

# WWF-SASSI serves up sustainable seafood report

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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The WWF-SASSI Retail/Supplier Participation Scheme Report 2014 has been released. WWF-SA's Seafood Market Transformation Manager, Chris Kastern, has noted that it reveals positive and steady progress by all 10 participating companies.

The participants are: Breco Seafoods, Fruit & Veg City/Food Lover's Market, I&J, John Dory's, La Marina, Ocean Basket, Pick n Pay, Spar Group, Supapackers Group of Companies, and Woolworths.

## Doubled demand

The WWF southern African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (WWF-SASSI), running since November 2004, is particularly pertinent today as, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, the per capita consumption of fish per annum has nearly [doubled in the last 50 years](#). This is reiterated in the WWF-SASSI report, noting that world population has more than doubled in the same period.

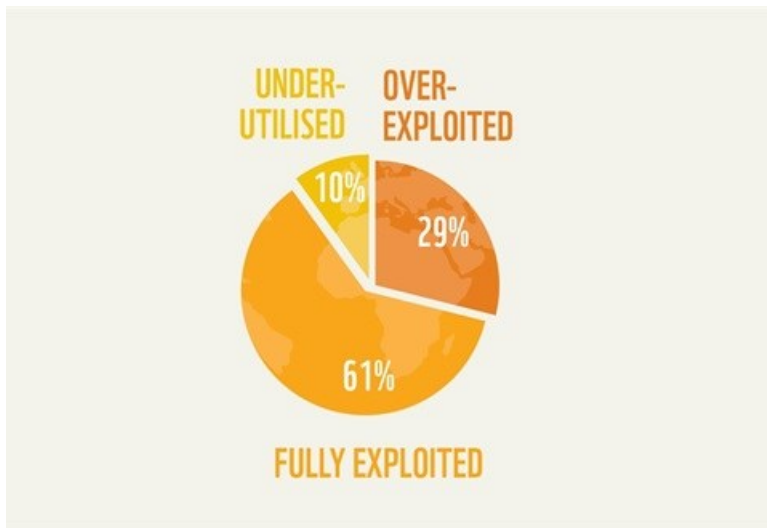


Image source: WWF-SASSI

"The demand for fish is greater now than it has ever been," it says, and that demand is set to continue to rise. This pressure on global marine resources forebodes sustainability risks across the seafood chain from the fisheries' ability to do business in the future, right through to consumer diet. A collapse in the South African marine ecosystem will have negative knock-on effects on the country's GDP as well as jobs in the marine and associated sectors.

According to the report, some of the challenges facing the sustainability of the seafood sector include: overfishing, a single-species approach and resultant by-catch, multiple users from various sectors, and a lack of information on marine ecosystems.

## Data needed

The challenge of a lack of information extends to participants in the WWF-SASSI programme. Breco Seafoods, a Cape Town-based supplier, notes in its last assessment that accessing accurate and up-to-date information about the status of fish stocks and the environmental performance of fisheries is one of the challenges the company has experienced so far in reaching a sustainable model.

Kastern explained that this challenge is largely related to imported seafood species. "WWF has a global network of offices that can provide guidance, data access and input on the queries that the WWF-SASSI participating retailers and suppliers may have relating to fishery performance in terms of sustainability performance. There are instances, however, where there is a lack of scientific data and in these cases the retailers and suppliers can play a strong role in lobbying for improved research and data collection in fisheries."

## **Awareness driving positive change**

Many of the participants placed much emphasis on awareness during the last assessment period (assessments are carried out biannually) including Breco with a 72% improvement, John Dory's 71%, and Woolworths an 86% jump in awareness.

Also in that vein, Ocean Basket's future plans include having an upskilled WWF-SASSI ambassador in each of its stores: "The SASSI in-store ambassador will be expected to be knowledgeable about the sustainability programme in its entirety, the Ocean Basket link to SASSI and the goals and our policy relating to sustainability. He will also be trained to explain where and how our seafood is caught, its classification and origin," explained Roelof Brink, Strategic Sourcing: Ocean Basket, on the role of the ambassador.

Awareness plays a pivotal role, not just for the programme participants, but for the success of the WWF-SASSI campaign. The report highlights consumers as "a key lever of change" through the responsible choices they make when purchasing seafood. A new demand shift over time has resulted in retailers aiming to achieve more sustainable models through the fisheries they do business with.

So far, WWF-SASSI has achieved 40% target market awareness and has a communications strategy in place that works with key influencers aiming to increase the level of awareness amongst seafood consumers. "There is a growing number of educational partners (21), chefs (20) and lifestyle ambassadors (nine) who work with SASSI to spread awareness around seafood sustainability issues on a national scale. The next step in this strategy is a well-structured campaign (aimed for end-2014) that will provide toolkits to key partners to enable them to speak to their diverse audiences about the issues integral to the complex nature of seafood sustainability, but in a relevant and understandable manner. The toolkit will also enable partners to tell their own stories on how they have contributed to seafood sustainability in an inspirational and inclusive manner," said Kastern.

Initial consumer pressure on retailers resulted in the birth of the WWF-SASSI Retail/Supplier Participation Scheme, an initiative of WWF's Sustainable Fisheries Programme. The aim of the scheme is to help seafood businesses achieve more sustainable business models that support sustainable fisheries and responsible aquaculture. It focuses on three key areas: performance assessment, setting achievable targets and upskilling, with the aim of empowering participants to move towards more sustainable practices across the supply chain.

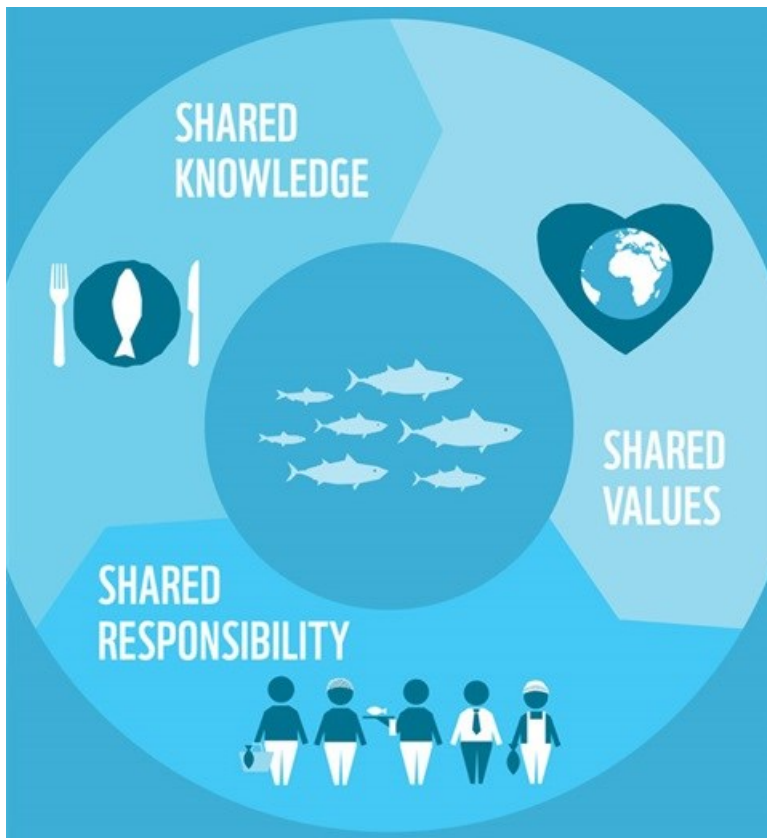


Image source: WWF-SASSI

The report outlines the eight focus areas assessed by WWF-SASSI in order to track the progress of participants:

- Sustainable seafood policies and commitments;
- Procurement;
- Traceability;
- Transparency and labelling;
- Training;
- Communication;
- Awareness; and
- Sustainable seafood initiatives.

## Commitments and strategies

Each participant's long-term strategy is available to the public at [www.wwf.org.za/sassi](http://www.wwf.org.za/sassi). Their time-bound commitments are also viewable on their individualised WWF-SASSI logos covering their fresh, frozen and canned seafood. The Woolworths-specific logo, for example, carries its end-2015 commitment that all its wild-caught seafood will be MSC certified, WWF-SASSI Green-listed, or in a formal Improvement Project.

"Woolworths remains deeply committed to procuring all seafood from sustainable fisheries and responsible farming operations. We have set time-bound sustainable seafood commitments and continue to work with a range of partners, including WWF-SA and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), to ensure that we meet these commitments by 2015. Of the volume (tonnage) of seafood species sold by Woolworths, 82% currently meets our sustainability commitments for 2015 and 67% meet our 2020 commitments. We do not sell any WWF-SASSI Red-listed species," commented Justin Smith, Woolworths Head of Sustainability.

In terms of the fishing industry in South Africa, WWF-SASSI has recognised I&J as currently having made the strongest time-bound commitment to sustainable seafood yet, being the first company in the sector to do so. During the last assessment period, I&J attained a 43% improvement in the sustainable seafood policies and commitments focus area.

"In what WWF-SA believes to be an industry leading initiative, the scope of the commitment extends beyond the seafood species that I&J procures to incorporate all of the species from its fishing operations as well. As an active participant in the WWF-SASSI Retailer/Supplier Participation Scheme, the company will, thus, actively engage with its own fishing operations as well as suppliers to make this vision a reality," explained Kastern.

I&J's public sustainable seafood policy entails that:

**By the end of 2015, I&J will only be selling seafood which is:**

- a. Certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) for wild caught products, or
- b. Certified by the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) for farmed products, or
- c. Green-listed by the South African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (SASSI), or
- d. The subject of a credible time-bound improvement project.

In its commitments, it also notes that, "While the above criteria hold for all species procured by I&J and all species targeted by its fishery division, during I&J's fishing operations there will be incidences where species with associated sustainability concerns may be caught as unavoidable by-catch. While I&J cannot completely avoid or exclude these species from its fishing operations, we commit to ensuring that these species are included in an effective By-catch Management Plan and at the same time ensuring that we are actively implementing best practice solutions to manage and mitigate impacts on these vulnerable species."



Image source: WWF-SASSI

Kastern outlined for us the required criteria for a company to achieve an assessment of 100% in the sustainable seafood policies and commitments focus area:

- The company must have a written sustainable seafood policy in place that defines sustainable seafood as being WWF-SASSI Green-listed, Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified or Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) certified;
- The policy should contain a time-bound commitment only to sell sustainable seafood or, alternatively, only source from fisheries or farms in credible improvement projects by a certain date. This policy must be communicated both internally and externally and must inform the company's business operations with regards to strategic sourcing of seafood products; and
- The company must have identified specific, measureable actions and targets to align with its written sustainable seafood policy and set timelines within which these will be achieved (these should also be made publicly available).

During the next assessment period, WWF-SASSI would like to see the largest improvement from participants in labelling,

transparency and traceability. "This has already been identified as a priority by the participating companies and strategies have been implemented by many of them, which should result in overall progress being reported in these areas over the coming year," said Kastern.

Download the [WWF-SASSI Retail/Supplier Participation Scheme Report 2014](#) (pdf). For more information on WWF-SASSI, go to [www.wwf.org.za/sassi](http://www.wwf.org.za/sassi).

#### **WWF-SASSI tools**

- *FishSMS: type the name of the seafood species into a text message and send it to +27(0)794998795.*
- *Mobile app: [www.sassiapp.co.za](http://www.sassiapp.co.za) (available on Blackberry, Android and iOS)*
- *Mobi site: [www.wwfsassi.mobi](http://www.wwfsassi.mobi)*



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