

CATCH-UP

Winter 2024

FEATURING THIS SEASON'S MARKET REPORT,
OUR FISH BUYERS' PICKS AND A ROUND-UP OF
FISHY INDUSTRY NEWS

UK Citizens say fish welfare matters

Source (full article): fishfocus.co.uk

UK citizens care about fish welfare, according to a recent survey undertaken by ComRes on behalf of Compassion in World Farming and Eurogroup for Animals.

The results clearly show that while UK citizens want to know about fish welfare, few currently have that knowledge. "Fish are incredibly misunderstood," said Dr Krzysztof Wojtas, Head of Fish Policy at Compassion in World Farming. "They are sentient, able to feel pain, pleasure and other emotions. Despite this, fish receive very little legal protection and are either farmed in inhumane conditions or caught from the wild in cruel ways."



John dory is a poet, coley is a breed of dog and pollock is an artist

Source (full article): fishfocus.co.uk

Despite being an island nation, new research from the [Marine Stewardship Council](https://www.marine.gov.uk) has revealed just how little we know about our sea life, with over half (55 per cent) not knowing that John Dory was a type of spiny fish.

In fact, more than one in ten (12 per cent) mistakenly thought the common sea fish was a famous poet.

Surprisingly, despite more than half saying they love fish and eat it an average of five times a month, 50 per cent of Brits surveyed for the poll to mark Sustainable Seafood September didn't know that coley was a wild sea fish.

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BUYER RECOMMENDS...

Good picks this season include:

- **Mussels**
- **ChalkStream® Trout**
- **Roeless Scallops**
- **Witch Soles**
- **Coley**

SOCIAL CATCH-UP...

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Rick Stein: 'The UK is one of the best places in the world to eat now'

Source (full article): [independent.co.uk](https://www.independent.co.uk)

The TV presenter has spent decades persuading Britain to embrace its own seafood, but now the 77-year-old chef believes the UK has become one of the best places to eat globally.

Rick Stein has made it his life mission to persuade people to eat more fish.

"A lot of people, they're frightened of fish, they're not used to it and they don't really know what fresh fish really tastes like, because they haven't had enough," says the TV chef.

"As soon as you start giving people really fresh fish... it's a revelation."



FISH MARKET REPORT Winter 2024

OVERVIEW

Welcome to the winter 2024 newsletter, which aims to cover the December to February period for the supply of fresh and frozen fish and seafood. We have seen some stability in fish availability and price during the autumn, which is typically our best season for quality and consistency of landings. However, we are now heading into a more volatile period with a number of factors, political, environmental and economic, to consider. The recent budget has dealt a blow to our industry. The forthcoming increases in national living wage and national insurance contributions will have significant ramifications throughout the supply chain and for hospitality. The cost of living crisis has already seen swathes of closures and shorter operating hours for many catering establishments. It will be impossible for operators to absorb these costs. We strongly advise that you work with us over the forthcoming months to discuss ways in which we can mitigate the inevitable increases coming our way.

In more fishy news, the most recent Marine Conservation Society (MCS) winter ratings update has seen few significant updates to most of the species used throughout our customer base. On the aquaculture side, farmed Spanish turbot – which was in the process of being reviewed – has come out as a positive MCS 2 rating. This puts it in the region of “fish to eat”. The perfect treat for a top end species on Christmas menus. Another positive change in the realm of wild caught species is the moving of dover soles from the West Country from a 3 rating to a 2 rating. This puts one of our most extravagant and expensive species in the “fish to eat” bracket. However, please ensure that you are sourcing from the southwest where we source all of our dover soles. The reason being that, conversely, dover soles from the Eastern channel have now been downgraded to a 5, “fish to avoid”, rating. This is why it is so important that you are aware of the precise regions from where you source your fish. Another fishery that has improved, and opens the opportunity for a slightly less exclusive sole species, is witch sole from the North Sea. This has moved from an MCS 5 to a MCS 3 rating. Coley continues to be positively rated at 3 for non-MSD fisheries and 2 for MSC certified. Keep championing this under-utilised white fish.

On the negative side ling, another substitute for our ubiquitous cod, continues to be red rated 5. For a while, ling was seen as a good alternative to cod. It is now, however, well and truly on the “fish to avoid” list. The most negative new rating for this period is undoubtedly the downgrading of crab from an MCS 3 to a MCS 4 rating. This means that many customers will need to remove crab meat from their menus. In a direct response to this issue, the processor that works very closely with us is in the process of setting up a FIP (fishery improvement project) with a number of fishermen in the North Sea. In time, this will allow us to source crab that will eventually aim for MSC certification. Do talk to your account manager if you think this rating change will cause an issue, as we may be able to recommend alternative species.

So heading into the winter period, the next three months truly will be a game of two halves. The quality of wild caught species will be excellent, but a reduction in fishing effort due to the Christmas holidays, combined with the likelihood of adverse weather, will mean that we are likely to encounter availability issues. In short, we expect stability in the first two weeks of December, followed by a four-week period of mixed availability. This is likely to resolve somewhat at the end of January. February should bring more consistent landings, but beware of spikes in price on the back of the demand created by Chinese New Year and Valentine's Day.

Wishing you all our very best to you and your loved ones over the festive period. Thank you for your invaluable custom and loyalty in 2024. A very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to each and every one of you.

Natalie Hudd, Director of Sales, Direct Seafoods.

FARMED FISH

Species	Comments
Sea Bass & Gilthead Bream	An increasingly tight supply of both species is keeping prices firm heading into the Christmas period. Prices for bass and bream have increased significantly in recent months, and are set to climb even higher into 2025 due to a shortage of supply and a spike in demand. Higher seawater temperatures, lower biomass, and an increase in disease and mortalities from the main producing regions of Greece and Turkey, have been cited among the reasons for the lower availability. The higher temperatures have meant that the fish were ready to be harvested sooner than usual, forcing companies to tap into future biomass. The warmer waters have also led to an increased level of disease. Indications are that low stocks and low availability will not be fully recovered by the end of the year, and that the full impact will be seen in 2025. Higher prices are not expected to be a short-term problem. Availability on the larger sizes is also going to be an issue.
Salmon	Whilst prices have remained surprisingly stable in November (at time of writing), demand for smoked derivatives and other festive variations is likely to drive the price up in December. We expect prices to be even higher in January as farms stop harvesting over the Christmas period, and availability tightens. The expectation, in line with historical trends, is that farmers will reduce harvests as the waters cool and the fish stop feeding (and therefore growing). We are also expecting that winter wounds will become an issue as they have been in prior years. However, prices have been tracking below last year in recent months. We are hopeful that this may mean we do not reach the highs that were experienced last January. Watch this space. You simply never know with salmon.
Trout	All fresh water trout variations should offer stability over forthcoming months. For that reason, operators should consider these as alternatives to salmon – particularly ChalkStream® which ticks the provenance box and has surged in popularity in recent years. Sea reared trout is another extremely valuable alternative. Whilst this trout does have a tendency to follow the fresh salmon price, it is interesting that a number of farmed salmon producers are increasing their efforts in farming these fish. This is due to their resilience to disease and lower mortality rates when compared to salmon. Perhaps one day the UK consumer will also recognise trout alongside salmon in the top 5 species given their similar flavour and texture profiles.
Halibut	Halibut has been extremely volatile this year in terms of availability. Various operational issues have hindered production. At time of writing, we are not seeing interruptions in supply and the price is holding stable. Providing we are not surprised by any further disruption to processing, halibut could offer a great premium festive choice.

FARMED FISH contd

Species	Comments
Other Farmed Species	Meagre availability has been consistent. Yields can reduce at this time of year, but the whole fish price is expected to be stable. As always, these offer a great alternative to wild sea bass, growing up to 4kg in weight. Farmed turbot should be a good substitute for wild fish which have a tendency to get very expensive this time of year. Farmed cod has not, despite our recommendations in the autumn, become a viable product. Farms have experienced serious quality issues because of the warm sea temperatures in Norway. Fish are now available due to the cooler waters, but they are only 1.5-2.5kg head on. These do not yield the size of fillets that the market demands. It is not expected that 3kg+ sizes will be available until Q2 of 2025. Keep in touch for developments on this.

WILD FISH

Species	Comments
Flat Fish	Lemon soles experience extreme festive demand. This will see prices increase in December and continue to rise as we approach the holidays. We expect prices to remain firm through January due to variable fishing effort. Plaice will start to roe up at the end of December as they go fully into their spawning season from January to April. The price for whole fish is anticipated to be stable, but fillets will be thin and poor quality. The reduced yield means that fillet prices will be high. One to avoid. Like plaice, megrim sole will also be out of season from January onwards. Keep your eyes open for any specials during December to make the most of these cost effective flat fish before they spawn. A good alternative will be witch soles from the North Sea over the next few months. Further to the ratings update from an MCS 5 to an MCS 3, these are generally cost effective so will offer a substitute for megrim sole or plaice due to their much later breeding season. Both brill and turbot have a tendency to command a premium at this time of year. If you are considering using either of these prime fish on New Year's Eve menus, speak to your account manager to assess availability. You would be well advised to buy early and freeze. Dover sole are expected to remain firm in price and out of the reach of most budgets, but quality should be good.
White Fish	The cut in the Barents Sea cod quota is creating a huge amount of pressure on this species. Cod prices have been high for most of this year, and we do not expect this to end. Haddock is the natural choice when operators look for options. Whilst not subject to quota cuts of the severity of cod, haddock is still looking likely to experience demand that will push the price upwards. For now, however, haddock has been running well with stable pricing. Both species are seeing high demand from frozen at sea processors, and both will see supply disruption in the weeks after Christmas due to reduced fishing effort when fleets tie up. It is worth considering previously frozen options during this period to ensure continuity of supply. Hake availability has improved in recent weeks with prices levelling out. A tidal species, landings could be negatively affected by any sustained period of bad weather. One for the specials board in December. Coley prices are predicted to rise slightly in line with other white fish during the month. However, with a price point that is circa 40% lower than large cod, this should definitely be considered as an option to save cost. If you are not brave enough to make it the star of show, then do consider using in fish pies, goujons or stews.
Round Fish	Monkfish is a key species for the UK and export markets in December. Truly an incredibly versatile fish that appeals to those who do not enjoy the more "fishy species", monkfish can be used in curries, wrapped in pancetta and pan roasted, skewered and grilled, or served as ceviche. Its versatility means it is very popular in December on festive menus, and you can expect the price to rise by up to circa 50% in the second week of December. With a significant proportion of fish caught by Scottish fleets, the price is likely to remain high until mid-January when those fleets resume operation. Quality will be excellent, but beware these fluctuations in price. Red gurnard will be fully in season now, but be careful of the fish you are sourcing and where they come from. The best-rated fish are caught by otter trawl in the North East Atlantic. The Scottish mackerel quota finishes at the end of November. Scarcity of fish will see prices rise by circa 50% in December. Definitely one to avoid. We will see a limited amount of fish available in January, but will rely on imports until the quota starts in the spring.
Cephalopods	Our native squid remains rated to avoid by the MCS. The only 4-rated product is jig caught from the Celtic Seas, but assurance of this origin will prove difficult. Cuttlefish is still predominantly 5 rated unless pot caught from the English Channel or Celtic Seas. Octopus is similarly poorly rated with the only UK 4 rating being pot caught or trawled from Cornwall. Talk to your account manager about MSC certified squid and octopus tentacles for more responsible choices.
Exotics	UK demand for tuna and swordfish reduces in December in favour of our local species. Stability of fishing in key regions, combined with a favourable exchange rate, means that either species will be a good choice. We are not expecting supply disruption until Ramadan at the end of February when we may see a reduction in fishing effort.
Shellfish	There is another season for Canadian lobster in December, and this is the last until next spring. This short season assists in fulfilling festive demand, but all supply thereafter will be from pounded stocks. This means that the price is expected to rise further after Christmas, and some of this will be fuelled by the demand from Chinese New year and Valentine's Day. Native lobsters will become scarce as the waters cool down. Prices are anticipated to rise between now and Christmas. Native scallops are superb quality at the moment. A festive favourite, you can expect the price to jump by approximately 20% between now and the end of December. Roeless imported scallops can offer a great alternative while the price is high, so we recommend these as a consistent alternative. Mussels are fully in season now and will remain so throughout winter. Economically priced, rated a 1 (best choice) by the MCS, high in iron, zinc, vitamins A and B12. Mussels are a fantastic source of protein, whilst being low in calories and low in fat. Great served with frites, as moules marinière, in stews, pastas, or paella – the choices are endless. We have some great frozen alternatives to use during the holiday period when harvesting is interrupted. Oysters are also in season and a good choice. We carry a range of origins – all with slightly different flavour profiles. Many customers like to offer oysters on New Year's Eve menus. Please do talk to your account manager if this is the case, as advanced notice of your requirement will ensure we can fulfil all orders. We are not expecting any issues with crab meats over the forthcoming months. The processing facility will shut over Christmas, which means that handpicked fresh crab will be short in supply, but pasteurised meats will offer a longer life alternative.

SMOKED, DELI & FROZEN FISH

Species	Comments
Smoked Fish	Smoked fish is a great choice when fishing has the potential to be interrupted due to the holidays. With a greater shelf life, you can feel confident that availability will not be an issue. The smoked salmon price will clearly follow the fresh salmon price. However, price aside, there is no denying that smoked salmon is a staple of most Christmas menus. Talk to your account manager about the range of cures we can offer. Hot smoked with star anise and ginger, gravadlax with wasabi and lime, or smoked salmon with lemon, dill and black pepper. A twist on regular smoked salmon, these cures create the potential to upscale your smoked salmon offering. Smoked haddock should be consistently available with frozen available to back up fresh stocks if the need arises. Smoked mackerel will get your customers a mackerel fix whilst the fresh is scarce due to the end of quota.
Deli	As with smoked lines, our long life deli range is well positioned to ensure continuity of supply through the festive period. Our variety of caviars and roes are suited to canapés, and our brined crayfish and prawns are perfect in a seafood cocktail. If you are hoping to cut effort in the kitchen, consider our jars of lobster or fish soup.
Frozen Fish and Seafood	It has been a turbulent year on frozen with the disruption in the Suez shipping canal, USA sanctions on product of Russian origin, and white fish quota cuts. We have seen the effects of some of this in cod and haddock pricing. Poor availability on cod means that we are still seeing some increases, but we are hopeful that this might fall back a little next year where demand has reduced. Haddock is also still going up, but is expected to level out early next year. Demand has, however, increased on pollock. Pollock prices have been at a low level for a lengthy period of time due to oversupply and stock in Europe. These stocks are now reducing and price at origin is rising. Frozen white fish pricing always moves in cycles, with demand moving from one species to another as a response to inflation. This is certainly the case here. There is a severe shortage of single frozen cold water prawns which has transferred significant pressure onto the double frozen and has pushed cold water prawns, as a category, up. New supply does not commence until the spring. This may temper the increases. In the interim, demand may move to small warmwater prawns. Raw peeled warm water prawns prices are increasing fast due a variety of issues. These include a significant shortage of raw material in Vietnam, with India not having enough to close this gap, and poor weather. Prices have been below farming cost for a long time, which has led to farmers not re-stocking all farms. Add freight rates, and it is a dismal outlook. It will likely be April 2025 before we see any sort of improvement.

Mussel farm is bringing shellfish reefs back to the Devon seabed

Source (full article): fishfocus.co.uk

Historic map reveals how mussel farm is bringing shellfish reefs back to the Devon seabed.

The UK's first large scale offshore mussel farm is allowing shellfish reefs to return to parts of the seabed off England's south coast for the first time in up to 150 years, a new study has revealed.

Study examines effect of fish oil in older adults' brains

Source (full article): fishfocus.co.uk

A clinical trial at Oregon Health & Science University suggests that a subset of older adults with a genetic predisposition to Alzheimer's disease may benefit from fish oil supplements.

The results come amid claims that fish oil supplements can improve brain function in people with memory problems. The study found no statistically significant benefit for all older adults in general.

How fish guts might play a role in future skin care products

Source (full article): fishfocus.co.uk

There are some pretty strange ingredients in cosmetics and skin care products.

One example is snail mucin — also known as snail slime — which is used for its moisturising and antioxidant properties. But researchers reporting in ACS Omega might have found something even weirder to put on your face: molecules made by fish gut bacteria

Fish size themselves up in a mirror to decide if they can win a fight

Source (full article): fishfocus.co.uk

Before deciding whether or not to fight another fish, cleaner wrasse check their own reflection in a mirror and size themselves up.

Bluestreak cleaner wrasse (*Labroides dimidiatus*) are remarkably bright. These finger-sized coral reef fish were the first fish to pass the mirror test, a common assessment to see whether an animal recognises that the reflection is of its own body and not another animal.

Recipe Corner

Looking for some seasonal menu inspiration? Take a look at these delicious recipes, which utilise one of our buyers picks for Winter

Shellfish soup from south of France

Source (full article): fishfocus.co.uk

Fried Fish & Mushroom Risotto

Source (full article): fishfocus.co.uk

Roasted trout, caper and oliver crostini

Source (full article): fishfocus.co.uk



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For species insights and menu inspiration contact your account manager.