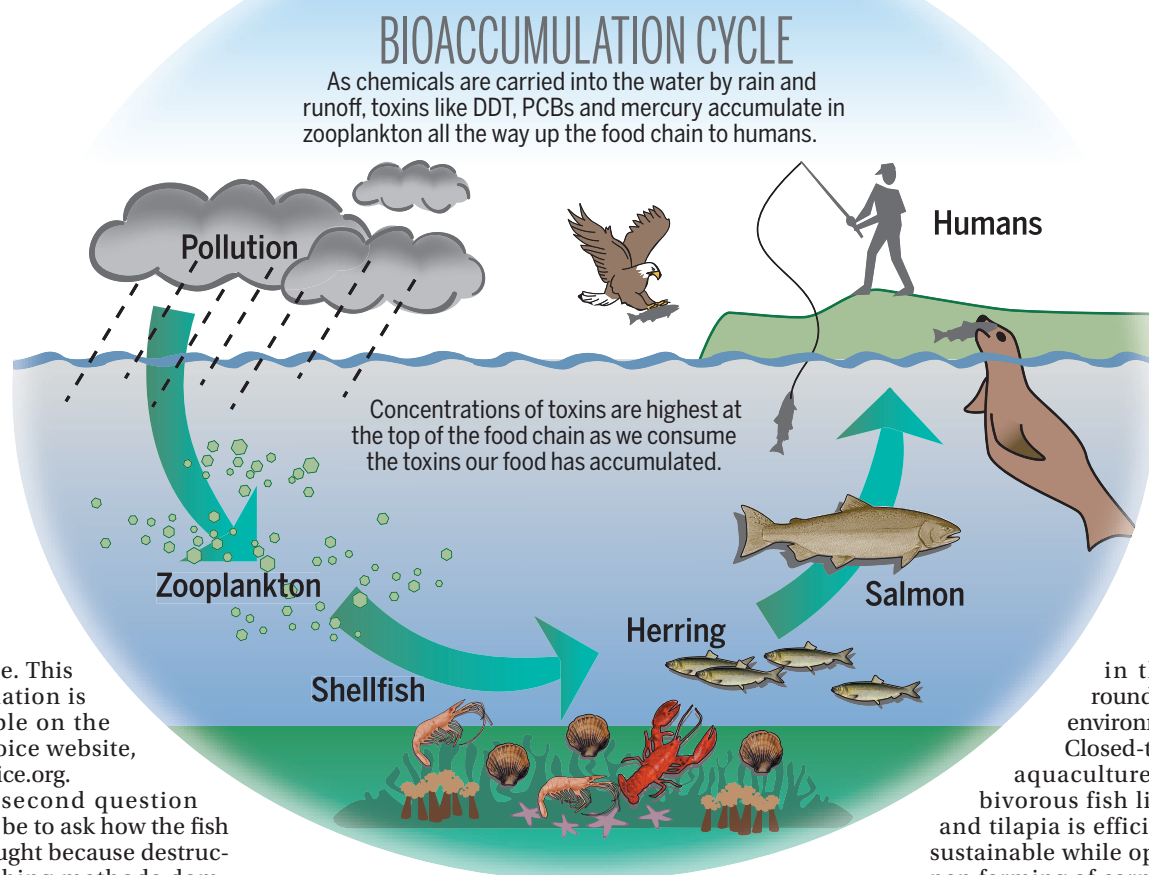
The second question should be to ask how the fish was caught because destructive fishing methods damage ecosystems through habitat destruction and the taking of unwanted species called bycatch.

While destructive methods are still used, many fisheries use more efficient, targeted methods.

For example, troll-caught tuna, trap-caught prawns, and harpooned swordfish are a few fisheries that appear sustainable without having negative impacts on other species. While some wild fisheries

can provide a sustainable catch, aquaculture, when done properly, is most likely the best option for the future. Shellfish, for example, can be farmed efficiently and can help improve water quality

in the surrounding environment. Closed-tank aquaculture of herbivorous fish like carp and tilapia is efficient and sustainable while open net-pen farming of carnivorous fish like salmon which makes up 75% of the value of the Canadian industry is not sustainable as it pollutes the surrounding waters and contributes to over-harvest of wild populations of fish for the feed.



There is a movement in British Columbia to move all salmon farms into closed-tank systems which would be a move in the right direction providing the industry finds a more efficient method for feeding the fish.

## Food choices

This brings us to the next issue, human health.

Eating lower on the food chain, not the big carnivores like salmon and tuna, is not only a more efficient use of energy, but it is better in terms of toxins.


Larger predatory fish, both wild and farmed, have higher levels of toxins such as PCBs and mercury because of bio-accumulation.

What else can we do? We should be aware of our impacts on the natural environment and keep our watersheds clean by not polluting and putting toxic chemicals down the drain.

As a consumer it is important to proceed with caution when choosing seafood. Sustainability of the natural environment is paramount in our seafood choices because it is just that, a choice.

Ultimately, the consumer drives the market for seafood.

**— Gaelin Rosenwaks is an oceanographer and conservation biologist based in New York**



**FOR HEALTHY CHOICES**

**SeaChoice**

Consult Canada's Seafood Guide, downloadable at [www.seachoice.org](http://www.seachoice.org), for a list of best choices of seafood to buy and eat. SeaChoice ranks seafood according to:

1. The vulnerability of the species fished.
2. The status or health of the stock.
3. The catch of unwanted species.
4. Ecosystem or habitat damage caused by fishing.
5. Effectiveness of management.

## 137 Species depend on salmon

From grizzly bears to grey wolves — at least 137 species depend on salmon for part of their diet. Even trees and plants benefit from the nutrients brought back by salmon from the seas.

