

# Making seafood a core choice for UK consumers in an equitable, healthy, and sustainable food system

## Background

The [Blue Food Assessment](#) highlighted the value of seafood as a sustainable, low-carbon source of high-quality nutrition that should be a larger part of everyone's diet. However, seafood consumption in the UK has declined in recent years and is now less than the global average, with consumption in poorer households and younger age groups markedly lower than that. Average consumption sits at 18.5 kg/capita/year, while world average seafood consumption increased to 19.9 kg/capita/year (Figure 1) and is expected to reach a level of 21.5 kg/capita/year by 2030. Between 2006 and 2019, average seafood prices increased by 30%, affecting the accessibility of seafood by lower income groups in the UK.

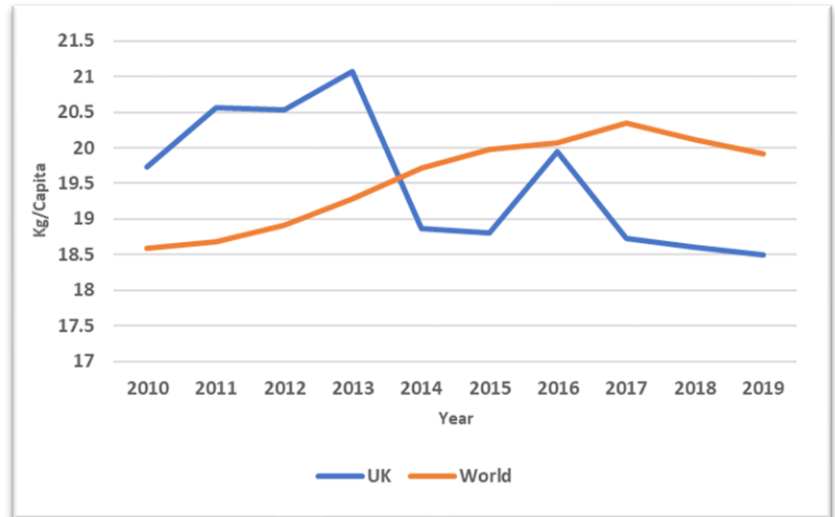


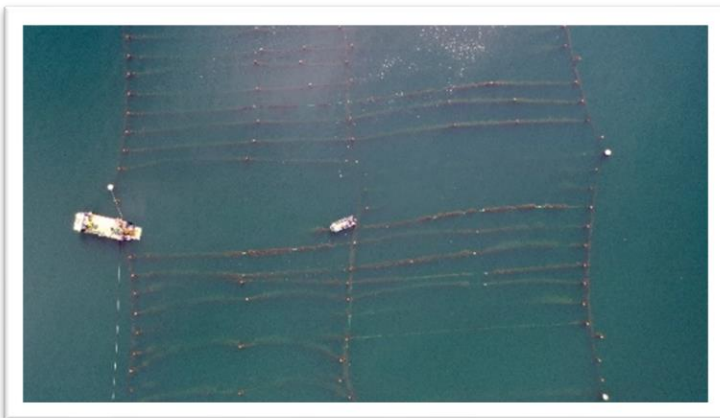
Figure 1: Seafood consumption (kg/capita/year) in the UK compared to world average (graph based on [FAOSTAT](#) data).

## Eating more seafood to improve individual, community and planetary health

Overall, people in the UK only eat half of the amount of seafood recommended by health professionals ([Seafish](#), 2019), and therefore they do not fully benefit from its health giving properties. Eating fish helps to reduce risk of premature death, coronary heart disease and stroke, and it also helps with cognitive development in young children. Such health benefits could particularly help those in lower income groups.



The UK's "[National Food Strategy](#)" and Scotland's ambitions to be a "[Good Food Nation Policy \(2025\)](#)" promote sustainable, nature-positive and affordable seafood, but do not specifically focus on access and consumption across different social groups. Action is required across government and industry to address this shortfall in consumption of a nutritious product that could improve the UK diet and enhance human wellbeing. Policy makers, institutional seafood buyers for schools, hospitals, community food groups, hospitality providers, convenience food outlets, retailers, and food system researchers need to effectively collaborate to create an equitable, healthy and sustainable food system that will enable UK consumers to make informed choices that regularly include seafood.



A salmon dinner (*Baukje de Roos*), seaweed production lines (*Seaweed Academy*) and mussels farming (*Judith Brown*)

## Recent dialogues

#SeafoodMattersUK brought together over one hundred participants across industry, academia and civil society to exchange ideas and discuss the practical opportunities for increasing seafood consumption in the UK. Key topics included the versatility of canned mackerel and sardines; the nutritional and environmental value of mussels; how to feed your family for £20 a week, often with cheaper imported fish; a pilot program to get farmed salmon into schools; innovators engaging young consumers in which fish to eat; and the potential of seaweed.



#SeafoodMattersUK event on 23/24<sup>th</sup> of June at the Institute of Aquaculture, University of Stirling (Photos by John Bostock)

## Policy recommendations

This diverse, professional group identified the following key recommendations to support increased seafood consumption for better nutrition, health, and environmental outcomes through greater equity, accessibility and affordability:

1. **Ensure that seafood becomes part of a life-long, nutrient rich diet from early childhood.** Orientation of parents, carers and teachers to the importance of seafood consumption for young children and inclusion in pre-school, primary and secondary school meals is critical. This will increase familiarity with seafood and normalise its consumption into adulthood. Mussels are fun, salmon is straightforward, canned mackerel is great value, pangasius is versatile.
2. **Sustain international seafood trade, which provides livelihoods in developing countries and nutritious seafood options for UK consumers.** Affordable imports can help lower-income consumers to access seafood, and complement UK wild-caught and farmed fish, shellfish and seaweed
3. **Encourage product innovation so that seafood arrives in supermarkets, restaurants, convenience food outlets in formats that consumers are familiar with and will enjoy.** Create nutritional requirements for fast food that can be met by a greater inclusion of seafood in menus.

## Conclusion

Seafood fulfils a crucial nutritional role in the diet. Seafood is a healthy and sustainable animal protein option and a valuable part of diets-in-transition to lower environmental footprints. Domestic production benefits local communities in the UK, whilst imported seafood provides some of the most affordable options for consumers from lower socio-economic groups. Canned seafood (mackerel and sardines) is affordable, nutritious, and healthy – and very under-rated. Mussels have the lowest carbon footprint of any animal protein, and also purify water, provide shelter to fish and other marine organisms, and reduce wave impacts. Similarly, seaweed could help to keep coastal waters healthy, enhance biodiversity and produce food.

Building on the first #SeafoodMattersUK event held in June 2022: We recommend an annual event involving government, senior level industry leaders and retailers, institutional seafood buyers, community food groups, hospitality, convenience food outlets, retailers, food policy makers and food system researchers in order to benchmark seafood consumption status, set out strategies and discuss and re-evaluate the efficiency of these policies.