

THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD INITIATIVE



Participation Scheme

A Business Guide to Sustainable
Seafood in Southern Africa



SASSI's Business Guide to Sustainable Seafood

© Erling Svensen/ WWF-Canon

Introduction

The unsustainable harvest of the world's oceans has led to the depletion, and in some cases the collapse, of many of the world's major fish stocks. While the outlook for these threatened marine ecosystems remains bleak in the face of unsustainable fishing practices, forward-thinking businesses involved in the seafood industry are realising that the fisheries crisis could also be viewed as a business opportunity.

SASSI's Business Guide is a tool designed to introduce businesses that buy and sell seafood to ways in which they can support sustainable seafood and in doing so, help to ensure the sustainability of their own business.

This guide outlines SASSI's core beliefs about why it is important for responsible businesses to engage in the growing global movement towards sustainable seafood and is intended to help these businesses take advantage of the new and exciting market for sustainable seafood. It highlights some of the benefits associated with making this shift towards sustainability and outlines a range of specific activities that can help support best practices.

At SASSI, we understand that sustainability cannot be achieved overnight; it is journey with many steps, one which will differ for each business. This guide has been developed as a starting point for this journey between SASSI and companies that share our interest in supporting the long-term viability of our seafood supply and health of ocean ecosystems.



Who is SASSI?

The Southern African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (SASSI) was launched in November 2004 to inform the seafood industry, from wholesalers to restaurateurs through to seafood lovers, about the threats facing Southern Africa's marine ecosystems.

SASSI has three primary objectives:

1. **Promote compliance of the law through education and awareness**
2. **Shift consumer demand away from over-exploited species to more sustainable options**
3. **Create awareness around marine conservation issues**



Why Sustainable Seafood?

Sustainable seafood is more than just a good deal for our marine ecosystems. At SASSI, we have developed our participation scheme with a view to enabling businesses to take advantage of the benefits offered by sustainable seafood.

Public relations benefits

Responsible businesses stand to increase the loyalty of existing customers and attract new clientele who appreciate the business's efforts and knowledge around seafood sustainability issues. At the same time, the brand value gained by being associated with WWF, one of the world's leading conservation organisations, strengthens any business' marketing activities and provides credibility to any business' claims of being a responsible member of their community. Ultimately, businesses with excellent reputations will be able to recruit the best people, enjoy privileged access to new markets, and generate greater loyalty from the communities within which they operate.



Purchasing sustainable seafood can also help to support local fishing communities

Reduced risk-exposure

Businesses that deal in overexploited seafood species are vulnerable to the unpredictable supply of these species. By shifting their dependence away from overfished stocks towards more sustainable species, these businesses can improve the reliability of their seafood supply chains.

In dealing with overexploited and often illegal fish species, businesses can also expose themselves to significant legal risks, often unknowingly. Choosing to focus your business around legal, sustainable seafood helps businesses avoid unnecessary legal complications.

Better quality seafood and service

Sustainable seafood can often be better quality than the less-sustainable or illegal options. Fish which are caught or raised with more care often have superior taste and freshness. Due to the growing scarcity of overexploited species, prices for these fish have been rapidly increasing over the last few years. High quality, and often cheaper, sustainable substitutes exist for most of the threatened species. In harder economic times, it makes sense to buy these cheaper and more sustainable fish.

Well educated staff can engage with interested customers, thereby improving the quality of your service, and potentially increasing your marketability. One way to empower your staff is to send them to a SASSI training course.





Increased consumer awareness

As environmental issues rise to the forefront of public debate, as has happened with the depletion of the ozone layer and more recently with climate change, the general public are increasingly demanding accountability from companies and individuals alike, as evidenced by the growing market for organic/natural food in South Africa.

Joining SASSI’s participation scheme enables businesses to gain public recognition of the fact that they are taking steps toward being a leader on seafood sustainability. A number of large retail chains such as Woolworths and Pick ‘n Pay have already joined as SASSI retail participants; helping to increase consumer awareness and cater to a market which is increasingly more aware of the major issues surrounding seafood sustainability.

Potentially increased profit margins

As evidenced by the growing market for organic/natural and Fair-Trade products throughout the food industry, there is growing evidence to suggest that consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable/ethically sourced products. The same is true of seafood (see **Box 1**). Fishermen and retailers have also noted that products originating from fisheries which are certified as sustainable are able to command a price premium on international markets, particularly in the US and Europe where large supermarkets such as Wal-Mart and Sainsbury’s have committed to increasingly source their seafood products exclusively from sustainable fisheries.

Box 1: How much is sustainable seafood worth?

A recent survey of European consumers found that:

- the average price increase for sustainable seafood is 10%
- 40% of consumers are willing to pay 5% to 10% more
- 25% of consumers are willing to pay 10% more
- a quarter of the most affluent consumers are willing to pay 20% more

(Source: Seafood Choices Alliance (2007). The European market for sustainable seafood)

Other benefits

- Successful companies are constantly seeking to expand their businesses - to improve their market position and access new markets. By choosing to focus their business on sound ethical and environmental principles, these companies are making a strategic investment, placing themselves amongst the leaders in a field that is undoubtedly going to grow in the future.
- Apart from the benefits of sustainable seafood for your business, by sending your staff on SASSI’s sustainable seafood training courses you will also be empowering your staff, improving their future employability and your business’s corporate social responsibility profile.



For more on how sustainable seafood can benefit your business, please contact us at:

sassi@wwf.org.za or call us on (021) 421 9167.

What does being a SASSI participant mean?

Regardless of whether your business is a seafood wholesaler/supplier, retailer or a restaurant, joining SASSI's participation scheme means committing your business to supporting sustainable and responsible fishing and seafood production.

Although the specifics of implementation will differ according to the size of the participant, all of our SASSI participants voluntarily commit to making their seafood businesses more sustainable by:

1. Ensuring that all seafood on offer is legal
2. Phasing out unsustainable seafood products and replacing them with sustainable substitutes;
3. Promoting sustainable choices from responsible, well managed fisheries;
4. Continuously evaluating seafood product ranges against strict legal, traceability, and sustainability criteria.
5. Providing consumers with seafood that is adequately labelled and includes information on the species, origin, and production method (fishing gear used, or wild-caught/farmed), or any credible eco-labels that may apply;
6. Always endeavouring to offer seafood that is traceable to its origins, making use of suitable traceability schemes or mechanisms;

SASSI's participation scheme has been developed to help businesses implement these changes into their everyday practices. To find out more about how exactly these commitments apply to your business, please contact John Duncan for more details at jduncan@wwf.org.za.



Our Vision for Sustainable Seas

SASSI is committed to working hand-in-hand with the seafood industry towards a future in which sustainable fisheries and aquaculture thrive at a level that supports the communities and businesses that depend on them.

An environmentally sustainable fishery is one in which stock levels are not depleted, is well managed, has minimal habitat damage and has low levels of by-catch. Likewise, sustainable fish farming (aquaculture) respects the surrounding environment, uses water and other resources wisely, and does not damage natural, wild fish populations.

Supporting SASSI and our vision for a sustainable seafood industry means purchasing environmentally responsible seafood. Not only does this help to reduce the pressure on our threatened marine resources, but in buying sustainable seafood you are also helping to support responsible fisheries and the many communities which rely on healthy ecosystems to provide them with livelihoods. A future that isn't sustainable isn't much of a future...

What does SASSI offer your business?

Working with SASSI allows your business access to the growing community of environmentally and socially responsible businesses who share your interest in supporting the long-term viability of the seafood industry and the health of our ocean ecosystems.

We understand that change does not happen overnight, sustainability is a journey which starts with just one small step. SASSI’s participation scheme is about helping your business in taking this first step and guiding you towards what we believe to be a sustainable seafood industry.

In order to achieve a sustainable seafood industry, it is important that we work with all of the components along the seafood supply chain, which is why we have developed different programs to enable all types of seafood businesses to engage with us.

SASSI engages with the larger participants such as wholesalers, retailers and restaurant chains through a regular assessment process during which we identify areas for improvement in the following areas:

- Sourcing and procurement.
- Product range
- Customer communication
- Staff awareness

SASSI engages with smaller participants such as individual restaurants and delis through:

- Annual training courses
- Online evaluations
- Menu assessments

Although the costs and services provided by SASSI differ depending on the type and size of the participant, SASSI commits to providing all of our participants with:

- **Strategic Advice & Evaluation**

SASSI provides up-to-date information and advice on the sustainability of local and imported seafood species. Contact SASSI at sassi@wwf.org.za or call us on (021) 421 9167.

- **Staff Training**

In order to engage with customers, you and your staff need to know the issues. SASSI runs quarterly half-day training courses on what sustainable seafood is all about and how to implement a sustainable seafood strategy in your business.

- **Regular Contact**

All SASSI participants receive regular contact from SASSI to help with any seafood-related problems, either through regular one-on-one assessments or electronically/telephonically. Participants also receive a copy of our electronic quarterly newsletter keeping them in touch with what’s happening in the world of sustainable seafood.

- **Web Advertising**

The SASSI logo is already well-known to many seafood enthusiasts. All SASSI participants are listed on SASSI website, restaurant participants are also listed as SASSI participants on South Africa’s biggest online restaurant guide Dining-Out (www.dining-out.co.za).

- **Awareness & Publicity Materials**

SASSI provides participants with sustainable seafood awareness materials to help raise awareness of sustainable seafood in their stores/restaurants and to publicise their commitment to SASSI’s goal of a sustainable seafood industry in South Africa.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *What are the costs involved in joining SASSI's participation scheme and where does this money go?*

The costs of participating differ depending on the type and size of your seafood business and are directly related to the amount of services provided. Because we are a non-profit organisation, all of the funds received in membership fees go towards covering the costs of running the SASSI program. These funds are kindly supplemented by WWF, Green Trust and Pick n Pay to help SASSI continue its work raising public awareness around the threats facing our marine ecosystems. To find out what participation will cost for your business, please contact John Duncan at jduncan@wwf.org.za.

2. *How big is the market for sustainable seafood in South Africa?*

South African consumers are becoming increasingly aware of sustainability issues facing our oceans. Since SASSI began in 2004, we have distributed over a million wallet cards and now have over 16 500 users of our sustainable seafood SMS service (FishMS 079 499 8795).

3. *Are there suppliers or processors that specialise in sustainable seafood?*

The WWF is working with fishing companies in South Africa to help develop sustainable fisheries (see www.wwf.org.za/rfp for more details), some of the products from these more sustainable fisheries are already available on the South African market. We can also help you work with your existing suppliers to identify the best choices in seafood sustainability.

4. *I am interested in supporting sustainable seafood, what is the next step I must take?*

Contact SASSI at sassi@wwf.org.za or call us on (021) 421 9167 to find out more.



© Erling Svensen/ WWF-Canon

Acknowledgements

SASSI acknowledges the support of The Green Trust (a partnership between WWF and Nedbank) and Pick n Pay. FishMs is supported by iVeri Payment Technology.



SASSI is implemented by WWF-SA, the conservation organisation, with the following networking partners: The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Two Oceans Aquarium, Ezemvelo-Kwazulu Natal Wildlife, SAIAB, Sea World at Ushaka, Bayworld, TRAFFIC, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Sharklife, the South African Shark Conservancy and Pete Goffe-wood.