



Ocean Wildlife and Co-op's Seafood Supply Chain

Co-op and Seafood Sustainability

Co-op is a leading convenience retailer with more than 2,500 stores across the UK – one in every postal area. As a member-owned co-operative, it is guided by principles that include open membership and concern for community.

Co-op is committed to caring for the environment in which ingredients are sourced, as set out in Future of Food ambition. To achieve this, Co-op supports credible certification where it drives change.

Co-op sources seafood using strict criteria as part of its Healthy Oceans strategy, to make sure there is fish for the future and thriving marine ecosystems.

Co-op welcomes the evaluation of risks to marine endangered, threatened, and protected (ETP) species from fishery bycatch and will take action to address the issues that have been identified. Co-op will continue to collaborate with Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP), Birdlife International, and Whale and Dolphin Conservation to identify and address issues in the future and ensure, through procurement policies and other measures, that the company's seafood supply chain does not present unacceptable threats to marine wildlife.

Fisheries and Bycatch

Bycatch, the catch of non-target species, is one of the most significant issues affecting the biological sustainability of marine fisheries. In particular, bycatch of endangered, threatened, and protected (ETP) species continues at a global and ecologically significant scale, despite an increase in the number of certified fisheries and improvement projects, and public attention to this issue.

Fisheries bycatch is a primary driver of population decline in many ETP species. These populations are at very low levels and are formally listed as endangered, threatened, or protected by international, national, and/or local jurisdictions.



Sharks and rays, seabirds, marine mammals, and sea turtles, all of which are ecologically important to ocean habitats, are at high risk of capture and harm in commercial fisheries. Many of these species are distributed across large geographic areas and overlap many fisheries. Many also have life-history characteristics that make them vulnerable to fishing-related mortality, such as slow growth, long reproductive cycles, and production of small numbers of offspring.

One-third of the world's sharks and rays are threatened with extinction, according to International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List criteria.

15 of the 22 species of albatross are threatened with extinction.

Less than 350 North Atlantic right whales remain in the world.

Fisheries bycatch is recognized as the greatest threat to **all seven species of sea turtles**.

Bycatch Audit of Co-op's Supply Chain

[Sustainable Fisheries Partnership \(SFP\)](#), in conjunction with Birdlife International and Whale and Dolphin Conservation, conducted a review and assessment of the fisheries [disclosed by Co-op in the Ocean Disclosure Project](#).

The three organizations collaborated to develop criteria to identify fisheries that could be considered high risk for interactions with sharks and rays, seabirds, marine mammals, and sea turtles.

These criteria include:

- The conservation status of the relevant bycatch species, as determined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- Bycatch rate and evidence of impact at a population level, or high likelihood of bycatch, based on gear type and overlap with susceptible species.
- Scale of the specific bycatch problem, e.g., across the world versus limited to one fishery.



- If the fisheries impact species with a very small range.
- If the fisheries include cross-taxa bycatch.
- If Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification has been suspended due to non-compliance with elements of Principle 2 in the MSC Standard.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The audit identified the fisheries in the Co-op supply chain that present the highest bycatch risks to sharks and rays, seabirds, marine mammals, and sea turtles. Co-op understands that the issues identified in the audit signal a need to fully address risks to ETP species across all of its sourcing, and commits to working with suppliers to improve fishery management and implement recommended actions.

The risk assessment conducted as part of the audit demonstrates a range of potential bycatch impacts to ETP species from the fisheries that supply Co-op. The audit identified a number of the fisheries as having the highest potential bycatch risk. A full list of these fisheries will be incorporated into the Co-op Food Ocean Disclosure Profile (ODP).

SFP reviewed the results of the audit with Co-op to determine where they can have the most impact by encouraging improvements to reduce ETP bycatch. The following are the top findings of this analysis and the fisheries where Co-op should prioritize action:

- Alaska salmon set/drift gillnet fisheries pose a significant risk to seabirds.
- Icelandic cod/haddock gillnet and longline fisheries pose a significant risk to seabirds and marine mammals.
- Canadian (American) Lobster & UK Brown crab pot and trap fisheries pose a risk to marine mammals.



While the primary purpose of the audit was to identify fisheries where there are bycatch risks, it revealed broad and proactive actions by Co-op to promote healthy fisheries and protect marine biodiversity. For example:

- Co-op's tuna sourcing comes from fisheries with healthy stocks and that use techniques, such as pole and line, that have very minimal bycatch impacts and/or impacts on habitat.
- There were very few fisheries with threats to sea turtles or sharks and rays. The Co-op supply chain specifically avoids fishery products from fisheries that have high population-level impacts on sea turtles, such as pelagic longline fisheries in the Pacific Ocean. They also do not source from purse seine fisheries that use fish aggregating devices, which can have negative impacts on these species.
- Co-op's Healthy Oceans strategy includes sourcing from fishery improvement projects (FIPs) and fisheries certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) that have mechanisms in place to support solutions on bycatch issues.

A number of common themes also emerged from the analysis. These were presented to Co-op with the following key recommendations, for work with their suppliers across various fisheries:

- Levels of bycatch monitoring are generally poor, and there is a need to adopt higher levels of observer coverage.
- There is an urgent need for a significant increase in the levels of bycatch incident reporting (which should be regular, detailed, and standardized). Data on bycatch needs to be placed in the public domain and be available to all stakeholders.
- There is minimal effort to continuously improve bycatch reduction. Bycatch mitigation should aim to adopt best practices at all times
- There is a clear need for a systematic examination of alternative gear options in fisheries where there are high bycatch risks, e.g. move away from gillnet fisheries.

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