

Growing consumer awareness around sustainable seafood certification

The results of a survey commissioned by the Marine Stewardship Council reveals that seafood consumers are increasingly demanding independent verification of sustainability claims in supermarkets. Research agency GlobeScan surveyed more than 25,000 consumers in 22 countries, and 72% of this year's respondents expressed a desire for such independent certification, up from 68% in 2016.



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Seventy percent of seafood consumers worldwide say that they would like to hear more from companies about the sustainability of their seafood. A separate [2016 study](#) from Nielsen also shows that companies that invest in independent labelling and do effective consumer communications outperform their competitors by 4%.

Price trumps sustainability

A notable change from 2016 is that consumers globally have started putting price before sustainability as a motivator for their seafood purchase decisions. Digging into the figures on seafood consumers revealed a surprising gender divide on this issue, with men more motivated by price and women seeing sustainability as more important.

In South Africa, women (67%) are more likely to say they would pay more for seafood products that come from a certified sustainable fishery than men (60%). Amongst seafood consumers, 72% agree that in order to save the oceans we need to choose seafood from sustainable sources. An increasing number believe that people should be prepared to switch to another type of fish if it is more sustainable (70% in 2018, up from 68% in 2016).

"This survey shows that consumers really do care about the oceans, but with so much confusion about how consumers can help, it's more important than ever to cut through the clutter and deliver an easy way for people to choose sustainable seafood," says head of marketing for the Marine Stewardship Council, Richard Stobart.

"With a rising consumer focus on price and the finding that more than half of consumers report eating seafood weekly, it is critically important that they have a range of clearly labelled sustainable options at the right price point. We're pleased to see that trust in the blue MSC label remains very high and our focus continues to be to drive understanding of the MSC blue fish label."

Younger generation more concerned with environmental issues

The survey found younger South African consumers are more worried about the effects of climate change and rising sea levels than older consumers (25% of 18-34's see climate change as one of the most concerning ocean issues compared to just 17% of those who are 55+). They are however much more positive about the current contribution of retailers and large companies to protecting the oceans, compared to their older counterparts (just 4% of those aged 55 and older think retailers are contributing well, compared to 17% of those aged 18-34).

There was also a marked increase in South Africans agreeing that supermarkets' and brands' claims about sustainability and the environment need to be clearly labelled by an independent organisation (15% increase from 62% to 77% in the 2018 survey).

Trust and understanding of the MSC

In a climate of persistently low consumer trust in business globally, trust in the blue MSC label remains high, at 69%, and understanding of the label has increased to 37% globally, up from 32% in 2016. Consumers also rate certification organisations third (after NGOs and scientists) for their contribution to protecting the oceans, with governments and large companies rated as contributing the least. Of those aware of the MSC label, 79% agree that the MSC is helping to ensure that fishers maintain healthy fish stocks and protect marine life.

Looking to the future

GlobeScan's tracking of consumer attitudes and beliefs shows that the proportion of people who believe their children and grandchildren will have a better quality of life than them has continued to drop since the start of the millennium. The MSC-commissioned research reflects this concern for the future, with 83% of seafood consumers globally agreeing that we need to protect seafood for future generations.

Eighty-one percent of those aware of the MSC believe it has a key role to play in achieving this. Globally, consumers are united in thinking that the biggest threat to the oceans is pollution, followed by overfishing.