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Save the Oceans with Your Diet - Go Fish Free this February

There are no longer plenty more fish in the sea! Fish Free February challenges you to help protect our oceans by removing seafood from your diet for 28 days and helping to raise awareness of the issues caused by intensive fishing practices.

Our oceans are in a state of global crisis, brought about by ocean warming, acidification, pollution, and habitat destruction. However, the biggest immediate threat to ocean life is from fisheries. Each year an estimated 1-2.7 trillion fish are caught for human consumption, though this figure does not include illegal fisheries, discarded fish, fish caught to be used as bait, or fish killed by not caught, so the real number is far higher. It is no wonder then, that today nearly 90% of the world's marine stocks are fully exploited, overexploited or depleted. If we do not act fast, overfishing and damaging fishing practices will soon destroy the ocean ecosystems which produce 80% of the oxygen in our atmosphere and provide three billion people with their primary source of protein.

Fish Free February, a UK-registered charity, is challenging people around the world to take action for marine life in a simple but effective way. Take the Fish Free February Pledge and drop seafood from your diet for one month, or beyond. Fish Free February wants to get people talking about the wide range of issues associated with industrial fishing practices and putting the wellbeing of our oceans at the forefront of dietary decision-making. A third of all wild-caught fish are used to create feed for livestock, so Fish Free February urges us to opt for plant-based dishes as a sustainable alternative to seafood, sharing our best fish-free recipes on social media with #FishFreeFebruary and nominating our friends to do the same.

“Not all fishing practices are bad” explains Simon Hilbourne, founder of Fish Free February. “Well-managed, small-scale fisheries that use selective fishing gears can be sustainable. However, most of the seafood in our diet comes from industrial fisheries which often prioritise profit over the wellbeing of our planet, resulting in multiple environmental challenges. In some cases, the fishing industry has even been linked to serious human rights issues such as forced labour and human trafficking! Fish Free February hopes to shed more light on fishing practices, create wider discussion around these issues, and offer solutions to benefit people, wildlife, and the natural environment.”

To learn more about these issues and to take the Fish Free February pledge visit www.fishfreefebruary.com

Notes to editors:

Fish Free February is a UK Registered Charity (Charity Number 1191886)

People can pledge their support to go Fish Free this February through the website (www.fishfreefebruary.com/pledge).

Website: www.fishfreefebruary.com

Digital Campaign Toolkit: www.fishfreefebruary.com/digital-campaign-toolkit

Email: info@fishfreefebruary.com

More Information

Fish Free February is a UK-registered charity working to inspire people around the globe to reduce their seafood consumption, support sustainable fishing practices, and learn more about marine issues. Our vision is a world where people care for and value the oceans, so fish stocks and marine habitats prosper. We want people to take the Fish Free February Pledge, replacing the seafood in their diet with plant-based meals for the month of February, whilst helping us to raise awareness of the threats to wildlife, the environment, and people from overfishing. Beyond February, we continue to encourage and support people and businesses to make a positive impact for the oceans year-round. 2021 will be Fish Free February's second year of championing ocean conservation, following a successful launch in February 2020 with nearly two hundred pledges and its registration as an official UK charity in October 2020.

Overfishing: We are fishing so intensively that many species cannot repopulate fast enough to sustain healthy populations. 90% of global fish stocks are fished to their maximum or overfished with an estimated 1-2.7 trillion fish caught annually for human consumption.

Plastic pollution: Discarded fishing nets make up 46% of the plastic in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, far more than plastic bags or straws. Fishing gear is abandoned at sea due to breakages, losing items overboard or when old or broken fishing gear is purposely dumped. These 'ghost' nets, hooks and lines are still lethal, entangling, wounding and suffocating birds, turtles, whales, seals and many other species.

Destructive fishing practices: Many fishing methods are non-selective, catching and killing many unwanted species (bycatch) in the pursuit of one target species. Long lines, trawlers, gill nets, electric pulse nets and dynamite fishing are all examples of incredibly destructive and wasteful practices.

Mislabelling: A study by Oceana found that one third of seafood samples in restaurants and stores in the US were not what they were labelled as. This can have huge implications on the environment as well as human health, but ultimately it highlights that we need far more stringent regulation and monitoring in this industry.

Farmed fish (aquaculture): 40% of the seafood we eat is farmed but creating seafood farms often involves destroying existing habitats and therefore has a high carbon footprint. Chemicals and diseases associated with seafood farming also impact the surrounding waters and eventually affect wild populations.

Food waste: The Scottish farmed salmon industry is highly wasteful, with around 20% of fish never reaching harvest due to mortalities and escapes during production, according to its own figures. If this level of waste remains unchecked, a large proportion of the wild fish sourced to feed its salmon is also being wasted.

Human rights: In regions of the world such as South-East Asia, forced labour and human trafficking is rife within the fishing industry. It is very possible that the imported fish in our supermarkets has made its way from the sea to the shelves as a result of modern-day slavery.

Illegal fishing: Companies in the fishing industry do not always follow the rules. Monitoring activity on the high-seas is incredibly challenging and currently illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing is widespread. This exacerbates the negative impact of all the issues associated with industrial fishing and means that companies can continue their dirty work and there is no justice for our oceans.

References:

- Overfishing is currently the largest threat to ocean life and habitats: https://wwf.panda.org/our_work/oceans/problems/
- 90% of global fish stocks are fished to their maximum or overfished: <http://www.fao.org/3/I9540EN/i9540en.pdf>
- 1-2.7 trillion fish are caught annually for human consumption: <http://www.fishcount.org.uk/published/std/fishcountchapter19.pdf>
- Discarded fishing gear makes up 46% of the plastic in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, far more than plastic bags or straws: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-22939-w?utm_source=commission_junction&utm_medium=affiliate
- Food waste from Scottish farmed salmon: <https://feedbackglobal.org/new-report-finds-310k-tonnes-of-wild-fish-a-year-will-be-needed-to-feed-scottish-salmon-industrys-ambitions-to-double-in-size-by-2030/>
- One third of seafood samples in the US were not what they were labelled: https://oceana.org/our-campaigns/seafood_fraud/campaign
- Farmed seafood now supplies approximately 40% of the seafood humans eat: [https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1890/1540-9295\(2005\)003\[0021:FSFAFF\]2.0.CO;2](https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1890/1540-9295(2005)003[0021:FSFAFF]2.0.CO;2)
- Slavery in the fishing industry: <https://www.dw.com/en/modern-slavery-widespread-in-fishing-industry-say-ngos/av-49089741>