



The University of British Columbia Sustainable Seafood Project
Assessing sustainability of BIVALVE purchasing at UBC
Executive Summary – May 2007

The University of British Columbia (UBC) offers customers scallops, clams, mussels, and oysters that are extracted locally, nationally, and internationally. In late 2006, the UBC Sustainable Seafood project recommended changes in sourcing to improve the sustainability of such purchases. The set of guidelines for bivalve sourcing produced by the project included the primary recommendation of using locally farmed native bivalve products whenever possible.

The UBC Sustainable Seafood project is a consortium that includes UBC Food Services, AMS Food and Beverage, Green College, Fisheries Centre, Faculty of Land and Food Systems, and UBC Sustainability Office¹. The partnership of students, faculty, and staff strives to make all UBC seafood purchases as ecologically, economical, and socially sustainable as possible. Having agreed on steps to increase sustainability of five other seafood products, the partners turned their attention to rainbow trout and steelhead in September 2006.

Bivalves represented 9% and 1% of total seafood purchases for UBC Food Services and AMS Food and Beverage, respectively in the mid 2000s. It was difficult to identify some products with confidence but scallops in general comprised 68 and 77% of the total bivalve volumes respectively. This proportion of UBC seafood purchases might increase if bivalve seafood products were used as an alternative to other, more unsustainable seafood products. Bivalves are subject to population declines from overexploitation, and may then find it difficult to achieve sufficient densities to reproduce.

Numerous issues of ecological, social, and economic sustainability were discovered when researching the origins of UBC bivalve products. Both wild capture and aquaculture are used to produce bivalve products. Environmental concerns surrounding the impact of wild extraction methods (such as deep water raking or dredging) have led to the increasing expansion of bivalve aquaculture enterprises. As filter feeding organisms, bivalves can be raised in a sustainable manner via aquaculture, although introductions of non-native species to areas must be prevented. While information regarding wild extraction technique, wild population status, native habitat, and capture or harvest method can be used to assess the ecological sustainability of products, assessment of social and economic sustainability is complex and challenging. It requires the inclusion of all stakeholders involved in bivalve fisheries for thorough analysis.

The project produced a guide to simplify UBC's bivalve purchasing, ranking the various bivalve products and species purchased by UBC according to categories reflecting potential sustainability concerns: local extraction or importation from elsewhere; wild-extraction or aquaculture-harvest; and whether the species was native to B.C. or introduced. Overall, native species are recommended over introduced species, cultured stocks are recommended over wild, and local sources are recommended over imported, although the guideline table identifies a few exceptions to these recommendations. The report also provides advice on accessing particular species. The assessment of UBC bivalve purchases succeeded in identifying products of conservation concern and in making sound recommendations to increase the sustainability of UBC shellfish sourcing.

¹ This is a SEEDS initiative. The full report is available at <http://www.sustain.ubc.ca.seeds.html>