

Protecting Endangered, Threatened and Protected Species in Fishing

Introduction

In September 2020, three non-governmental organisations – Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, Whale and Dolphin Conservation and Birdlife International – collaborated with Asda Stores Ltd to evaluate the likely impact of the company's seafood sourcing on endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) marine species through bycatch (i.e. accidental capture) in fishing. The results of the evaluation were [published](#) and Asda committed to making a public response to the report and the issues that were identified.

Asda's Response to the ETP Bycatch Report

Asda recognises the potential issues identified in the report and the need for fishery management to fully address risks to ETP species. Asda already takes measures with regard to protecting ETP species in fisheries but we understand that there is a case for going further and we will adopt the following measures:

Tuna caught by long lines

Long line fisheries for tuna can represent a significant risk to ETP species (particularly seabirds, sharks and turtles). Implementation of best practices for bycatch mitigation will be key to reducing impacts. Consequently, as of February 2021, for long line tuna fleets that supply Asda the following are required:

- The current mitigation of bycatch for ETP species meets, at a minimum, the requirements of the relevant Regional Fishery Management Organisation (RFMO)
- Adoption of circle hooks for industrial vessels (over 24m) and to work with the small number of remaining non-industrial vessels to move to circle hooks as soon as possible (by 2025).
- Vessels that supply Asda will be required to safely release all sharks. At a minimum, all sharks must be landed with fins naturally attached to prevent the harmful practice of shark finning
- Adoption of best practices for the mitigation of bycatch for ETP species within 3 years where required, based on scientific data
- Levels of observer coverage set by the relevant RFMO are applied
- Adoption of higher levels of observer coverage in the future, ideally 20% within five years, using a combination of human and electronic monitoring
- 100% observer coverage in the long term – using a combination of human and electronic observations

Tuna caught by purse seine

Purse seine fleets that supply tuna to Asda are assessed as representing less of a threat to ETP species than long line fisheries. They already have high levels of observer coverage. However, we are communicating to the supply chain that we expect supplying fleets to meet the minimum requirements of the relevant RFMO and to work towards best practices in mitigation within 3 years. We will also never source from fisheries that deliberately set nets around ETP species.

Gill nets

We recognise that gill nets can pose a substantial risk to ETP species and have examined the role of gill nets in fisheries that supply Asda. There is currently only one gill net fishery in the Asda sourcing portfolio; North Pacific salmon. This is a fishery that is certified to the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standard. We recognise that despite the presence of the MSC certification (see below) there may be threats to ETP species which are currently unassessed. Consequently, we have communicated our concerns to our supplier and are investigating the opportunities for enhanced observation in the fishery. Future measures to mitigate bycatch will be informed by the results of monitoring data.

Entanglement in lobster trap fisheries

Asda is aware that lobster trap fisheries in the United States represent a significant risk to marine mammals and particularly the critically endangered North Atlantic Right Whale. Asda does not regularly source lobster from the United States, most lobster is sourced from MSC-certified fisheries in Canada, where there are also risks to whales but the risks may be lower. Asda will write directly to suppliers asking them to explain the measures being undertaken by the source fisheries to reduce potential entanglement risks and we will review further sourcing of lobster from the United States and Canada in the light of the answers we receive.

The role of sustainability certifications

Asda will make representations for more effective measures to be adopted by sustainability certifications for seafood and will require additional measures from source fisheries where there are significant risks to marine ETP species.

General measures

In addition to the specific measures identified above, Asda will also take the following actions:

- Adopt a procurement policy for all seafood products that requires that best practices are implemented to reduce harm to ETP species and particularly the use of best practices in the mitigation of bycatch. The specification will also require appropriate observer coverage (whether electronic or in-person) be introduced over a meaningful timescale.

- Adopt a presumption against sourcing seafood products caught with gill nets because of the very high risk to cetaceans and other ETP species. Seafood products caught with gill nets will be accepted where i) no practicable alternative fishing gears are available, ii) the fishery is certified to a sustainability standard compliant with the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative benchmark and iii) active steps are being taken to establish impacts on ETP species and measures are taken to address problems when identified.
- Support innovation in the mitigation of ETP impacts in fishing through preferential purchasing and other measures.

Conclusion

Asda welcomes the evaluation of risks to marine ETP species from fishery bycatch and will take action to address the issues that have been identified. Asda will continue to collaborate with the three NGOs in identifying and addressing issues in the future and will ensure through procurement policies and other measures that the company's seafood supply chain does not present unacceptable threats to marine wildlife.

Asda Stores Ltd, February 2021