



**The University of British Columbia Sustainable Seafood Project**  
*Assessing sustainability of SNAPPER and ROCKFISH purchasing at UBC*  
**Executive Summary - May 2007**

Snapper and rockfish products have been popular seafood with catering customers at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and have been used occasionally in residence food services. After reviewing the sustainability of snapper and rockfish extraction, the UBC Sustainable Seafood project recommended that neither product be sold on campus.

The UBC Sustainable Seafood project is a consortium that includes UBC Food Services, AMS Food and Beverage, Green College, Fisheries Centre, Faculty of Land and Food Systems, and UBC Sustainability Office<sup>1</sup>. The partnership of students, faculty, and staff strives to make all UBC seafood purchases as ecologically, economical, and socially sustainable as possible. Having agreed on steps to increase sustainability of four other seafood products, the partners turned their attention to snapper and rockfish in July 2006.

Assessment of snapper and rockfish products against sustainability recommendations was difficult because of imprecise labeling. Ambiguous and arbitrary use of the names “snapper” and “rockfish” hindered sourcing and product identification. Given UBC’s proximity to key rockfish fisheries, most “snapper” products were probably actually rockfish. Trade data, official records and commercial information support this inference.

Snappers (mainly the family Lutjanidae) are a family of about 250 predatory and long-lived species from the tropic or sub-tropics. Snappers are worryingly easy to catch because they aggregate to spawn, often at predictable times or places, and may be site faithful. They are often fished under poor management or with destructive techniques.

Rockfish (mainly the genus *Sebastes*) are a group of about 100 very long-lived species (up to 200 years) found primarily in the North Pacific and Gulf of California. Rockfish mature very late, breed once a year, carry their young internally, and are site faithful. The main catch method, bottom trawling, has high bycatch rates and damages marine habitats. The rockfishes’ tendency to aggregate in multispecies aggregations means that fishing gear catches many species of different susceptibility simultaneously.

Virtually all snapper and rockfish come from capture fisheries, and most stocks globally are overfished, declining or data deficient. Very few fish declared to be snapper or rockfish were captive bred or reared. The species’ slow growth rates limit both their recovery from fishing and their aquaculture potential.

Given that snapper/rockfish species cannot sustain high levels of exploitation and that ambiguous labeling is a problem, all snapper or rockfish products should be removed from UBC menus. Many ecologically sound alternative products exist, such as farmed tilapia, US-farmed catfish species, or Pacific halibut.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a SEEDS initiative. The full report is available at <http://www.sustain.ubc.ca.seeds.html>