

Five fishy tales

Here we highlight five key seafood species from the new *Best Fish Guide*.



Hoki

Hoki is one of our largest commercial fisheries, with exports all over the world. The fishing industry trumpets hoki's certification as a "sustainably managed fishery" by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). However, Forest & Bird has twice taken its concerns with the hoki certification through the MSC appeal process. Following both hoki appeals, the MSC made significant changes to its certification standard.

During the last decade, hoki has moved in our guide from the bottom to the top of the red "worst choice" ranking. And in the latest guide mid-trawl hoki has moved up into the orange "OK choice but eat less" category. Despite these improvements, the hoki fishery is still responsible for too many bycatch deaths of seabirds, fur seals, and small fish. Much hoki fishing is done by bottom trawling where heavy steel rollers attached to nets trundle along the seabed, crushing everything in their path. If bycatch and habitat damage from bottom trawling were addressed by the industry, hoki would be a much better choice.



Snapper

Snapper is one of New Zealand's favourite eating fish, which has led to heavy pressure on populations. Snapper is caught by bottom inshore trawl and longline. It is ranked as a red "worst choice" in the guide because of depleted stock numbers, overfishing, and the by-catch of globally threatened seabirds, such as black petrels in the longline fishery. But the longline fishery has been working hard to reduce the amount of seabird bycatch, particularly in the Hauraki Gulf. This hasn't yet seen snapper move out of the red category, but it is likely to do so in the next edition of the guide as there is a time lag in MPI reporting.



Salmon

Generally a good choice fish. All New Zealand commercially available salmon is farmed, and our assessment of salmon varies from place to place, largely because of the suitability of the local environment, the impact different farms have on the environment, and the rules around aquaculture put in place by different local councils. Our best choices are New Zealand's only freshwater salmon farmed in the hydro canals in the Mackenzie Basin and the saltwater farms near Akaroa on Banks Peninsula. Salmon from other parts of the country are still ok choices but are less good because of environmental impacts.



Squid

Squid caught by trawling is in the red "worst choice" category. But if you can find squid caught using a sea lion-friendly fishing method called jigging, it is ranked as an amber "ok choice". The trawl fishery has been responsible for large numbers of seabird deaths, and the main squid fishery around New Zealand's sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands has killed a lot of sea lions, which have the same "nationally critical" threat status as kākāpō and takahē. Squid caught by jigging (hooked lines) is a far better option for our seabirds, 90 percent of which are threatened with extinction. Little squid is caught by jigging in New Zealand, but consumer pressure from consumers (ie you!) could change that.

Whitebait

This year's guide includes the freshwater native species of whitebait and eels for the first time.

Both are ranked as red "worst choice". The main reason New Zealand's five whitebait species are declining so rapidly is habitat loss and degradation but whitebaiting is also having an impact. Whitebait is the only commercial fishery managed by the Department of Conservation. It is a popular delicacy in New Zealand, but Forest & Bird believes we should not be commercially harvesting endangered species. For more on whitebait, see p40.

