

OCEAN WISE® SEAFOOD PROGRAM RECOMMENDS TWO WILD B.C. KELP SPECIES AS A SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD OPTION

Vancouver, B.C. – B.C. kelp is now a sustainable choice for diners, chefs, and seafood shoppers alike based on a new Ocean Wise seafood assessment that recommends the marine plant. Ocean Wise Seafood conducted the report in-house as part of the program’s expanding scientific research arm that aims to identify even more ocean-friendly seafood options in Canada. The report examines the sustainability of the giant kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) and bull kelp (*Nereocystis leutkeana*) fisheries along the B.C. coast.

The superfood, which has long been a staple in certain cuisines like Japanese cooking, has become increasingly popular in recent years among mainstream chefs and foodies. It’s been touted for its health benefits, which include vitamins, minerals, trace elements, and enzymes. Kelp is especially high in iodine, a mineral known to optimize thyroid function and metabolism. As the seaweed appears on a growing number of menus, the production among B.C. fisheries increased 43 per cent from 2014 to 2016, from 281 metric tons to 400 metric tons.

“This assessment is a first for the Ocean Wise Seafood program, and we continue to expand our scope to include less conventional, but in-demand, seafood items and now marine plants. These two species of kelp can be found in everything from sushi to brownies, and we’re likely to see more of it as production continues to rise at our local fisheries,” said Ann-Marie Copping, Ocean Wise Seafood program manager. “This report is just the latest in our ongoing efforts to create awareness about smaller fisheries from coast to coast to coast. We want to connect our partner suppliers, retailers and restaurants with this information so Canadian consumers can continue to look for dynamic seafood items with the Ocean Wise symbol.”

Ocean Wise executive chef Ned Bell is excited by this new recommendation as it is his own kelp brownie recipe that inspired the assessment. “With more than 10,000 edible plants in the ocean, I am beyond excited to start experimenting and cooking with new and underappreciated yet sustainable ingredients from our oceans,” added Bell.

Farmed seaweed, largely produced in Asia with only a small portion produced on Canada’s east coast, has been Ocean Wise recommended for several years. One of its more recognizable products is the red seaweed nori (*Pyropia spp.*).

Ocean Wise Seafood analyst Alasdair Lindop conducted the recent assessment of wild B.C. kelp, a rigorous scientific process that involves months-long research of the fisheries. To make a recommendation for wild capture assessments, the program 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.

Both species of kelp form expansive beds, known as kelp forests, and can be found along almost the entire B.C. coast. Overall abundance is unknown, as no stock evaluation has been conducted in over a decade; however, licence conditions are precautionary, limiting harvest to targeting only 20 per cent of kelp plants in the bed and taking only a portion of the plant. The kelp is harvested by hand, using a cutting tool to trim the fronds and blades, which allows the plant to regrow.

Kelp harvesting in B.C. has been attempted since the mid-20th century but repeated industrial attempts failed and all harvesting is now on a small-scale. The provincial government's Ministry of Forestry, Lands and Natural Resource Operations is responsible for managing the fishery, and they issue individual annual licenses to harvest kelp in one or more of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Pacific Fisheries Management Area sub-areas. The Ministry assesses applications on a case-by-case basis, based on historical inventories. In 2017, quotas were set at 900 metric tons although the requested quotas have not been met in recent years.

Most of the kelp harvested is giant kelp and is used in the herring spawn-on-kelp fishery, which involves either attaching kelp fronds to ropes and introducing them to herring that have been captured and contained in a pond, or depositing the fronds in wild spawning areas. The fish lay eggs on the fronds and those in ponds are then released unharmed, with the herring roe gathered together with the kelp and brined before being shipped to market, almost exclusively in Japan.

Edible products, fertilizers and cosmetics are among the other uses for the kelp, which can be dried and then turned into a powder.

Ocean Wise® Seafood Program

Overfishing is a major threat to our oceans. With thousands of Ocean Wise seafood partner locations across Canada, Ocean Wise makes it easy for consumers to choose sustainable seafood for the long-term health of our oceans. The Ocean Wise symbol next to a seafood item is our assurance of an ocean-friendly seafood choice. www.ocean.org/seafood

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