DELIVERING A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE BLUE FOOD IN THE EU
WWF’S VISION FOR SEAFOOD IN THE SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS LAW
The WWF European Policy Office wishes to thank colleagues from across the WWF EU network for their contributions to this report.

WWF

WWF is an independent conservation organization, with more than 5 million followers and a global network active through local leadership in over 100 countries. Our mission is to stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world’s biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

The European Policy Office contributes to the achievement of WWF’s global mission by leading the WWF network to shape EU policies impacting on the European and global environment.

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The EU Sustainable Food Systems Framework Law must include clear, long-term guidelines for European seafood systems that focus on human health, environmental protection and social equity:

- Support the consumption of less, but more sustainable and diverse seafood
- Improve the regulatory framework to ensure a level playing field between products imported into the EU and those produced domestically
- Prioritise consumption of sustainable seasonally-available fish with a minimal impact on marine biodiversity and of species whose populations are harvested below maximum sustainable yield
- Ensure no seafood linked to illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing is sold on the EU market
- Restrict subsidies and price cuts for seafood with a high environmental impact
- Eliminate the import and sale of endangered species
- Integrate the need for sustainable and low-impact fisheries and aquaculture

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sustainable seafood consumption as it stands today is at risk from rampant overfishing, fishing techniques that damage habitats and recklessly catch non-targeted species, and fuel-inefficient and highly polluting vessels, to name a few issues that contribute to marine biodiversity loss and greenhouse gas emissions.

As part of the wider food system, WWF believes that fisheries and aquaculture production should uphold ambitious and robust sustainability standards that are implemented across the seafood supply chain, from fishing nets and fish farms to consumers’ plates.

The European Union (EU) has one of the largest fishing fleets in the world and is a key importer of seafood. Under its own laws, the EU has an obligation to ensure that marine resources are not harvested beyond sustainable limits and that species retain their capacity to replenish populations to healthy levels.

WWF advocates that truly sustainable seafood must be secured in the EU market as part of the solution to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and reduce climate emissions, in addition to securing livelihoods tied to the ‘blue foods’ sector in the long term. In this regard, this policy brief calls for the prompt publication of the EU Sustainable Food Systems Framework’s legislative proposal by the new European Commission, including specificities for the seafood sector.

WWF has built on its wider recommendations for the Framework to focus here on how this law can – and must – shift seafood consumption habits, ensure affordable and sustainable seafood for everyone, improve sustainability along the value chain of businesses, transition the food system towards climate-neutrality, and provide more accurate information for consumers.
INTRODUCTION

71% of our planet is covered by the ocean. 2.15 billion people live within 100 kilometres of a coastline, over 58 million are employed in fisheries and aquaculture, and global coastal and marine tourism is worth €4.2 trillion. Our ocean is in trouble: between 1970 and 2012, 49% – nearly half – of marine species’ populations fell into decline, on average. This degradation of marine biodiversity is widely due to overfishing, damage to habitats and climate change. All of these impacts are directly linked with the quantity of seafood being consumed globally and its journey to our plates: from fishing methods that damage the seafloor and the overcapacity of fishing vessels compared to the ability of fish populations to replenish. Shark and ray populations, specifically, have dropped by two thirds over the last 50 years, notably due to an increase in fishing pressure since 1970.

In the EU, these climate and nature shifts affect the over 3.3 million people engaged in blue economy sectors, the hundreds of millions who live in coastal areas and everyone who, both in the EU and internationally, consumes European seafood. Important pieces of EU legislation do exist to tackle these issues, notably the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) whose primary objective was for all Member States to achieve ‘good environmental status’ (GES) of EU marine waters by 2020. Unfortunately, when examining key fish stock populations, the target was not reached in a single EU sea basin. To again take a species-focused view, sharks in the Mediterranean Sea are currently the most at risk in the world, with overfishing posing the single largest threat.

The failure to achieve GES extends to other targets of the MSFD, such as healthy food webs to ensure long-term abundance and reproduction of species and keeping food contaminants in seafood within safe limits. Unhealthy seas – both in terms of biodiversity loss and poor water quality – jeopardise the ecosystem services we rely on for our food and climate regulation, thus threatening the livelihoods of those tied to the seafood sector and putting the health of seafood consumers at risk.

Newer commitments may help correct the EU’s course: in December 2022, the EU signed the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework agreement. In doing so, the EU and its Member States have committed to achieve 25 targets by 2030, including restoring 30% of all degraded ecosystems (target 2), ensuring sustainable, safe, legal harvesting and trade of wild species (target 5), enhancing biodiversity and sustainability in fisheries and aquaculture (target 16), and enabling sustainable consumption choices to reduce waste and overconsumption (target 10). The EU already has some pieces in play towards achieving these targets. In the context of the European Green Deal, the European Commission adopted the Farm to Fork Strategy in 2020 to comprehensively secure a more sustainable food system – one that recognises the links between healthy people, healthy societies and a healthy planet. Under this Strategy, the EU announced the publication of a legislative proposal for a framework for a sustainable food system to accelerate and facilitate the necessary transition towards fairer and more sustainable EU food systems, from production to consumption. This Sustainable Food Systems Framework (SFSF) was intended to establish new foundations for future food policies by introducing sustainability objectives, production principles based on an integrated food system approach and a sustainable food labelling framework to empower consumers to make sustainable food choices.

Unfortunately, while the legislative proposal for the SFSF was expected in autumn 2023, it has failed to manifest. The law was not mentioned in European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen’s 2023 State of the Union address, where priorities until the end of her mandate were set, nor was it mentioned in the 2024 Commission Work Programme. Therefore, ahead of the European elections taking place in June 2024, from which the new European Commission President will be appointed, it is essential to stress the crucial role of the SFSF and the necessity for its inclusion in the next Commission’s political priorities.

The integration of seafood into the scope of the law is critical: the EU is one of the largest seafood markets in the world, importing over 70% of what it consumes with an average consumption of 24 kilograms (kg) per person each year, which is 3.5 kg more than in the global average. The EU’s seafood consumption varies substantially across countries with Portugal being the biggest consumer with up to 59.6 kg per inhabitant per year versus 6 kg in Czechia. Further, the EU has one of the most substantial fishing fleets globally with 74,000 vessels hauling in 1.3 million gross tonnes of catches in 2020. Therefore, a strong need to minimise the harmful impacts of this industry on the environment, climate and society in terms of eutrophication, animal welfare, unsustainable feed for forage fish, use of antibiotics, and of freshwater and land conversion.

Given the EU’s major role in global seafood trade, the SFSF must carefully consider fishery and aquaculture products, with specific attention for wild-caught fish given its uniqueness compared to other food products.
SHIFT CONSUMPTION

There is a need to better integrate seafood choices in sustainable diet guidelines to steer consumption towards eating less but more diverse and responsibly-sourced seafood products. This should be done in tandem with raising awareness about the impacts of EU seafood consumption abroad, to underline the necessity of equitable access to a common resource – seafood – between the EU and the countries from where seafood is imported.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

The EU must urgently address the role its high levels of seafood consumption play in fueling the climate and biodiversity crises.

Today, wild-capture fisheries are almost fully dependent on fossil fuels. And with 70% of seafood consumed in the EU being imported, the emissions of overseas fishing combined with the cargo ships, planes and land transport necessary to secure the EU’s fresh and frozen seafood demand means the sector’s carbon footprint reaches far beyond EU waters.

The populations of many species targeted by EU fleets are of concern due to overfishing. In the most alarming cases, 75% of Mediterranean and Baltic commercial fish populations are being harvested outside of biologically sustainable limits.

Reducing seafood consumption would also help to address the problem of European diets being too rich in animal-based protein. To address the issue of animal-sourced foods (both wild and domestic) being over-consumed in general in the EU, WWF promotes shifting the dietary balance toward more plant-based foods.

As supported by the World Health Organisation, transitioning towards plant-based diets maximises the benefits for people, animals and the environment in terms of reduction of greenhouse emissions, land use and healthcare costs.

ENSURE EQUITABLE INTAKE OF COMMON RESOURCES

Regions across the world are unevenly reliant on nutrition provided by seafood. Coastal and tropical countries are most likely to be nutrient deficient and, at the same time, more affected by the decline of marine fisheries and nutrient availability due to the impacts of climate change.

A reduction in seafood consumption should be considered, particularly in more developed countries (such as in EU Member States) where alternative proteins, vitamins and fatty acids are easily sourced from other foods, including legumes and vegetables.

The EU must transition towards low-impact seafood, which is sourced from healthy wild stocks that are harvested below the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) – i.e. highest theoretical level of harvest that can be continuously taken (on average) from a given fish stock under existing environmental conditions and without significantly affecting the species’ reproduction process.

This can be achieved via well-managed fisheries with practices that have a minimal impact on habitats and on marine ecosystem interactions and functions, and low-impact aquaculture production systems.

Equitable access to low-impact seafood will help secure a thriving blue food sector for generations to come, both in Europe and abroad.

Fish from our ocean is unlike any other animal-based protein source: it is a common, renewable resource if appropriate management measures are effectively implemented. Working together with stakeholders across the value chain, the EU has a collective responsibility to ensure that seafood sold on its market does not threaten the stability and the security of other regions, and that it is harvested by means that keep our seas healthy and full of life. To ensure this, full traceability of all seafood products along the supply chain is necessary.
All EU Member States must fully implement the EU IUU Fishing Regulation to ensure no products sourced from illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing enter the EU market.

Through the Sustainable Food Systems Law, the European Commission and all EU Member States should encourage a shift in consumer behaviour to ensure 60% protein is sourced from plant-based foods by 2030, ultimately reducing seafood consumption.

By 2030, all EU Member States must reduce the amount of wild-caught fish used as feed per quantity of farmed fish produced, i.e. the forage fish dependency ratio, to < 1, to reduce food security issues in regions where fisheries are active and optimise direct human consumption of wild-capture seafood. This transition can be achieved by using fishmeal and fish oil replacements such as macroalgae (seaweeds), bacteria, fungi and insects, and by increasing the use of caught species’ components not fit for human consumption (e.g. bones, tail, skin, entrails).

By 2030, EU aquaculture production should fully transition to using deforestation-free alternative plant-based feed and seafood by-products not suitable for human consumption.

By 2030, to optimise consumption of valuable nutrients and reduce wasteful discarding of seafood by-products, all EU Member States must maximise the processing of wild-capture fish by fully implementing the landing obligation and the discard ban included in the Common Fisheries Policy.

The Sustainable Food Systems Law should emphasise the reduction of seafood waste and the reuse of seafood by-products along the supply chain.

All EU Member States must ensure that their national seafood dietary recommendations better consider the impacts of the wild-capture fisheries and aquaculture sectors on nature and people.

All EU Member States must ensure that public procurement for collective food service menus only includes seafood from sustainable sources (i.e. assessments of what constitutes "sustainable" wild-catch fish should be based on stock status, ecosystem impacts from harvesting techniques and overall effectiveness of the fisheries management system; similarly, for aquaculture products, assessments should be based on the use of resources, ecosystem impacts and management effectiveness.)

Keeping turtles out of shrimp fishing nets

Six out of seven sea turtle species are classified as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Bycatch, alongside illegal trade, is considered the principal threat to their survival, with hundreds of thousands of marine turtles captured in fishing gear each year.

Tropical shrimp trawls (TSTs) are particularly problematic fisheries, as shrimps and turtles share the same habitats and therefore end up in the same nets. As shrimps are the second most imported seafood product in the EU, the use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) could help reduce the environmental impact of such fisheries. TEDs are a proven effective marine turtle bycatch mitigation tool in tropical shrimp trawl fisheries, which reduce bycatch of sea turtles by up to 97% without compromising shrimp catches, and also reduce fuel consumption.

WWF is calling for the EU to update the measures under the EU Common Fisheries Policy to make the use of TEDs obligatory on all relevant shrimp trawlers (i.e. those whose products end up on the EU market), both within and outside of EU waters. Further, similarly to the United States, the EU must adopt a specific regulation conditioning that imports from tropical shrimp trawl fisheries must not impact marine turtle populations.

While the EU General Food Law’s primary objectives are the high level of protection of human life and health, and the protection of consumers’ interests, nothing is said regarding food affordability. The affordability of healthy, nutritious and sustainable seafood should not be reserved to the wealthiest in our societies. As poverty increases and the wealth gap grows, the poor are marginalised from accessing high-quality and healthy foods. According to Eurostat, in 2022, 8.3% of the EU population was not able to afford a complete meal every second day, with 19.7% of people being at risk of poverty.

If unhealthy foods are the cheapest foods, those without financial means will be subject to greater health concerns and a lower life expectancy in the long term. This not only cuts lives short, it creates a financial strain on governments to sustain over-burdened public health systems.

All EU citizens should have the ability to access healthy, nutritious and eco-friendly foods. Wages should be set to align with the ability to purchase foods that support good health and have lower environmental footprints. On one hand, seafood is more likely to be affordable when it is sourced from lower trophic levels (e.g. sardines, anchovies, herring), is seasonal and local, is sustainably harvested and has as few intermediaries along the supply chain as possible. Various retailers work together with WWF to increase the sustainability of seafood in the EU, while striving to offer affordable products.

On the other hand, what we see today is that the most affordable seafood choices are often associated with high environmental and social impacts – their price does not adequately reflect the true environmental cost associated with their harvesting, production, processing and transport. For example, shrimp farming in Ecuador supplies up to 32% of shrimp sold on the EU market with shrimp being the second most consumed seafood product in the EU, but sustaining these operations to meet demand results in heavy mangrove deforestation. For EU production, the exemption of fuel taxes and other harmful subsidies for the EU fishing fleet negatively sponsors fishing activities that destroy habitats and drive overfishing.

WWF is advocating for the price of seafood to reflect the environmental externalities associated with it. This will help support consumption choices that are more sustainable in both the short and long term, in turn supporting the people engaged along the full seafood value chain.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

> All EU Member States must ensure that their national seafood dietary recommendations better consider the impacts of the wild-capture fisheries and aquaculture sectors on nature and people.
> All EU Member States must ensure that public procurement for collective food service menus only includes seafood from sustainable sources (i.e. assessments of what constitutes “sustainable” wild-catch fish should be based on stock status, ecosystem impacts from harvesting techniques and overall effectiveness of the fisheries management system; similarly, for aquaculture products, assessments should be based on the use of resources, ecosystem impacts and management effectiveness.).
A MORE RESPONSIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

One fish out of six imported into the EU is currently at risk of being untraceable back to its point of catch, illustrating how poorly monitored and transparent the EU seafood supply chain is. Seafood processors and retailers have the ability and the responsibility to lead a food system transformation by controlling the legality, sustainability, and transparency of products across their suppliers. Along the supply chain, responsible seafood sourcing requires a seascape approach that looks beyond labelling to include strong traceability measures.

To verify the origin of products and to ensure companies do not fall victim to seafood fraud, mislabeling, or accidentally sourcing endangered species — and ultimately selling them to uninform customers — it is important that companies adopt robust traceability measures within their businesses and across their supply chains. This includes the collection of environmental and social data on products, and the ability to track these back to the fisheries and farms of origin in accordance with the Common Market Organization Regulation.

For this to happen and in light of the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, European companies will have to identify, prevent, mitigate, and report environmental harm and human rights violations (i.e. conduct due diligence) in their operations and value chains. This includes the entire upstream and parts of the downstream supply chain, including transport, storage and disposal in specific cases, but not the sale or final use of products. Applied to the seafood industry, imports to the EU will have to respect these obligations.

Regarding trade agreements, EU seafood imports should also respect any mirror clause — i.e. the reciprocity of complying with environmental and social standards as it applies in the EU — to enter and be sold in the EU market. This would ensure a level playing field across aquaculture companies and wild-caught fisheries to avoid exporting the environmental and climate footprints of seafood products consumed in Europe but which are produced somewhere else in the world.

Broadly speaking, seafood imports from non-EU countries should be avoided from places where food production causes environmental damage and where fish stocks are not sustainably managed. As laid down in the EU Deforestation Regulation, some restrictions are already in place to secure imports of deforestation-free products.

Finally, all businesses along the seafood value chain, from fishers to retailers and the food service industry, should be held accountable for their sourcing policies and choices to avoid importing and selling seafood originating from overfished stocks sourced from highly-damaging fishing or aquaculture practices, and to provide granular information about our seafood. As enshrined in the EU Fisheries Control Regulation, the digital traceability of the entire EU fishing fleet is becoming mandatory. Tracing seafood digitally from the point of catch and farming right down to the point of sale will cover both imported and EU-sourced products, as well as both wild-caught seafood and aquaculture products. This will deliver benefits not only for ascertaining the legality and sustainability of a given product, but equally for food safety and quality control, forming the basis for bringing clear information to consumers. While traceability does not equal sustainability, the availability of credible information about the provenance of seafood products equips businesses, authorities and citizens to make more informed decisions.

Best practices of businesses with responsible seafood sourcing policies

WWF-Switzerland has a corporate partnership with Coop, a major Swiss retailer, to improve their sourcing and supply of seafood products. Coop has committed to not sell species threatened with extinction (listed as endangered or critically endangered on the IUCN Red List). In 2016, they also reached — and have since maintained — the target of only sourcing seafood products that are rated “green” or “yellow” in the WWF seafood guide, thus avoiding seafood from stocks that are severely overfished, or that are sourced from production or fishing methods that severely impact the environment. Furthermore, they have committed to increasing sourcing from recommendable labels: in 2022, 64.5% of their seafood assortment was Bio, Aquaculture Stewardship Council or Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified.

WWF has partnered with Bolton Food — including the brands Rio Mare, Sauquilet and Isabel — to foster sustainable fishing practices and tuna supply chains. As Bolton Food is Europe’s leader in canned tuna production, raising sustainability criteria for tuna fisheries provides a strong example for others in the seafood processing sector to follow. Since 2017, Bolton has secured a 43% increase in seafood product sourcing from MSC-certified fisheries, credible and comprehensive Fishery Improvement Projects, and from projects seeking to improve fishing practices and management. Between January and December 2022, 77.7% of Bolton Food’s seafood sourcing came from sustainable sourcing. Further, 100% of Rio Mare’s tuna products are now fully traceable from catch to plate. Finally, WWF-France has worked with 17 Marriott hotels to raise awareness among their customers about sustainable seafood consumption and to improve the company’s supply policy to meet responsible fishing criteria. Marriott has committed to ban the following species from their hotel restaurants: wild and farmed bluefin tuna, orange roughy, and sharks and shark fin.
A CLIMATE-NEUTRAL AND NATURE-POSITIVE FOOD SYSTEM

REDUCE EMISSIONS FROM PRODUCTION AND TRANSPORT

As global food systems contribute to 34% of total greenhouse gas emissions, the SFSP Law should encourage environmentally-friendly agriculture and seafood production practices to comply with the European Climate Law’s objectives to become climate-neutral by 2050, with an intermediary target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. The global fishing and the aquaculture sectors account for 0.5% and 7% of greenhouse gas emissions respectively. Both sectors therefore have a role to play in contributing to cross-sector and global efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of seafood. In addition to this, harmful fishing techniques, overfishing and unsustainable feed sources (linked to overfishing) mean the fisheries and aquaculture sectors negatively impact the ocean’s health and impede its capacities to store carbon, trap heat from our emissions, produce oxygen and regulate climate.

ASSESS AND DISCLOSE THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

In the context of the dual climate and biodiversity crises, seafood consumption must shift towards products with lower environmental and social footprints. The carbon footprint of blue food should not be underestimated and must account for the fuel used by fishing vessels, the disturbance of seabed sediments, the transport of imported seafood products and the greenhouse gases emitted in farmed fish production, amongst others. There is a need to better assess emissions tied to our seafood, which should be incorporated into broader sustainability assessments that would more accurately reflect seafood’s impacts on marine biodiversity. As shown in Figure 1, half of the second-most consumed seafood product in the EU, shrimp, are caught with harmful fishing techniques, bottom trawls, which have a high environmental impact on the seabed.

The carbon footprint of blue food should be monitored, with 100 to 200 entries updated every year. By achieving the targets of the UN Kunning-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to protect 30% of the EU marine and coastal area by 2030, EU fisheries will benefit from spillover effects, where fish populations that are allowed to increase within protected areas inevitably leave these zones and enter fishing grounds, increasing catches. Further, supplying and eating diversified seafood products is important to avoid pressuring overfished and currently threatened species. Therefore, as part of achieving its climate targets, EU food systems governance pertaining to seafood must be revamped to be more integrated and transversal, from the nets and fish farming sites to our plates. Especially important to take into account in this process are the EU’s high dependency on imports to meet seafood demand, the different types of production (i.e. wild-caught and farmed fish), and sustainable fisheries management to preserve our common goods.

Figure 1: Five top imported seafood species in the EU and their production method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOST IMPORTED SPECIES IN THE EU</th>
<th>% OF TOTAL VOLUME OF EU-IMPORTED SEAFOOD</th>
<th>% FARMED</th>
<th>% WILD-Capture</th>
<th>CAPTURE METHOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SALMON</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>Farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHRIMP (WARM WATER AND MISCELLANEOUS)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>Farming, bottom trawls, cast nets, gillnets, pots and traps, skimmer trawl, suriperas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUNA (SARPACE AND YELLOWFIN)</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
<td>Purse seine, longline, pole-and-line, gillnet, miscellaneous gear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COD</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
<td>Trawl nets, gillnets, bottom longlines, rod and reel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALASKA POLLOCK</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Trawl nets, gillnets, bottom longlines, rod and reel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products (EUMOFA), 2023, The EU Fish Market 2023 Edition

RECOMMENDATIONS:

> As seafood is currently one of the main sources of animal protein in European diets, the Sustainable Food Systems Law must include a specific scope for seafood, with measures addressing the EU’s high import dependency, forms of production — either farmed or wild-capture — and its fisheries management system.

> The Sustainable Food Systems Law must include minimum sustainability requirements for public procurement involving seafood companies to incentivise companies to decarbonise their supply chains by 55% by 2030 (in line with the EU Climate Law).

> The European Commission and all EU Member States must ensure that maritime spatial planning criteria better integrate sustainable aquaculture and fisheries, i.e. reduced climate footprint, and de-carbonisation of the fleet and of infrastructure are part of Member State national plans for the long-term sustainable management of their marine areas.

> The Sustainable Food Systems Law must ensure consistency across EU policies, including the EU Climate Law and other international commitments, to push stakeholders along the seafood supply chain – producers, processors, retailers – to contribute to the overall effort to reduce and mitigate climate change effects and biodiversity loss, i.e. they contribute to the maritime spatial planning consultation process, prevent the sale of seafood linked to IUU fishing or coming from overfished stocks.
In a 2021 survey by Eurobarometer on seafood consumption habits in the EU, 64% of respondents said they eat fishery and aquaculture products at home at least once a month.\(^6\) As the majority of EU citizens are seafood consumers, providing them with sufficient and verified information is essential to support making informed food choices.

As laid out in the EU Common Market Organisation Regulation, it is mandatory to provide information on the commercial designation of the species (using the common names accepted in each Member State together with the species’ scientific names), the production method (i.e. whether farmed or wild-caught; and if wild-caught, under what fishing technique), the area where the product was caught, the quantity caught and the type of fishing gear used. For wild-capture fisheries, this includes scientific information on the status of the stock or vulnerability of the species to fishing pressure, along with environmental impacts of the fishing gear used and the effectiveness of fishery management to ensure environmental sustainability.

Assessing seafood sustainability can only be achieved through a sound traceability system that monitors the entire supply chain with accurate information. Therefore, as established in the new EU Fisheries Control Regulation, the future digitalisation of the EU fishing fleet with onboard tracking devices and mandatory electronic logbooks will provide automatic, reliable and precise information about the area of catch, the quantity caught and the type of fishing gear used. This will not only help to ensure full traceability, these new datasets will be particularly helpful to assess the sustainability of a given product. Making this information available on seafood packaging – the last step in the value chain – will support consumers in making better and more informed decisions towards a more sustainable diet.

**Figure 2: Example of a species’ sustainability assessment in a WWF seafood guide**

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- All EU Member States must fully implement and enforce the EU Common Fisheries Policy’s Common Market Organisation with ingredient lists for processed food, and key traceability and sustainability information for all aquaculture and fishery products being clearly communicated to all consumers at all seafood selling points (retail, wholesale, fishmongers, hospitality) via food labelling.\(^6\)

- The Sustainable Food Systems Law must establish an EU food sustainability ranking system that uses evidence-based criteria and a robust assessment methodology (e.g. the CAM) that will apply to and be available for all fishery and aquaculture products, including processed and imported seafood.
WAY FORWARD

Accountable to the targets set in the UN Global Biodiversity Framework and in its own Climate Law, the EU has committed to reduce and mitigate its impacts on both nature loss and the climate crisis. With the largest maritime territory in the world and as the largest seafood market on our blue planet, the EU has both a responsibility to care and the means to induce positive change.

The anticipated legislative proposal for a Sustainable Food Systems Framework is an exceptional opportunity for the EU to integrate sustainability as a primary objective in how we produce and consume food into law. Regarding seafood, specifically, its legally-binding measures would complement existing EU legislation on fisheries and aquaculture, such as the Common Fisheries Policy, the Common Market Organisation and the Regulation on Food Information to Consumers.

The food we source from our ocean is unlike any food product on Earth: all the species we consume, from the smallest mollusc to the largest fish, are commonly-owned and – when responsibly cared for – infinitely renewable resources. Effective legislation to address the EU market’s high levels of seafood consumption, high dependency on imports to meet demand and the poor environmental status of EU seas is urgently needed to ensure the long-term viability of those resources and, with them, a thriving ocean.

The European elections bring with them a crucial moment to amplify political consideration for human health, environmental protection and social equity. The newly-elected Members of the European Parliament and the new European Commission hold in their hands a range of actionable measures to reverse course on our ocean’s drastic decline, with the Sustainable Food System Framework being an especially crucial piece of the puzzle.

It is also time to effectively integrate a blue component within the European Green Deal, as well as bring coherency to and fill the gaps in the EU’s scattered marine policy landscape. WWF is calling for an Ocean Deal to connect the dots, as well as to fulfil the EU’s domestic and international climate and biodiversity commitments.

These are fundamental steps to secure a healthy ocean that provides for both present and future generations – from the air we breathe to waters we swim in and the seafood we eat.
OUR MISSION IS TO STOP THE DEGRADATION OF THE PLANET’S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND TO BUILD A FUTURE IN WHICH PEOPLE LIVE IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

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