



Issue 43: May, 2023: This e-bulletin is aimed at personnel in fisheries and aquaculture, at fish packers, processors, distributors, retailers and finally, consumers.

Winds of change in the seafood sector

Very few things remain static in our fast-changing world and the seafood sector is no exception. This issue lists some recent changes and developments which may have an increasing impact going forward both at consumer level and in the overall fishing industry.

Iced seafood counters

Iced seafood counters are closing in the UK and at least one Irish supermarket chain has closed its iced seafood counters in favour of prepacked fish in chilled cabinets. Hopefully other Irish supermarket chains will NOT follow as the iced seafood counter is the nearest thing we have, with a few exceptions, to the large iced fresh fish markets and in-store displays that prevail in many European towns and cities, and also to iced fish displays outside many European seafood restaurants. A well maintained iced seafood counter is a 'work of art', is hugely visual, displays a wide range of fish species/shellfish, and allows consumers peruse and inspect what is on offer in a positive and searching way. This option does not prevail to the same extent for prepacked seafood in chill cabinets. Iced counters are also manned and consumers can select the size of portion they require and can discuss their intended purchase with an operative and have it packed in an ultra-convenient microwaveable bag which facilitates rapid cooking in the home. Small portions (circa 10g) of flavoured butter are also a feature and can be included in the microwaveable bags with the fish on request. These bags are 'greener' than prepack trays plus film. Increased seafood consumption is highly desirable for health reasons and well maintained iced seafood counters are central to this. The priority/necessity, therefore, is for supermarkets to expand consumer-friendly iced seafood counters rather than abandon them despite being more costly to run than the prepacked seafood/chilled cabinet option.



'Greener' trawlers

Offshore wind farms are an increasing feature globally as economies struggle towards greener energy supplies and four successful bidders in Ireland's first offshore wind contract auction have been announced recently. In parallel with this a memorandum of understanding has been signed between the Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation and a wind farm company (Hexicon) re the development of a model to accommodate partnership between offshore wind farm development and the sea fishing industry. The partnership is built on six key principles termed the "New Approach". This is a welcome development aimed at avoiding conflict between the interests of these two important players. Proper siting of offshore wind farms is critical so that they don't impact negatively on key fishing grounds and on the environment. Potential possible long-term outcomes from the development could include using power from the floating windfarms to produce hydrogen and ammonia to be used as fuel for trawlers resulting in 'greener' trawlers.

Seafood self-sufficiency in the EU

Issue 30 of SeaHealth-ucd cited a Eurobarometer survey on EU consumer choices regarding fishery and aquaculture products which showed that Europeans love fish and other seafood. More than four out of ten Europeans eat seafood at least once a week at home. Regional, national and EU seafood products enjoy a very strong consumer preference. Demand for seafood in the EU will continue to rise due to continuing consumer interest in health, and as more evidence comes on-stream on the health benefits of seafood. However, a recent finfish report from the European Fish Processors and Traders Association has shown that seafood self-sufficiency in the EU has hit a record low level and will soon be only 33%. Foremost among the decline are reduced catches by EU trawlers due to dwindling stocks and also the withdrawal of the UK, and its fishing industry, from the EU. Iceland, Norway and some Asian countries are major seafood suppliers to the EU. However, sourcing seafood supplies from outside the EU has become more difficult due to supply chain issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and trade sanctions against Russia. Seafood imports from China have also reduced as some Chinese seafood originates in Russia. Therefore, increased self-sufficiency is essential and it is imperative that the EU expands its seafood production through: (i) more accurate information on wild fish stocks thereby facilitating more precise quota allocation; (ii) bringing underutilised fish species on-stream; (iii) a significant increase in fish and shellfish farming in EU waters; (iv) better coordination of existing trawler fleets; and (v) increased financial inputs from the EU to encourage expansion in the seafood sector. Strong consumer demand for seafood in the EU is a major opportunity and it is now up to the EU fishing industry to deliver.

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<https://www.ucd.ie/foodandhealth/more/seahealthucd/>