

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BENCHMARK MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM REPORT FINDS FUTURE OF GLOBAL SEAFOOD SUPPLY AT A TURNING POINT

Summary: Many trends positive, urgent action is needed; ‘Super Green’ seafood buying list debuts

Global prospects for securing a sustainable seafood supply and protecting ocean ecosystems are improving, thanks to a growing consensus on how best to manage fisheries and fish-farming operations, and new commitments by consumers, major buyers and the fishing community.

That’s the conclusion of a benchmark research report – “Turning the Tide: The State of Seafood” – released today (October 20, 2009) by the Monterey Bay Aquarium, on the 25th anniversary of the aquarium and the 10th anniversary of its Seafood Watch program.

The report was released at the California Science Center, which announced a new partnership with the aquarium to advance public and business awareness about the connection between seafood choices and the health of the world’s oceans. The Center will collaborate with the aquarium on many programs in the months and years to come, and will open new Ecosystems exhibits in the spring of 2010.

The aquarium also announced a partnership between Seafood Watch and Santa Monica Seafood – the largest seafood distributor in the southwest and an emerging national leader in sustainability.

“The State of Seafood” details significant and continuing threats to healthy oceans from mismanagement of wild-caught fisheries and a booming fish-farming sector, and highlights trends that offer hope for the future.

In conjunction with release of the report, the aquarium has launched a national campaign asking top chefs and culinary leaders to take a “Save Our Seafood” pledge not to serve items from the aquarium’s Seafood Watch red “Avoid” list as a way to restore ocean health. More than two dozen prominent figures have signed on already, including Los Angeles chefs Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger (Border Grill/Ciudad), and Suzanne Goin (Lucques), along with Alton Brown (Be Square Productions, Atlanta), Rick Bayless (Frontera Grill/Topolobampo, Chicago), Susan Spicer (Bayona, New Orleans), Rick Moonen (rm seafood, Las Vegas), Fedele Bauccio (Bon Appétit Management Co., Palo Alto), Michelle Bernstein (Michy’s, Miami), and Michel Nischan (The Dressing Room, Westport, Conn.).

The “State of Seafood” report also identifies a “Super Green” list of wild and farmed seafood – items that are both good for human health and are produced in ways that protect ocean ecosystems. The list was developed in collaboration with the Environmental Defense Fund and scientists from the Harvard School of Public Health.

Copies of “The State of Seafood” report, including the “Super Green” list, are available at www.montereybayaquarium.org/seafoodwatch. The aquarium will update the report every two years.

“Ocean life is still in decline and we clearly need to take urgent action to turn things around,” said aquarium Executive Director Julie Packard. “The good news is that we know what it will take, and that key players are working more closely than ever to solve the problems. I’m confident that we can and will create a future with healthy oceans.”

While many other human activities strain the marine environment – including growing impacts from global climate change – the primary factors in the oceans’ decline today are related to commercial fishing: failure to consider the entire ecosystem when managing fisheries and aquaculture operations, and the rapid industrialization of fishing effort worldwide to keep up with growing human demand for seafood, the report concludes.

A century of industrial-scale fishing and ineffective management has left major commercial fisheries around the world in need of rebuilding. Many have collapsed. In addition, populations of large, long-lived animals, including whales, sharks, turtles, tunas, manatees, rockfish and billfishes, have plummeted.

Ocean wildlife caught commercially are not the only species affected. Bycatch – the unwanted or unintentional catch of animals in fishing gear – is the single greatest threat for nearly 250 species of threatened or endangered ocean animals, according to the report.

While wild fisheries have reached a plateau, demand for seafood continues to grow worldwide. In 2009, farmed seafood will for the first time eclipse wild-caught fish in the human diet. Yet management of aquaculture has not kept up with skyrocketing global expansion.

Yet for all the discouraging trends, there is an equally long list of positive new developments, the report finds. These include:

- The release earlier in 2009 of a consensus scientific study that unified marine ecologists and fisheries management scientists on a set of principles for restoring ocean ecosystems and commercial fish populations.
- Significant new commitments from major seafood buyers, including retailers like Walmart and North America’s largest food service companies, to shift their purchases to seafood from sustainable sources.
- Growth in the supply of sustainable seafood that has been certified by reputable international organizations, notably the Marine Stewardship Council.
- Adoption by governments around the world of policies to better manage fisheries and fish-farming, reduce the rate at which wildlife is caught and killed accidentally in fishing gear, and to protect critical ocean habitat vital to maintaining healthy ocean ecosystems.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium recognized the warning signs more than a decade ago, first when it opened a special exhibition on the topic and later when – in response to public demand – it created its acclaimed Seafood Watch program.

Since 1999, Seafood Watch has become a recognizable standard and reference point for millions of conservation-minded consumers, and for restaurateurs and major seafood buyers in the United States.

It has distributed nearly 32 million consumer pocket guides with seafood recommendations covering all regions of the United States, and partnered with Compass Group and ARAMARK – the two largest food service companies in North America – to help shift millions of pounds of seafood purchases to more sustainable sources. ARAMARK also initiated the connection between Monterey Bay Aquarium and Harvard researchers that led to creation of the “Super Green” seafood list.

“Our Seafood Watch initiatives address the most critical issues raised in ‘The State of Seafood’ report,” Packard said. “They give everyone – from consumers to chefs to major seafood buyers – an opportunity to be part of the solution.”

“The California Science Center is extremely proud to partner with the Monterey Bay Aquarium in jointly presenting their report on “Turning the Tide: the State of Seafood,” said Jeffrey Rudolph, president and CEO of the center. “The educational promotion of sustainable seafood is at the heart of both our missions and we look forward to partnering on many events, programs and exhibits in the future.”

Monterey Bay Aquarium is working with 14 other nonprofit organizations across the United States and Canada as part of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions (www.solutionsforseafood.org). Participating organizations have crafted a Common Vision for Environmentally Sustainable Seafood to help seafood buyers and suppliers develop comprehensive, corporate policies on sustainable seafood.

Since the debut of the Common Vision in 2008, more than 20 major companies across North America have pledged their support.

In 2009 the Monterey Bay Aquarium celebrates 25 years of inspiring ocean conservation.