



Ocean Wildlife and Publix's Seafood Supply Chain

Publix and Seafood Sustainability

[Publix](#) is the largest employee-owned company in the United States. It is one of the 10 largest-volume supermarket chains in the country.

As an early supporter of fishery improvement projects (FIPs), Publix has been a leader in addressing issues of ocean sustainability, helping to launch improvement efforts in fisheries worldwide, from the US Gulf of Mexico to Indonesia.

Publix collects detailed information about its seafood sourcing to monitor against sustainability indicators, and was the first American retailer to participate in the [Ocean Disclosure Project \(ODP\)](#).

Publix's seafood sustainability goals to date have prioritized sourcing from healthy fish stocks and well-managed fisheries. The company is now focused on addressing issues around the impacts of seafood production on marine wildlife, including sharks, seabirds, marine mammals, and sea turtles.

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, 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 Publix'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 Publix 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, 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.



This audit identified the fisheries in the Publix supply chain that present the highest bycatch risks to sharks, seabirds, marine mammals, and sea turtles. As part of the review, SFP consulted with Publix to identify overlaps with its top-selling seafood items, to determine areas where the most impacts could be made by advancing improvements to reduce ocean wildlife bycatch.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The following are the top three findings of this analysis, based on the significance of the bycatch problem and threats, and the scope and magnitude of the improvement that could be effected by Publix based on its seafood sourcing patterns and locations.

- Longline fisheries for tuna and mahi mahi in the Eastern Pacific Ocean present serious risks to sharks and sea turtles, through the hooking of these species when they try to take bait from fishing lines.
- Longline fisheries for cod and haddock in Iceland present a significant risk to seabirds.
- Canadian snow crab pot and trap fisheries pose an entanglement risk to marine mammals, because of their buoy lines at the surface. Of particular threat and concern is the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale.

While Publix will prioritize work on these fisheries first, a number of common and important themes emerged from this audit. Publix understands that the issues identified from its audit signal a need to fully address risks to ocean wildlife, particularly ETP species, across all of its sourcing, and commits to working with suppliers to improve fisheries management and adopt best practices to reduce bycatch.

Three key recommendations Publix should pursue with their suppliers across all fisheries include:

1. Implement known and available best practices. Proven best practices and new technologies exist to reduce bycatch, but are not being used or utilized at scale. Similarly, support innovation and new technologies to solve bycatch problems.
2. Make bycatch reduction, particularly of ETP species, a priority in fishery improvement projects (FIPs). For example, many of the fisheries identified in the audit are already in FIPs, but do not include or have not begun efforts to reduce bycatch.



3. Support and advocate for more data collection. Bycatch monitoring is generally poor, and there is an urgent need for higher levels of observer coverage (electronic monitoring or human). There is also an urgent need for more bycatch incident reporting. This should be regular, detailed, and standardized. Bycatch data and information should be placed in the public domain, available to all stakeholders.

Publix Response and Activities Underway to Reduce Bycatch

There are already steps underway to reduce bycatch in several of the fisheries identified in the audit. Through its sourcing and support of the following Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs), Publix has encouraged their suppliers to continue participating in the efforts below and to adopt best practices as a priority. Based on the audit results, Publix will work with its other suppliers of fish to take steps to protect ETP species.

The Eastern Pacific large pelagics – longline FIP, targets yellowfin tuna and mahi-mahi in Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Panama, as well as swordfish in Costa Rica. The participating vessels recently adopted an ETP management policy that all vessels are expected to implement onboard. This policy document acts as a guide for skippers on best practice and the actions they should be taking to reduce interactions with ETP species, and how to deal with any interactions that still occur.

Interactions with North Atlantic right whales led to the suspension of MSC certification for the Zone 12 Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence snow crab fishery. Publix encouraged its supplier to launch a FIP to better organize the various industry and government efforts that were emerging to protect the whales and the fishery. The FIP has been piloting innovative, ropeless gear solutions and improving tracking of the results across pilot projects to enable a faster path to widespread adoption of the gear.

In 2010, Publix played a key role in encouraging its supplier of Gulf of Mexico pink shrimp to launch one of the first FIPs in the United States to address bycatch of sea turtles and other environmental issues in the fishery. There are now five state-level FIPs across the US Gulf of Mexico shrimp fisheries that work together to coordinate and establish annual, boat-level gear inspections to ensure the proper installation and effectiveness of TEDs. These gear inspections are still ongoing and have generated a high degree of compliance in TED use. Recent assessments show that these measures have been highly effective in protecting sea turtles.

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