



ALLIANCE™

(<https://www.globalseafood.org>).



Health &
Welfare

Spotlight on crustacean welfare: How the UK is showcasing ways to improve practices and consumer trust

3 February 2025

By Bonnie Waycott

Growing demand for ethical food drives UK seafood industry to prioritize animal welfare and attract conscious consumers



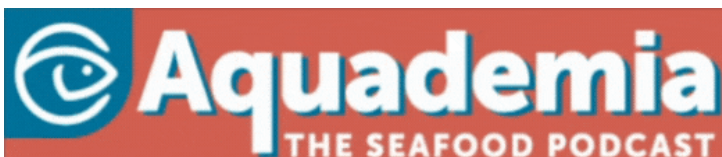
Growing demand for ethical food is pushing the UK seafood industry to prioritize crustacean welfare, improved quality and worker satisfaction. Photo by Stuart Spray.

Good animal welfare is drawing attention worldwide, and the UK's seafood sector is no exception to this growing trend. As consumer awareness rises, so does the demand for seafood transparency and traceability, with more shoppers expecting retailers to make responsible choices. Against this backdrop, adapting practices to minimize animal suffering is quickly becoming critical.

It's compelling change on the ground and in the ocean. To meet the demand for responsibly sourced seafood, UK businesses are now prioritizing humane technologies and improved welfare practices. This approach benefits the animals, but also businesses and individuals by opening the door to higher price points. It also results in better quality, more attractive products, thanks to reduced injury and stress on animals.

There is also value in establishing good animal welfare to create working environments that don't test staff emotionally. Ben Perry, head of sales at **Ace Aquatec** (<https://aceaquatec.com/>), in Scotland, UK, told the *Advocate* that a comfortable working environment with less physical stress on workers – such as when handling a species – will reduce emotional stress and lead to higher job retention.

“Automation, mechanization and technology such as humane stunners can address this by removing some of the physical labor, and deliver good welfare at the same time,” he said. “There are many ways to incorporate good welfare practices in fisheries.”



(<https://link.chtbl.com/aquapod>).

Management programs and policies can improve worker awareness and understanding of good and bad animal welfare practices. Certain fishing techniques, such as pots and creels for species like crab, lobster and langoustines, can replace methods like bottom trawling and reduce the risk of equipment loss. Artificial intelligence (AI) technology can be incorporated into nets on trawlers to determine the individual size and species of captured animals before releasing or retaining them depending on whether they qualify against a trawler's intended catch.



Management programs and policies can improve worker awareness and understanding of good and bad animal welfare practices, while automation, mechanization and other technologies can reduce physical labor and deliver good welfare practices. Photo by Stuart Spray.

“More workers prefer to see welfare-first technology in place, because it provides a nicer working environment,” said Perry. “Poor animal welfare puts people off, so if vessels or farms can differentiate themselves from that, they are much more likely to attract workers, in particular the younger generation.”

Seafood consumers are also drawn to good animal welfare. They want to feel positive about the food they eat in a world where food production systems are coming under ever-increasing scrutiny for their environmental, social and health impacts.

UK retailer **Marks & Spencer** (<https://www.marksandspencer.com>)(M&S) advocates for good decapod crustacean welfare and practices such as humane slaughter. In July 2023, it published its Crustacean Welfare Policy, which pledges not to sell live wild or farmed decapods, and to only engage with suppliers that use stunners before killing, while it also prohibits eyestalk ablation among its shrimp suppliers. Rather than put eco-labels such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) on their packaging, M&S also backs and promotes its own brand, while telling customers where each product comes from.



What is the path to viable alternatives to shrimp eyestalk ablation?

Welfare concerns around the common hatchery technique that underpins global shrimp farming is leading to trials for new approaches.



Global Seafood Alliance

Linda Wood, aquaculture and fisheries manager at M&S, said collaboration and innovation across the decapod crustacean supply chain are key to addressing issues like animal welfare. She adds that consumers want information on their seafood purchases, such as where they come from and how they were caught or farmed, so the industry has a responsibility to do more to educate consumers.

“It has a huge duty of care, not only to share information but also to push technology companies to find better innovations, or to learn more about a particular species and how it responds to certain environments,” she said. “Seafood has always been a bit behind land animals because it’s underwater and can’t be seen. However, the industry has plenty of energy and science behind it, and a lot of technology that’s getting behind fisheries and farms, so the pace of change could be quite rapid.”

Animal welfare is also being pushed further into the public consciousness by NGOs. **Crustacean Compassion** (<https://www.crustaceancompassion.org>) campaigns for the legal protection and humane treatment of crabs, lobsters and other decapod crustaceans in the UK. It also works with retailers to explore their sourcing policies and efforts to address welfare risks.

“Consumers want food that is ethically and sustainably produced, and that includes giving animals a good life,” said Dr. Ben Sturgeon, CEO at Crustacean Compassion. “This is reflected in today’s very high level of interest in, and awareness of, issues like welfare and sentience.”

“The blue food economy is being positioned as the answer to the global food problem and potentially having more environmental benefits than land-based agriculture,” said Jane Bush, corporate engagement advisor at Crustacean Compassion. “Good animal welfare goes hand in hand with this, and the seafood industry must show that it’s well-equipped as a promising sector in this field.”

UK consumers are also keen to understand how supermarkets and household name brands perform when it comes to animal welfare. Against this backdrop, Crustacean Compassion created the UK’s first industry benchmark in 2022. Known as **The Snapshot** (<https://www.crustaceancompassion.org/the-snapshot>), it assesses leading seafood producers, processors and retailers across the supply chain on their management and reporting of decapod crustacean welfare. Information is available to the public, who can discover which companies are working to raise welfare standards, and which are lagging behind.

Dr. Ben Sturgeon, CEO at Crustacean Compassion: “The days of simply putting a boat out to catch as much as possible have gone. We must work together to preserve stocks, reduce waste and restore the oceans if we want to see a future. Good welfare means considering the animals within their natural habitats, the process of capture, and how we use them within food chains.” Photo by Stuart Spray.

“Decapod crustaceans were recognized by the UK Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 as sentient beings, but there is little information on working practices across the supply chain, while the UK seafood industry’s new voluntary codes of practice still don’t address some key welfare issues,” said Bush. “We wanted to know what was happening to decapod crustaceans from capture or harvest through to slaughter and sale. We assessed 30 companies on areas such as humane stunning, slaughter, handling, transport, storage, improvement targets, research and development efforts and communication with the public.”

While there are clear leaders demanding more for decapod crustaceans, most businesses are still not taking meaningful action on crustacean welfare. Indeed, Sturgeon says that there is currently an area of general malaise with retailers, with consumer communications within the Snapshot consistently

scoring poorly over the last three years.

However, he stressed that this is somewhat reflective of the fact that until more recently, retailers have not had much that they can signify to consumers as either high animal welfare practice or a point of difference from other retailers. Crustacean Compassion provides retailers with evidence that consumers want good welfare (through polls or other evidence), how to achieve this – labelling, case studies, open policy publication – and the knock-on economic and welfare benefits.

“Good welfare will lead to fishing industry stability, potential local economy boosts, and addressing issues such as net carbon footprints,” said Sturgeon. “This can all be related to consumers through ESG (B Corp) certification that is increasingly within consumer consciousness alongside welfare.”

As awareness of inhumane practices rises, consumers will inevitably start asking their own questions about crustacean sourcing and treatment policies, said Bush. If companies can't tell a good story, consumers may switch to products that remove the animal welfare risks associated with seafood, so engagement from companies in the supply chain is key. Examples include uploading welfare policies, sharing targets and objectives for improving welfare standards, or publishing project and research updates. Most importantly, companies need to tell consumers that they realize that there is a problem and highlight what they are doing to find solutions.

“Information can be shared as frequently as when they have something new to say, or even just to reiterate their current welfare policy on a regular basis,” said Bush. “This increases the chances of reaching the right audience, and helps companies be seen as progressive organizations that are constantly seeking improvement.”

Animal welfare is not an isolated country approach, and global trade and linked markets mean that combined efforts must be made. Can the UK work with other countries to improve decapod crustacean welfare and consumer communication?

“The ocean is a mosaic of life – actions creating poor welfare in one area inevitably impact widely,” said Sturgeon. “The days of simply putting a boat out to catch as much as possible have gone. We must work together to preserve stocks, reduce waste and restore the oceans if we want to see a future. Good welfare means considering the animals within their natural habitats, the process of capture, and how we use them within food chains. The UK is not the leader right now, and we must learn from our global partners to catch up and come together to learn how to continue that improvement.”

Bush said that more companies are likely to take on the challenge of improving animal welfare, particularly as the pathway becomes clearer for them, thanks in part to examples set by welfare-focused retailers and businesses.

“Those who don't take available opportunities to improve will face increasing public scrutiny and commercial disadvantages, so continued improvement will be driven by a combination of wishing to do the right thing and the threat of being shut out of a seafood market that no longer tolerates poor crustacean welfare,” she said. “At a time when fisheries in the UK are encouraging more people to **eat British seafood** (<https://www.globalseafood.org/advocate/experts-urge-uk-to-embrace-local-fish-for-better-health-and-to-achieve-climate-goals/>), the high welfare expectations of today's consumers must be met.”

Author

**BONNIE WAYCOTT**

Correspondent Bonnie Waycott became interested in marine life after learning to snorkel on the Sea of Japan coast near her mother's hometown. She specializes in aquaculture and fisheries with a particular focus on Japan, and has a keen interest in Tohoku's aquaculture recovery following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.

Copyright © 2025 Global Seafood Alliance

All rights reserved.