

If you read the e-mails below (start from the top and work down) you will see how quickly the Co-op took action when I pulled them up for calling their salmon “sustainable”. I would have given them full marks but when you read their e-mail followed by my response you will see why I can only rate them 5 out of 10 for the way they dealt with this.

I hope other retailers of salmon farmed in Scotland will now get the message. Farmed salmon is not sustainable and should not be described as such. I also hope the Scottish Government take the hint and stop misusing the words “sustainable” and “sustainability” when referring to the salmon farming industry. They once used those words over a dozen times in a press release promoting salmon farming.

Now that it is official that salmon farming is not sustainable I ask the Scottish Government to abandon their plans to double farmed salmon output in Scottish waters.

It is also time for Government to take a hard line on how products can be described. The Co-op have stopped describing their salmon as sustainably sourced but I cannot stop them saying it is responsibly sourced. The phrase “responsibly sourced” sounds very positive but it means little or nothing in law and gives consumers a false impression of the green credentials of a product. It will take legislation to ensure producers, manufacturers and retailers describe their products accurately, clearly and honestly.

I now have a confession to make. I am guilty of not describing farmed salmon properly. I keep calling it “**Scottish farmed salmon**” when I should be referring to it as “**salmon farmed in Scotland**”. The majority of salmon farms around our coast (including many with “Scottish” in their name) are actually owned by Norwegian businesses. I believe around 95% of salmon in farms in Scotland are raised from fertile eggs imported from Norway. So, despite all the tartan on the packaging and advertising, they are not Scottish salmon at all. Maybe that’s why they keep trying to escape from filthy floating factory fish farms in Scottish sea lochs – they are homesick and pining for the fjords.

Next time you are in a supermarket look to see if any salmon farmed in Scotland is described as sustainable on the packaging or in-store advertising. If you see any please take as much detail as possible (perhaps a quick pic) and let me know.

Anyway below is the e-mail string between Animal Concern Advice Line and Co-op Food.

Cheers4now, John @ ACAL

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E-MAIL FROM: John F. Robins, Secretary, Animal Concern Advice Line (ACAL), c/o Animal Concern, Post Office Box 5178, Dumbarton G82 5YJ. Tel 01389-841111. Mobile: 07721-605521. Animal Concern Advice Line (ACAL) is a recognised Scottish charity: No. SC030982. Animal Concern Advice Line was established in 2001 to take on the charitable work of Animal Concern which was founded as the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society in 1876.

E-MAIL: [acal@jfrobins.force9.co.uk](mailto:acal@jfrobins.force9.co.uk) Website: <http://www.adviceaboutanimals.info>

3rd May 2019

Co-op Group  
Customer Careline  
Freepost MR 9473  
Manchester M4 8BA

FTAO: Steve Murrells (CEO), Allan Leighton (Board Chairperson) and Jo Whitfield, (CEO Food).

Dear Mr. Murrells,

I'd be grateful if you would copy this message to Mr. Leighton and Ms Whitfield as I cannot find e-mail details for them.

I write concerning the use of the word "sustainable" when referring to salmon products sold in Co-op Food outlets. In the last couple of weeks I read the following on some sandwich packs for sale in two Scottish Co-op Food stores.

On a Well & Good range tuna and cucumber sandwich pack it was stated; "We make our sandwiches using responsibly sourced fish and shellfish. That means pole and line caught tuna and prawns and Scottish smoked salmon from sustainable sources."

On a prawn and mayonnaise sandwich pack it was stated; "We make our sandwiches and wraps using responsibly sourced fish and shellfish. That means pole and line caught tuna and prawns and Scottish smoked salmon from sustainable sources."

I have been monitoring the Scottish salmon farming industry for over 30 years and I have yet to find a farm which has found a way to raise salmon sustainably. To produce one tonne of saleable salmon product you need to feed the farmed fish anything between two and a half and five tonnes of wild-caught fish which results in depletion of already scarce wild fish stocks. This conversion rate does not take into account the problem of huge numbers of morts caused by disease, parasites and poor handling. In one year this has amounted to over 10 million dead fish. The Scottish salmon farming industry have to transport these casualty fish to toxic waste disposal facilities which can be well over a hundred miles from where the carcasses are brought ashore.

There are also sustainability issues over the way salmon farms deal with parasites such as sealice which cause extreme suffering and death by literally eating farmed salmon alive. These lice accumulate in unnaturally huge numbers due to the unnatural high concentration of salmon within the cage nets on the farms.

The lice not only attack caged salmon, they also feed on migratory wild salmon and seatrout as they pass close to or underneath the salmon cages. This is a particular problem for young salmon and seatrout as they migrate to sea for the first time. Infestation by sealice related to salmon farming is thought to kill large numbers of young salmon and seatrout and many people believe this is a major contributory factor in the vast depletion of wild salmon and seatrout which started with the introduction of salmon farming in the 1970s and has increased substantially as the salmon farming industry has greatly expanded.

To counter the sealice problem salmon farmers have two main weapons. One is the use of various pesticides to kill the parasites. The problem with this is that those same pesticides can be lethal to creatures such as the spat of shellfish. This not only depletes shellfish numbers it damages the very bottom line of the marine food chain.

A greener method of dealing with sealice is to use cleaner fish such as wrasse to eat the lice. Sadly that has not proven to be as green a solution as it has been painted as tens of thousands of wild-caught wrasse have been imported live from the south of England and put into the salmon farm cages. This may be causing an imbalance in the marine ecosystem off the southern English coast. Many of these imported wrasse have been seen dead amongst salmon morts, some apparently having succumbed to infestation by the sealice they were brought in to kill.

A third and newer technique for killing sealice is the Thermolicer. The idea being to heat the water around the salmon to circa 60c at which time the sealice die and drop off. Regretfully large numbers of salmon have been poached alive during such treatments.

Another problem is damage caused to the seabed under and adjacent to salmon farms. A large salmon farm can produce as much faeces as the population of a small town. Salmon excrement, perhaps containing chemicals and medications, does not get treated in a sewage farm. It drops to the seabed where it accumulates and kills off any natural flora and fauna.

A major salmon farming company recently decided to stop referring to its Scottish produce as "sustainable". This followed intervention by the Advertising Standards Authority. You will find full details here: <https://theferret.scot/loch-duart-sustainable-advertising/>

If Co-op Food have in fact discovered the Holy Grail of aquaculture, a salmon farm in Scotland providing a truly and provably sustainable product, I would be grateful if you would provide me with full details.

If not I, as a long-time supporter of the co-operative movement, ask you to take immediate steps to remove any reference to sustainability from your salmon products.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,  
Animal Concern Advice Line

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From: The Co-op - Executive Resolution Team

Sent: 15 May 2019 11:10

To: [john@jfrobins.force9.co.uk](mailto:john@jfrobins.force9.co.uk) Subject: The Co-op - Your Ref: 06937481

Good Morning,

Thank you for your email, which has been passed to me by Steve Murrells. My apologies for the delay in getting back to you.

We appreciate you highlighting the on-pack wording on some of our seafood sandwiches. You're right to point out that our salmon is responsibly rather than sustainably sourced, and we're sorry for this mistake.

We will be altering the wording on our sandwich packaging at the earliest opportunity.

Kind regards

John. Executive Resolution Team. Co-op Service Centre  
E-MAIL FROM: John F. Robins, Secretary, Animal Concern Advice Line (ACAL),

Wednesday, 15 May 2019

Dear John with no surname,

Thank you for your reply. I am pleased that The Co-op will no longer be inaccurately using the word "sustainable" when referring to Scottish farmed salmon.

However I have to point out an inaccuracy in your e-mail when you state that I was ".... **right to point out that our salmon is responsibly rather than sustainably sourced** .... ". I did not and would not refer to any Scottish farmed salmon as being responsibly sourced.

I would not describe a product sourced from a livestock industry with one of the highest mortality and pollution levels as being responsibly sourced but unlike "sustainable" the word "responsibly" has little if any legal definition when it comes to describing how a product is sourced.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,  
For ACAL