

Environmental standards

How RFR fits in with other fishy initiatives

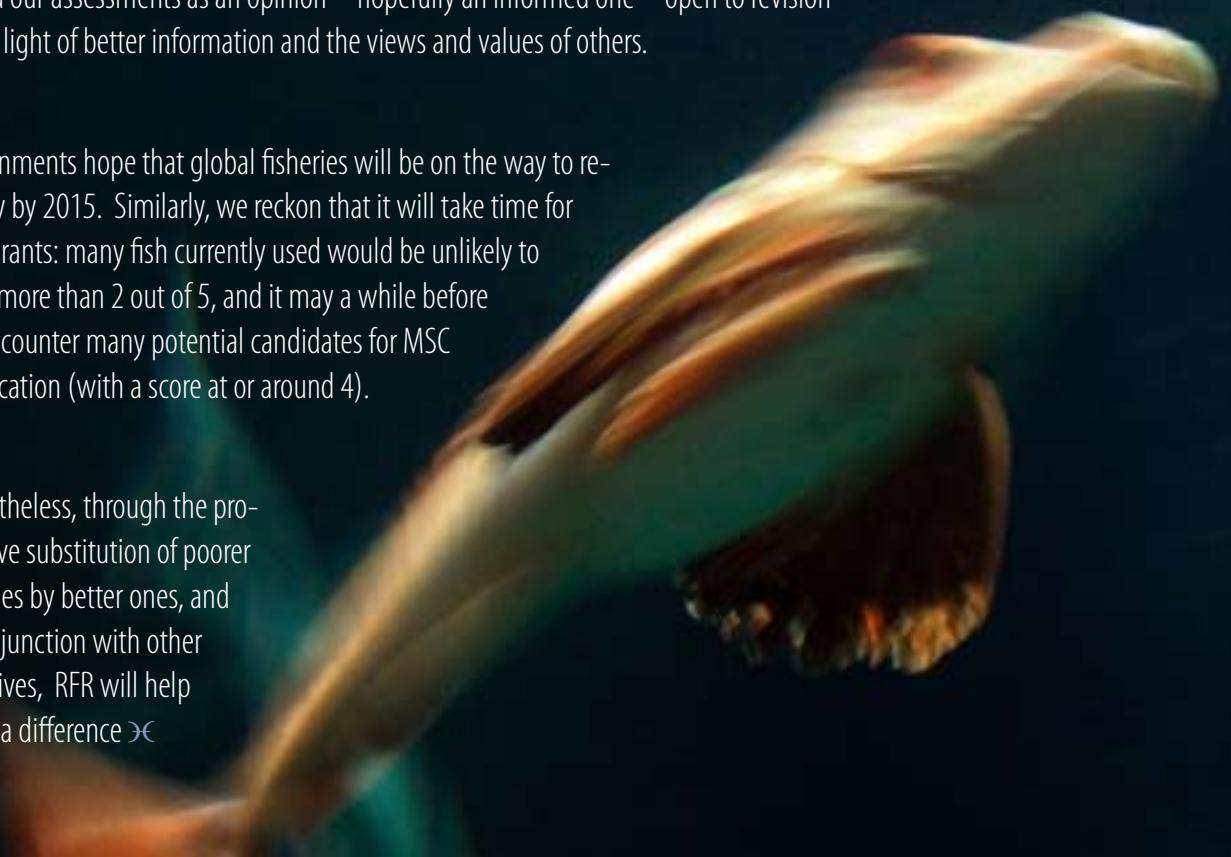
Our purpose is to directly link individual restaurants with local fishermen working for higher environmental standards, and who look after the quality of their fish. We also aim to have a fair trading relationship. As such we complement others working primarily on environmental standards — notably — the Marine Stewardship Council (aiming to promote the best fisheries), and the Marine Conservation Society's *Fish Online* (providing a five point, worst to best, score for global fisheries).

To guide our environmental choices, we score the 'portfolio' of fish used by RFR restaurants — those currently used (often globally sourced) and those we are considering replacing them with (which we source as locally as we can). Two challenges are the relatively few MSC certified fisheries (although this is growing), and the enormity of assessing and updating the status of global fisheries, which means that *Fish Online* is also some way from its goal (although already very useful), and often will not have the detail necessary to assess a local fishery.

We have to bridge these gaps, and be consistent in our scoring, which we do through a shared set of principles, the United Nations *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries*. Actually getting out on boats, and seeing things with our own eyes, is a priority for us. We also seek feedback on our assessments from MSC, MCS and other environmental organisations, from commercial fishermen, anglers and indeed all those with an interest. We regard our assessments as an opinion — hopefully an informed one — open to revision in the light of better information and the views and values of others.

Governments hope that global fisheries will be on the way to recovery by 2015. Similarly, we reckon that it will take time for restaurants: many fish currently used would be unlikely to score more than 2 out of 5, and it may a while before we encounter many potential candidates for MSC certification (with a score at or around 4).

Nevertheless, through the progressive substitution of poorer fisheries by better ones, and in conjunction with other initiatives, RFR will help make a difference ☸



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Without someone like RFR actively linking restaurants and fishermen, getting fisheries that are better for the environment onto menus can remain 'a good idea, but not something I have time to do.' For a chef, the other bases that must be covered include quality, reliability, cost and minimum hassle. Unless all this is provided on a plate, the 'environmental choice' will usually remain on the shelf, or at best a token gesture.

We make full use of existing initiatives such as MSC and *Fish Online*. Nevertheless, because we score all the fish in a restaurant's portfolio, and actively substitute with local fish, often from smaller 'day boats' (whose environmental impact can vary enormously, depending on the commitment, skill and knowledge of individual fisherman) we need to supplement this information.

This was a challenge, as we had to come up with a way of gathering the missing information without undermining existing initiatives.

FAO Code of Conduct

The first step is – like the MSC and MCS – to be consistent with the UN *FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing*, and especially its *Technical Guidelines*. The devil is in the detail, but the Guidelines essentially boil down to two points:

Limits & Targets Each fishery must have preset negative 'limits'; such as stocks at risk of collapse (or some wider environmental impact), that must be avoided, and positive 'targets' – a defined goal you want the fishery to reach. This target has been summed up as 'big stocks, big catches' (by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, no less) where stocks are rebuilt to allow bigger catches than now, but also leaving more in the sea for other species.

Precaution The second major 'point' in the FAO

Code is that the less that is known about a fishery, then the greater the precautions – which in practice means lower catches until we learn more.

Our 5 point scale for implementation of the FAO Code is simple:

- 0 – insufficient information
- 1 – fishery below limit point
- 2 – above limit but no positive target
- 3 – target set, but early days
- 4 – target set, well on way to getting there
- 5 – at or above target

The Right to Know

All this is very well, but it would take a huge budget to research this ourselves – it can cost between \$20,000–200,000 to certify each individual MSC fisheries. So how do we deal with this?

Our answer is we shouldn't have to – nor can it be right to rely on charities and others to fund initiatives such as MSC, MCS and RFR – although we are extremely glad that they do. This shouldn't be necessary, because fisheries management bodies are set up, and paid for by taxpayers, to assess the status of fisheries: exactly

the information we need! Put bluntly, we demand that such bodies should say, in lay terms, ex-

of FAO Limit and Target reference points. Global governments have agreed to implement the FAO Code of Conduct, and show results by 2015, so this is hardly an outrageously radical demand.

Historically, it may be no accident that official management bodies haven't done this, because they can be highly politicised, and the information too embarrassing to publish. There may be signs of change, and in European Seas the body responsible for the scientific assessments (ICES – The *International Council for the Exploration of the Seas*) has begun to publish such information. The problem is that the information (particularly on the positive target reference points) is very limited for the stocks ICES do assess, and many stocks aren't assessed by them at all. Instead, in the UK, it is left to local bodies (such as Sea Fisheries Committees in England and Wales, and the equivalent in Scotland) to do the best that they can, with a very limited budget.

However, for us it is simple: we look at the management body's web site, and if the information isn't there, or is poor, ambiguous or too confusing, or is contradicted by what we see on our boat inspections, we adjust the score accordingly.

Beware of Spin

Unfortunately, information provided by bodies like ICES is easily misinterpreted. Stocks above the limit but with no target (which we give 2 out of 5) have been touted as sustainable fisheries. In our book, having a depleted fishery, albeit not in a state of collapse, is nothing to shout about!

We Listen

We seek out opinions about our methods and our scores, say what the range of opinion is, and how this compares with other fisheries. For a restaurant it is important to know what people *think* about a fishery



actly how well the fisheries they are responsible for managing are doing, *in terms*

