



Activist FAQ: Trader Joe's

July 24, 2009

1. Why are you going after Trader Joe's when other stores, like Whole Foods, are actually selling more red-list products?

It's not just about how many red list fish a given store sells. It's true that many other retailers are unfortunately selling red-list fish, and quite a bit of it. Trader Joe's is "special" insofar as it was the only retailer in our report to somehow manage all of the following:

- **Trader Joes has no sustainable seafood policy**
- **Trader Joe's does not participate in any sustainability initiatives, either with environmental groups, scientific bodies, or other companies within the seafood industry**
- **Trader Joe's has a misleading and incomplete labeling system that does not provide customers with the information necessary to make informed seafood buying decisions (actual product name, catch method, etc)**
- **Trader Joe's sells a large number of Greenpeace red-list fish**
- **Trader Joe's is a nation-wide company**

No other company meets all of these criteria. Trader Joe's is unique by virtue of just how appalling its seafood operation really is.

2. I don't see the items that Greenpeace claims Trader Joe's sells in my neighborhood store. What's going on?

There are two reasons that this may be occurring.

- **Trader Joe's stores make independent buying decisions from a central catalog. Some stores elect to bring certain products in while others do not. The Trader Joe's down the block from your house may not sell orange roughy, for example, while many other branches do.**
- **Trader Joe's has extremely confusing seafood labeling practices. Many of their red list items are hidden behind market names and product re-branding that hide the truth of what they're selling. In fact, even the store manager often doesn't know the truth of what they he/she is selling! Here are some examples:**

YOUR TRADER JOE'S QUESTIONS – ANSWERED

Atlantic salmon:

- “Barbeque Cut Fresh Salmon Fillets”
- “Pecan & Hazelnut Crusted Norwegian Farmed Salmon”
- “Fresh Salmon Boneless Skinless Fillets”
- “Salmon Stuffed with Feta & Spinach”
- “Cajun Salmon”
- “Salmon Stuffed with Couscous & Dill”
- “Pacific Supreme Smoked Salmon”
- “Just Salmon”

Yellowfin tuna:

- “Wild Sashimi Grade Ahi”
- “Solid Light Yellowfin Tuna” (canned)

Atlantic Scallops:

- “New England Wild Jumbo Scallops”

Ocean Quahog:

- “Pilgrim Joe's Clam Chowder”—Problem ingredients: Sea clam, sea clam juice (sea clam is a market name for ocean quahog) (canned)

Greenland Turbot:

- “Seasoned Turbot”

South Atlantic Albacore Tuna:

- “Albacore Solid White Tuna in Water”
- “Albacore Solid White Tuna in Olive Oil”

Tropical Shrimp:

- “Tempura Shrimp with Dipping Sauce”
- “Coconut Shrimp”
- “Medium Cooked Shrimp”
- “Large Cooked Shrimp”
- “Jumbo Cooked Shrimp”
- “Colossal Cooked Shrimp”
- “Uncooked Wild Blue Shrimp”
- “Colossal Butterflied Shrimp”
- “Trader Joe's Seafood Blend”

Alaska Pollock:

- “Trader Joe's Lightly Breaded Fish Sticks”—Problem ingredient: Pollock (shortened market name for Alaska Pollock)

YOUR TRADER JOE'S QUESTIONS – ANSWERED



3. I buy from Trader Joe's but only wild Pacific Ocean salmon. Is this better than farmed salmon?

These days, most wild Pacific salmon available at large retailers is from Alaska. Wild Alaskan salmon is generally a good option when it comes to seafood. Historically, these fisheries have been managed well and draw from strong populations. Farmed salmon is starkly different. Salmon farms have been linked to the mismanagement of wild fish stocks, parasite problems, pollution, diminished wild salmon populations, and in certain areas, even to human rights abuses.

4. I have started to buy the EcoFish labeled salmon from Whole Foods. Should all of Trader Joe's Salmon and all fish be Eco Labeled?

EcoFish is, confusingly, not actually an eco-label, but the name of a seafood company. Thankfully, this distributor tends to make thoughtful choices and to promote sustainable seafood options. At present, all EcoFish salmon products are made with wild Alaskan salmon.

5. Why isn't shrimp on your red list? Doesn't shrimp fishing trawl the seabed and kill many species that are not shrimp?

Shrimp trawling is bad news, and shrimp actually is on our red list. It is itemized as "tropical shrimp," a broad category that includes both the trawled wild product that you have mentioned, as well as the farmed shrimp produced in abysmal conditions in countries like India, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

6. There are no Trader Joe's where I live. Is there anything I can do?

Absolutely. We encourage you to use our state-based search tool and see how the committed your local retailers are to seafood sustainability. There are a few smaller chains that are doing extremely well and merit our support (PCC in the Seattle area, Andronico's in the San Francisco Bay area, and My Organic Market in the MD/DC area are three good examples.) There are also a few regional retailers that did as poorly as Trader Joe's.

You can access this tool at <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/campaigns/oceans/seafood/supermarket>

For those of you across the pond, there are some retailers in the United Kingdom that are really starting to make some progress. Waitrose, for example, has made several recent sourcing decisions that support sustainable seafood, including dropping orange roughy from their inventory. We encourage you to contact Greenpeace UK for more specific information on retailers that merit your support.

YOUR TRADER JOE'S QUESTIONS – ANSWERED

7. Why are you going after the stores? Isn't the problem stemming from the commercial fishermen and the fishing industry?

Greenpeace is heavily engaged directly with the fishing industry and relevant policy-makers to reform commercial fishing, but that does not mean that the retailers are not a major issue. We need to pressure companies that are making tremendous profits off of the demise of our oceans to change their habits. They need to begin taking responsibility for what they sell and how they sell it. Passing all the blame to either the fishermen or the consumer public is not acceptable. These are the big buyers, their dollars speak volumes. They need to get on board with sustainability.

8. Who determined this red list? Is it the Blue Oceans Institute, Monterey Bay Aquarium, a group effort of all of them, or what? Also, what justifies a given fish being included on this list?

The Greenpeace red list was developed by Greenpeace and Greenpeace International through a thorough scientific process. Our science and ranking benchmarks are available for public scrutiny on the Greenpeace International website:

- **Wild fisheries:** <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/red-criteria-unsustainable-fisheries>
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- **Aquaculture:** <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/red-criteria-unsustainable-aquaculture>

While our methodology is to a large degree similar to those used by other conservation groups (such as the Blue Ocean Institute and the Monterey Bay Aquarium), there are some discrepancies between our rankings. This is evidence of the fact that these groups, while all working towards the same goals, do have differences in the way that we approach ocean conservation and sustainability issues. Still, rather than being detrimental to the movement, we find that these incongruencies between the ranking systems force ongoing discussion and keep the scientific community engaged. Since fisheries themselves are dynamic, it is necessary to maintain a dynamic and adaptable approach in our appraisal of them.

9. I saw “scarlet” snapper for sale at Trader Joe's. Is that the same as red snapper, and thus a red list species?

The fact that we even have to ask the question is indicative of incomplete and misleading labeling on the part of Trader Joe's. It may be red snapper, or it may not. Either way, we must approach this from a precautionary principle – until we know what it is, we cannot assume it is sustainable. Trader Joe's must not only discontinue unsustainable items, but they must improve their labeling practices to the point where we can shop for seafood with confidence.

10. Is all Atlantic salmon on the red list? Even wild salmon imported from Scotland?

All Scottish salmon available to US consumers on any significant commercial scale is farmed. If it doesn't say “farmed,” it should. This again underscores the need for more transparency in seafood operations.

YOUR TRADER JOE'S QUESTIONS – ANSWERED



11. Would Greenpeace advice consumers to eat less fish in general, and to eat smaller fish towards the bottom of the food chain, and to eat only vegetarian fish... rather than just participate in this one Trader Joe's campaign?

- **Less fish in general: Yes. We are consuming too much seafood overall and need to cut back, but it's not all about what we see on our plate. It's important to be aware that we are using much of this seafood in inefficient ways. When you eat 2 ounces of farmed bluefin tuna, you are actually consuming upwards of 2 pounds of fish when you consider the amount of sardines that were fed to the tuna.**
- **Bottom of the food chain: Absolutely! Fish like mackerel, sardines, and the like have a better chance of being sustainable options due to their life cycle and inherent physiology. It's also a more efficient source of protein. Finally, fish like these tend to be high in Omega-3s and other important nutrients.**
- **"Vegetarian" fish: This is extremely important when applied to farmed fish. One of the key points that make many fish farms unsustainable is their use of wild fish to feed the fish they are raising (see the point made about bluefin above). Fish that can be fed primarily or entirely on vegetable matter have a much greater chance of lending themselves to sustainable aquaculture operations than do carnivorous fish.**

12. It is my understanding that in Asia, fish have been sustainably farmed for thousands of years, by using only vegetarian fish. Which are the vegetarian fish in North America which might be sustainably farmed?

The roster of sustainable farmed fish is changing rapidly with the development of stronger standards and more efficient fish feeds. As of now, you can expect domestic farmed herbivores/omnivores (tilapia, catfish, striped bass, barramundi, etc) and filter feeders (clams, mussels, geoduck, oysters, scallops) to be more sustainable in general than their carnivorous counterparts (salmon, tuna, amberjack, etc). This is changing as aquaculture evolves, but it's important to remain aware of the general biology at work here.

13. Will you update us on any additional information you have on TJ's action? Are they working with the Monterey Aquarium and if so, what does the Aquarium say about their responsiveness?

They have announced that they will be working with the Monterey Bay Aquarium, which is fabulous news. It's incredibly important for companies like Trader Joe's to not only develop sustainable seafood policies, but to do so with the aid of a transparent, science-based 3rd party like the Aquarium. That being said, no actions have yet been taken – as you said, there's still orange roughy in Trader Joe's freezers. We will absolutely keep you up-to-date on the evolution of this important partnership.

YOUR TRADER JOE'S QUESTIONS – ANSWERED



14. After I told a Trader Joe's manager about my concerns, he handed me the official response which basically says "We don't sell all the red listed seafood Greenpeace says we do." I then pointed out that in my quick one-minute survey of the frozen fish section I saw orange roughy, tropical shrimp, Greenland turbot, and yellowfin tuna. Why are there two different stories here?

This is one of the major problems that we are facing. Trader Joe's leadership is either unaware that they carry certain red list seafood items, or they are actively sending out false information about it to their own employees. Ocean quahog is a great example: Trader Joe's released a statement denying that they sold, among other items, ocean quahog. The fact is that ocean quahog is present in every can of "Pilgrim Joe's clam chowder," but it is labeled under the name "sea clam." The company's alarming lack of transparency isn't only hiding their red list seafood items from their customers – they are actually fooling themselves as well.

15. What's the point of interacting with the store managers? Do they really have any power to change things?

Absolutely. Trader Joe's store managers have a great deal of control over what is sold in their individual stores. They choose their items from the Trader Joe's catalog, and as such are able to avoid things like red-list fish if they so choose. Additionally, Trader Joe's headquarters claims to listen to store managers input during product development, so if enough managers get on board, we can really make a strong statement to corporate leadership.

16. Is Trader Joe's required by law to label their seafood?

Yes, to a degree. COOL (Country of Origin Labeling) is a federal regulation stating that all fresh and frozen seafood must be labeled to indicate where it is produced. Trader Joe's complies with this on a marginal basis, but does not give customers what they really need, which is clear and thorough labeling (country of origin, catch method, farmed v wild, etc) on all seafood products. As an example, take a look at a can of "Trader Joe's Solid White Tuna." See if you can tell where it's from. Given that some albacore tuna stocks are severely depleted and others are quite strong, it would sure be nice to be given enough information to make a conscientious decision!