

The Canned Tuna Chain of Custody

Longliner

Albacore (“solid white”) and yellowfin tunas are generally caught on longlines: thick plastic ropes attached to thousands of individual hooks in series. Conventional longlines can stretch for miles, kill countless seabirds and sharks every year, and are one of the biggest threats to endangered leatherback turtles. Greenpeace is calling on fishing companies to adopt best practices that will greatly reduce these impacts and protect oceanic ecosystems.

Purse Seiner

Most skipjack (“chunk light”) tuna is caught by purse seine vessels, many of which employ fish aggregating devices, or FADs—floating objects that attract far more than just skipjack. FAD-associated purse seiners slaughter tens of thousands of sharks, rays, juvenile bigeye tuna, and other threatened animals every year. Greenpeace is campaigning for companies like Chicken of the Sea, Starkist, and Bumblebee to abandon FADs and to adopt more sustainable fishing methods.

Transshipper

Much of the pirate fishing activity within the tuna sector is hidden by transshipping—vessels at sea transferring fish from one to another, often without any sort of observer coverage. This practice compounds the opacity of the seafood chain of custody and makes tracing a product to its source extremely difficult. Progressive companies are abandoning transshipping in favor of more defensible and transparent protocols that allow them to stand behind their product.

Cannery

Traceability in the tuna chain of custody is often compromised at the cannery. Unless careful and transparent records are kept and rigorous protocols are followed, canneries can combine various loads and species of tuna together, creating a highly opaque product and making it difficult for consumers to make sustainable choices.

Retailer

Nearly half of all seafood consumed in the United States is purchased at grocery stores. Greenpeace is calling on retailers to implement policies that will help customers make sustainable and responsible choices when buying canned tuna. Companies like Whole Foods, Safeway, and Walmart have introduced positive options in this area, but other companies like Kroger and BI-LO still refuse to do so.

Food Service

Institutions like hospitals, schools, and corporate campuses generally rely on external companies to operate their kitchens and dining rooms. Collectively, these food service providers (most notably Compass, Aramark, and Sodexo) use a vast amount of seafood. Greenpeace is currently exploring this industry and sincerely hopes to see significant positive changes in the coming year.

Import Point

The first point of control for seafood entering the United States is at the border, where unfortunately, less than 2 percent of all imported seafood is inspected. Greenpeace is calling on retailers, policymakers, and consumers to support critical traceability legislation like the SAFE Seafood Act, which will help close our borders to illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) seafood and keep our oceans healthy and productive.

