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GIANT RED SEA CUCUMBER FROM B.C. FISHERY NOW RECOMMENDED BY VANCOUVER AQUARIUM'S OCEAN WISE PROGRAM

Vancouver, B.C. - With Lunar New Year approaching on January 28th, many families will be marking the occasion with a celebratory meal involving seafood and they can now add Ocean Wise sea cucumber to this year's menu. Following an assessment of British Columbia's giant red sea cucumber (*Parastichopus californicus*) fishery, the unique seafood—which is often reserved for special occasions in Chinese cuisine—has been recommended by the Vancouver Aquarium's national sustainable seafood program.

The assessment was conducted as part of the program's continued focus on small-scale Canadian fisheries. In 2015, Ocean Wise identified a need for more assessments of local, diverse and culturally relevant seafood options. To date, Ocean Wise has now completed assessments for and recommends gooseneck barnacles (Tofino, B.C.), Chedabucto Bay shrimp (Chedabucto Bay, Nova Scotia) and Arctic char (Cambridge Bay, Nunavut).

"From coast to coast to coast, we have some amazing fisheries in this country that are harvesting their seafood sustainably. Our decision two years ago to focus on small-scale fisheries across Canada is a celebration of our local fisheries," said Ann-Marie Copping, Ocean Wise program manager. "The giant red sea cucumber fishery is a great example of a long-running fishery that uses a highly selective fishing method, ensuring the nearby environment remains intact and the population healthy for generations to come. With this new recommendation, our hope is that more restaurants—and in turn, more consumers—will seek out this unusual, sustainable seafood."

Sea cucumbers are soft, gelatinous tubes of various different colours with markings such as blotches, spots and spikes. In British Columbia, there are approximately 30 species of sea cucumbers, but the giant red sea cucumber is the only species caught commercially. The giant red sea cucumber is distinguishable by its deep red colour and yellow spikes, and can grow to about 50 centimetres long. They are found from intertidal zones to the seabed up to 250 metres deep. A commercial fishery has existed in B.C. since the 1970s, with demand and market price increasing ever since.

The meat and the skin of sea cucumbers have long been a prized ingredient in certain Asian cuisines, and in China has been considered a medicinal food for centuries. In Chinese restaurants, sea cucumber is often braised whole or sliced and served alongside vegetables or mushrooms. Their texture is soft, glutinous and can be described as slightly al dente, with a mild taste that often takes on the flavours and seasonings with which it's cooked.

Historically, most of the product has been sold to export markets but there is growing interest from local restaurants serving this dish as well, including Vancouver's Blue Water Cafe which is featuring giant red sea cucumber as part of its annual [Unsung Heroes menu](#) during the month of February.

To make a recommendation for wild capture assessments, Ocean Wise uses four criteria: impacts of the fishery on the stock in question, impacts of the fishery on other species, effectiveness of management and impacts on habitat and ecosystem.

The sea cucumbers in the fishery are hand-caught by divers along the coast of B.C. This catch method is highly sustainable, as there is virtually no impact on other species or the surrounding environment and no juveniles are taken. To ensure protection of the population, fishing is restricted to about 50 per cent of the B.C. coastline, with the additional benefit of larvae and adults moving over from protected areas.

The assessment was conducted by Ocean Wise research analyst Alasdair Lindop and underwent a rigorous scientific evaluation, including review by academic and industry experts, before being published this month. The report is now part of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch® index of assessments and eco-labels can benchmark to it. To read the full assessment, click [here](#).

Vancouver Aquarium Ocean Wise®

Overfishing is the single biggest threat our oceans face today. With more than 675 partners – and thousands of partner locations – across Canada, Ocean Wise makes it easy for consumers to make sustainable seafood choices that ensure the health of our oceans for generations to come. The Ocean Wise symbol next to a seafood item is the Vancouver Aquarium’s assurance of an ocean-friendly seafood choice. www.oceanwise.ca.

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