



## Creating Consumer Markets for Invaders

Even if a fish, like the blue catfish, is overabundant and causing environmental damage, fishermen must go through a series of regulatory steps before they can sell the fish commercially. There are also challenges to catching and processing new types of fish, and convincing consumers to eat it.

### What is sustainable seafood?

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) defines seafood sustainability as “catching or farming seafood responsibly” so that fish stocks are not depleted and will be available to future generations. Its [www.fishwatch.gov](http://www.fishwatch.gov) website provides indicators on different species. Environmental damage caused while fishing is also a consideration. Individual states and interstate commissions manage migratory fish in their waters up to three miles offshore. Beyond three miles, the National Marine Fisheries Service works with regional management councils and states.

### Seafood guides, eco-labels and certification programs

Fisheries, commercial distributors, and restaurants may voluntarily seek “certification” that they offer sustainable seafood, or use “eco-labels” that provide guidance. These are voluntary programs usually run by non-profit organizations.

McDonald’s uses the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) label on its fish sandwiches. Whole Foods uses MSC labeling and Seafood Watch, a Monterey Bay Aquarium program featuring color-coded labels for fisheries not yet certified by MSC -- green indicates best choices, yellow signals good alternatives, and red means to avoid. Whole Foods also works with the Safina Center. In Canada, Whole Foods prefers to partner with SeaChoice, a popular local group similar to Seafood Watch. Certifiers use different criteria for wild fish and farmed fish. NOAA’s FishWatch website notes that sustainable seafood guides from different organizations sometimes contradict each other.

### Compiled by Science and the Media

Sources:

<http://safinacenter.org>, [http://www.fishwatch.gov/buying\\_seafood/choosing\\_sustainable.htm](http://www.fishwatch.gov/buying_seafood/choosing_sustainable.htm)  
<http://www.msc.org>, <http://www.congressionalseafood.com/our-responsibility/sustainable-seafood>  
<http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/mission-values/seafood-sustainability/seafood-sustainability-faq>  
<http://www.seafoodwatch.org/>



### Is the fish commercially viable?

Blue catfish can be fished in large numbers, and commercial sales from mid-Atlantic stocks have skyrocketed in the past year. Snakeheads are elusive. Amateur enthusiasts in the mid-Atlantic hunt snakeheads with bows and arrows, and there is a Potomac River Snakehead Fishing Tournament. Usually, however, they are caught unintentionally when fishermen look for catfish. Nevertheless, the market for this excellent eating fish, a staple food in Asia, has grown.

### Will it worsen the problem?

Those who support creating a market for invaders like the blue catfish and northern snakehead argue it is a practical, economically advantageous way to keep problem fish populations under control. Once invaders have established themselves, they are almost impossible to eradicate. Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources have actively promoted commercial blue catfish fisheries as a way to manage the problem. Others worry it may provide incentives to introduce these problematic species to new areas. The debate continues.