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WWF South Africa: Seafood Sustainability Charter for Retailers

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Introduction

Worldwide, seafood resources are under ever increasing pressure due to the growing consumption of fish and other seafood products. This has resulted in the over-exploitation of many fish stocks, including those of many South African species. Additional concerns relate to the environmental impacts of fishing methods and the rapidly growing aquaculture industry, and the implications that these hold for both the environment and communities who depend on these resources. Parallel to this there has been heightened consumer awareness with a rapidly growing demand for more sustainable and better labelled seafood products. Retailers hold a significant proportion of the global seafood market share and are well positioned to effect positive changes in the fishing industry. In a number of countries, major retailers have started adjusting their seafood business to meet consumer expectations and in order to promote sustainably and responsibly harvested seafood products, thus contributing towards the maintenance of healthy and productive marine ecosystems, species, and livelihoods (Greenpeace 2006, Jacquet and Pauley 2007).

Overfishing and IUU

It is estimated that 76% of global commercial fish stocks are exploited at or beyond sustainable levels (FAO 2007). Reasons for overfishing include insufficient or inefficient management systems (past and present), destructive fishing methods that damage the habitat, lack of robust and up-to-date scientific information on fish stocks, and in particular *Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU)* fishing activities. Sub-Saharan Africa loses an estimated US\$ 1 billion per annum (or 19% of current landing value) to IUU fishing (HSTF 2006).

Sustainability and Traceability

One of the critical components of countering IUU and thus promoting more sustainable seafood sourcing is by ensuring proper traceability of all seafood products. Traceability may be defined as *"the ability to trace and follow a food, feed, or food-producing animal or substance intended to be, or expected to be incorporated into a food or feed, through all stages of production, processing and distribution"* (EU 2004). To date most traceability schemes, including the ones legally required in South Africa, have relied on "paper trails" – successive documents such as catch returns, invoices, orders, import permits, and delivery notes that are generated as a product moves through the supply chain. Typically the responsibility for traceability at any given point is limited to a "one up one down" level which makes it difficult to trace a product from the vessel to the consumer. Guaranteeing sustainability without proper traceability is virtually impossible; however traceability alone does not mean that any given product is necessarily sustainable.

Chain of custody management and corporate brand integrity

Traceability schemes have developed in recent years to incorporate the most advanced electronic techniques of tracking batches of products, including bar-coding and even DNA-testing of random product samples. Not only do these management systems aid in ensuring

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sustainability, they offer exceptional insurance for corporate brand integrity that may have been built up over many years. For example, efficient chain of custody management will ensure that a retailer is able to assess exactly where a seafood product originated from that is unexpectedly implicated in a food safety scare, and effectively carry out a whole-chain product recall. Knowingly or unknowingly, a retailer simply cannot afford to be seen caught up in the sourcing and sale of IUU seafood products.

Getting involved:

WWF South Africa invites local retailers to become part of the global solution to overfishing and IUU. This approach focuses on establishing sustainable seafood procurement policies or refining existing ones, ensuring sourcing and traceability regimes that effectively bar IUU origin seafood from entering the formal market, and effective communication and labelling that will enable the consumer to have the ultimate say in encouraging more sustainable and environmentally sound fishing practice.

Key focus areas:

The Sustainable Seafood Charter focuses on a number of key operational areas, as listed below.

- *Sourcing and Procurement*
- *Product range*
- *Communications*
- *Awareness*

Sourcing and Procurement

1. Establish a sourcing and procurement policy for all seafood products;
2. Ensure all seafood products on offer are legal (i.e. be able to demonstrate compliance with national and international laws that govern fisheries) and originate from legal sources (no "red/black" listed, or IUU sources);
3. Be able to trace seafood products to their origin, and maintain an adequate chain-of-custody management system (e.g. invoice paper trails, electronic tracking systems);
4. Communicate your sourcing criteria to your suppliers;
5. Consider all new seafood products against sustainability and traceability criteria before procurement.

Product Range

1. Evaluate (or have independently evaluated) all products in the seafood portfolio against the sourcing and traceability criteria;
2. Identify existing seafood products that are sourced from unsustainable fisheries (over-exploited, high bycatch, or other unacceptable levels of environmental impact);
3. Phase out and/or replace unsustainable products (red/orange listed) with more sustainable alternatives within a specified time frame;
4. Promote species that are considered sustainable choices, come from healthy well-managed populations, and are biologically equipped to better handle fishing pressure. As a minimum requirement, the source should be a fishery that applies the FAO guidelines for a responsible fishery, be Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified, or be "green-listed" by a credible species listing scheme (WWF network);
5. Adequately label all seafood on offer and provide customers with the correct species name, origin (country and/ or region) and production method (type of fishing gear used or whether wild-caught or farmed);
6. Promote the use of eco-labels from certification schemes that meet the FAO criteria (FAO 2005) where applicable;
7. Continually evaluate and improve seafood product portfolio (existing and new).



Communications

1. Develop a “sustainable seafood position statement” that states a concern for the issues and includes a measurable commitment to action;
2. Communicate this position internally and publically;
3. Advocate sustainable management for over-exploited species and encourage implementation of recovery plans, following rigorous scientific advice and in collaboration with WWF and relevant authorities.

Awareness

1. Ensure that all employees/staff are briefed about the company’s sustainable seafood position and policy;
2. Ensure that appropriate staff-members understand the practical implications of sourcing and procurement policies, traceability mechanisms, and labelling;
3. Equip staff to be able to engage with customers about seafood product range and labelling;
4. Engage staff in training or awareness programmes to educate them about sustainable seafood;
5. Use point of sale information to educate customers about sustainability issues and product selections.

Proposed work plan:

1. Preliminary information exchange meeting (pre-assessment)
 - ✓ base-line information
 - ✓ number of outlets
 - ✓ species/products
 - ✓ trade volumes
 - ✓ listing of sources and suppliers
2. Assessment of any existing seafood sourcing and procurement policies (wild-caught and aquaculture);
3. Screening of product range for sustainability, traceability, and labelling against indicators and standards;
4. Identification of critical areas of concern that require urgent improvement;
5. Setting of short and medium term goals with appropriate performance indicators;
6. Engagement with the seafood suppliers to the retailer;
7. Setting up of four-monthly performance assessment meetings.

Costs:

Typical costing per annum:

Item	Breakdown	Cost (R)
Pre-assessment	2 days @ R2,000/day	4,000
4-monthly follow-up	3x2 days per annum @R2,000/day	12,000
In-house education/training	R2,000 per session (min. one session/year recommended)	2,000
Communication outputs	(newsletter and regular communications)	2,000
Training materials	R100/pack, 10 packs	1,000
Total per year¹		R21,000

¹ NOTE: All cost accrued for travel and accommodation of WWF staff and all other parties involved, as well fees for venues; equipment hire; refreshments, etc. are not covered by these rates and are for the account of the retailer.



Generic Sustainable Seafood Policy

1. There is global concern over the over-exploitation of seafood resources and the environmental impacts of fishery and aquaculture activities on marine ecosystems;
2. Retailers are major role players in the seafood industry and can help to drive positive change in fisheries by supporting sustainable seafood choices from legal and responsibly managed sources;
3. Market support for sustainable and well-managed fisheries and responsible aquaculture is critical to the long-term maintenance of healthy and productive marine ecosystems, species, and livelihoods, as well as sustainable business;
4. Consumers have a right to sufficient and accurate information about any seafood product on sale, in order to be able to make environmentally responsible choices;
5. All seafood should be traceable to their origins, making use of suitably robust and credible traceability schemes or mechanisms;
6. All seafood on offer should be legal (no IUU products);
7. Unsustainable seafood products should be phased out and replaced by sustainable substitutes;
8. Sustainable choices should be promoted;
9. Seafood should be adequately labelled and provide information on the species, origin, and production method (fishing gear used, or wild-caught/farmed), or any credible eco-labels that may apply;
10. Seafood product ranges should be subject to continuous improvement, and any new seafood products should be considered against strict legal, traceability, and sustainability criteria.



Initial Performance Assessment:

	Risk Issues	Corrective actions	Score (1-5)²
1. Sustainable Seafood Policy			
2. Procurement criteria			
3. Screening and improvement of product range			
4. Traceability & auditing			
5. Knowledge of buyers on sustainability issues			
6. Product labelling and information			
7. Promotion of sustainability issues			

Note: The performance assessment is not designed to "pass or fail" a participant, but rather to provide a yardstick for measuring improvement over time.

1. Sustainable Seafood Policy:

- Do you have a sustainable seafood policy?
- How well does it conform to WWF’s draft generic policy?

2. Procurement criteria:

- Do you have criteria on which you base sourcing?
- Do these criteria address sustainability, environmental, legal and/or social issues?
- Have you communicated these procurement criteria to your suppliers?

3. Screening and improvement of product range:

- Are you able to provide a complete list of your seafood products?
- Are products named down to species level?
- Are there any products that are on the "red list"?
- Are there any products from certified fisheries?

4. Traceability & Auditing:

- Do you have a mechanism for tracing the source of products?
- Are all products on your procurement list traceable to source?
- Are any auditing mechanisms in place to validate traceability and compliance?

5. Knowledge of buyers on seafood sustainability issues

- Have buyers received any training or instruction on seafood sustainability issues?

6. Product labelling and information:

- Are products labelled with correct species names?
- Do labels carry additional information (origin and fishing production method)?
- Are any of your products eco-labelled?

7. Promotion of sustainability issues:

- Do you communicate at any level with your customers and employees on seafood sustainability issues?
- Please indicate communication mechanisms used (in-house publications, in-store displays, print media, etc.).

² Where 1=no performance, 2=need improvement, 3= satisfactory, 4=good, 5=excellent

**Ongoing four-monthly Performance Assessment:**

	Actions since last assessment	Score (1-5)	Actions for next quarter
Sustainable Seafood Policy			
Procurement criteria			
Screening and improvement of product range			
Traceability & auditing			
Knowledge of buyers on sustainability issues			
Product labelling and information			
Promotion of sustainability issues			

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