

S P R I N G 2 0 1 4

# San Diego Seafood Marketing Study

Report for groups interested in marketing or supporting efforts



## Introduction

As part of a project to identify barriers to getting locally sourced seafood from our waters to our plates, we held a seafood tasting event at Tuna Harbor on 9/7/2013 for San Diego's foodie public. Chefs, scientists, seafood producers (fishermen & aquaculturists) and nutritionists introduced all aspects of local species, and 142 participants provided information about their food and shopping habits, and what they would like in local seafood sales.

We then interviewed 20 fishermen on 12/16 and 12/17/2013 to identify potential supplies of seafood and barriers inhibiting the fishermen from selling directly to the public.

A summary of results is presented here including 1) evidence of direct market demand, 2) barriers to direct sales, and 3) suggestions for overcoming barriers for both the public and producers.

## Synopsis

1. There is a supply and demand for San Diego seafood and for direct markets, but the public and producers are out of sync as far as preferences and availability of product.
2. Barriers to the public can be overcome by raising awareness of San Diego's seafood producers and their products, increasing product accessibility, and building grassroots support of San Diego's seafood community.
3. Overcoming seafood producer's barriers requires collaboration within their community, higher-level support, and grassroots economic and political support.

## Project leads and partners

### Project scientists

**Theresa Sinicrope Talley**  
California Sea Grant, Scripps  
Institution of Oceanography,  
UCSD. [tstalley@ucsd.edu](mailto:tstalley@ucsd.edu)

**Adina Batnitzky**  
Department of Sociology,  
University of San Diego  
[batnitzky@sandiego.edu](mailto:batnitzky@sandiego.edu)

### Partners

Ocean Protection Council  
Collaborative Fisheries Research West  
Fishermen of San Diego  
Port of San Diego  
Slow Food Urban San Diego  
Alchemy Cultural Fare & Cocktails  
Carlsbad Aquafarm  
Hubbs Sea World Research Institute  
Fiddler's Green Restaurant  
Miho Gastrotruck  
Mitch's Seafood  
NOAA

Ocean Harvest  
Pacífico Aquaculture  
Specialty Produce  
Tijuana River NERR  
United Women of East Africa  
Chefs Coleman, Felmley, Leong, Quinonez  
and Valdez  
Volunteers from USD, Mesa College and  
Slow Food Urban

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## Public demand exists

The top 5 reasons San Diego's public wants to buy direct are: desire for fresh, eco-friendly, healthy food; knowledge of food source; and wish to support the local economy and fishermen.

### A diversity of products will sell

Fish topped the list of preferred San Diego products, in particular California halibut, white seabass, yellowtail, sablefish and Bluefin tuna, but no less than 25% of participants expressed interest (rating of 4 or 5 out of 5) in every single species landed in San Diego.

### The value of local direct

Most people will pay more for directly purchased seafood; 17% said they'd pay 5-10% more, 31% said 10-20% more, 26% said 20-30% more and 13% said >30% more.

### Will travel for fresh fish

Most people (43%) are willing to drive 15-30 min for direct seafood, 35% would travel 10-15 min, 9% would go 30-45 min.

### Amounts of seafood wanted

Most (45%) said they would buy 1-2 lb, 30% said 0.5-1 lb and 20% said 2-4 lb of each seafood per visit. About 60% thought they'd buy 2 types of seafood per visit, nearly 25% said 3-4 types and 14% said they'd buy one type of seafood per visit.

### Market visits

25% of people said they would make the trip to a direct market on San Diego Bay every 1-2 weeks, 39% said monthly, 28% said every 3-4 months. But, these rates depend on convenience (low traffic, lots of parking, good time, near home).

### Willing to try

Most (61%) of people would be willing to try seafood that is new to them if it was offered at a dockside market. Some would try "new" seafood if they received prep and cooking tips (13%) and/or free samples (20%).





## DEMAND FOR DIRECT MARKET SALES



## Seafood supply & the will to directly sell it exists

### Makes better cents

Producers can get from 10 to 500% more for catch by selling direct with highest increases for many of the underappreciated, less-mainstream species (e.g., invertebrates, lingcod, cabezon)

### Minimum sales

Many wish to sell  $\geq 100$  lbs or  $\geq \$200$  of combined product each week. 25% of fishermen would sell 10-50 lb of less-mainstream product taking advantage of the higher direct rate and the chance to harvest less. 88% would sell any unsold product to processors.

### Interest in sales

75% of fishermen sell or wish to sell at one or more of San Diego's open air markets (farmer's and/or fishermen's markets).

All fishermen stated that weekends, in particular morning &/or afternoon, were the best time for a market with most (83%) expressing interest in Sunday due to their availability, low auto traffic, and increased foot traffic (bay visitors, nearby church goers).

35% fishermen sell or wish to sell at grocery stores, while 55% have or want direct sales with restaurants.

## A diversity of seafood can be available every month

Producers expressed interest in direct marketing these species:

### Seasonal catch

#### Nearshore fish

California halibut (Mar-Sept)  
Sablefish (spr-fall)  
Rock cod/rock fish (May-Feb)  
Lingcod (May-Feb)  
Mackerel (Apr-Sept)  
Sandabs (Apr-Sept)  
Sheephead (May-Feb)

#### Nearshore inverts

Kellet's whelk (Jul-Mar)  
Spot prawn (Feb-Oct)

#### Open ocean fish

Albacore tuna (Apr-Dec)  
Bluefin tuna (Aug-Jan)  
Swordfish (Jun-Jan)  
Yellowtail (Apr-Dec)  
Opah (Jun-Jan)  
Mako shark (Jun-Jan)  
Thresher shark (Jun-Jan)  
White seabass (May-Aug)

### Year-round catch

#### Nearshore fish

Sardine

#### Nearshore inverts

Manila clam (f)  
Market squid \*  
Mediterranean mussel (f)  
Pacific oyster (f)  
Red sea urchin  
Rock crabs  
Spider crab  
Top snail

#### Seaweeds

Red ogo (f)

(f) = farmed

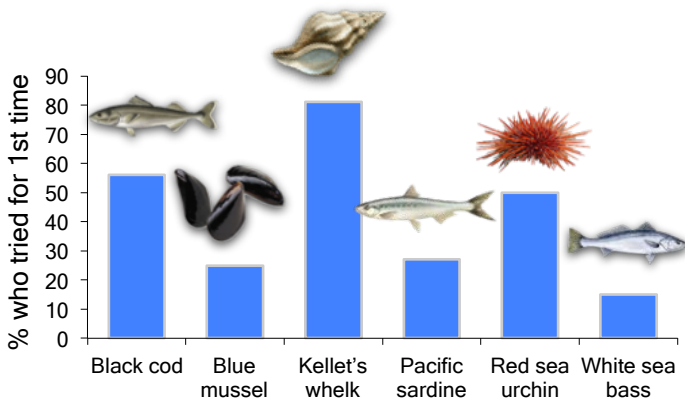
\*=fishery closes at any point when total catch limit is reached.



# Public Barriers

## Why people don't buy more fish

The top two reasons for the public not eating more seafood are that seafood is too expensive and that fishing may harm the environment. These were, however, ranked 3.3 and 3.0, respectively, on a scale from 1 (don't agree) to 5 (strongly agree) suggesting that they are generally not strong limiters of seafood sales.



Seafood species served at 9/7 event

## Our food habits don't match local supply

The most commonly purchased seafood are imported into Southern California and include fresh or frozen salmon (28% of responses), fresh or frozen tuna (10%), canned tuna (10%) and shrimp (9%) (see shopping cart). Many people are unfamiliar with and have not tried most of San Diego's local products, especially invertebrates and less-mainstream fish (e.g., see graph).

## Limits to attending current markets

**Tuna harbor.** 59% said they would attend monthly or more. The main limitations of the 41% who'd attend less frequently were distance of the market from their homes (usually in North County; 31%), not enough parking nearby (23%) and inconvenient hours (16%). No one said they would never attend.



**Fishermen's Farmer's Market.** 36% said they'd attend monthly or more. The main limitations of the 64% who'd attend less frequently were inconvenient hours (35%), too far from homes (33%), not enough parking (17%) and 9% stated other reasons such as weekday traffic, parking challenges, and schedule conflicts. 14% said they would never attend.



## Unmet seafood producer needs

### Lack of social capital

All fishermen agreed that the main barrier to directly marketing their products was the lack of producer-based groups committed to establishing a reliable and diverse seafood supply for sales, and to coordinating catch and sales to reduce competition, costs and effort associated with marketing.

11 of 14 distrust current processors (unfair prices, undercutting prices of local using cheaper imports), and would like to take charge of at least some of their own marketing using producers' associations. This indicates that interest in collaboration exists but the organization and establishment of connections may present challenges.

### Lack of infrastructure

All fishermen cited a short supply of producer-owned and operated infrastructure, especially on the waterfront, as limiting direct sales efforts. This includes too few fueling and offloading docks, processing and storage facilities (HACCP-approved), tanks and aerators to maintain live invertebrates and smaller fish, storage and staging areas, and direct market space.

### Regulations that limit flexibility & innovation

Most fishermen agreed that some current regulations make direct marketing more challenging. Limits to fishing ground access increase time on the water and fuel consumption. Fishing permits are limited in scope, number and are expensive to transfer making it difficult to portfolio fish and gain access to fisheries. Imports flood market and undercut U.S. prices. County and local permits for fishermen-only markets don't yet exist and have been a stumbling block to current efforts.

It was noted that strict regulations are also what makes San Diego's catch so responsible and may be able to be used to market products.

### Little personal sustainability

Several fishermen noted several personal challenges as limits to direct marketing. In particular, the scarcity of customers increases competition within the fishing community, where one person's success often means another's decline. Further, long fishing days (or seasons) make it difficult or impossible to add marketing duties including finding customers, haggling over prices, and/or staffing open-air markets.



# Overcoming barriers

Barriers can be overcome by addressing mismatches in public demand and local products and by building support through increased accessibility and public awareness of the fishing community and its products.

## Raising public awareness...

- **Increases the value of local seafood.** People value and are willing to pay more for responsibly sourced (“sustainable”) food. By introducing them to San Diego’s environmentally, economically and socially responsible producers and the sustainable seafood they provide, appreciation and value will rise.
- **Builds interest.** Within 2 months of our 9/7 event, 42% of participants visited the docks again and 10% talked to &/or bought fish directly from fishermen when they may not have otherwise.
- **Nurtures adventurousness.** 75% of people said that since they learned more about local seafood, they are more willing to try something completely new.
- **Changes habits.** Seafood preference increases with familiarity. 86% of people said that were more comfortable prepping or ordering a particular seafood once they had tried it.



## Supporting our seafood producers

**With long hours and many independent operations, San Diego’s seafood producers can use help in connecting and with marketing.**

- Help with coordination and running of market efforts including dock and facility managers, market staff.
- Helping to form and maintain a Community Fishing Association that collaboratively finds innovative, productive solutions to marketing (and fishery) challenges.
- Provision of producer owned and operated infrastructure along waterfront.
- Helping to secure a high level political support to find innovative solutions to regulatory barriers (e.g., co-management, portfolio fishing, fishermen’s markets).
- Helping to build grassroots support in the form of sales and speaking out for green and blue economies.