

My name is Darren, and I am the chef and owner of Fishbone, a seafood restaurant in Queenstown. I was invited here today because of a speech I gave last year at the New Zealand Seafood Conference titled – and with apologies to Stanley Kubrick – Fishlove or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Sustainable Seafood.

Until a couple of years ago I spent the better part of a decade cooking New Zealand fish and drowning in a sea of guilt. I thought I was doing something wrong, serving fish. I would look at green group Forest and Bird Best Fish Guide and see my whole menu before my eyes, all in the red – do not eat – zone. My menu read like a list of endangered species. I love eating fish. I love cooking fish. I love to fish. So what was I to do? I decided not to serve snapper and orange roughy, the two fish at the bottom of the list and ignored the rest.

Two years ago, a sea change occurred. Guilo, a chef from a restaurant in Lyttleton, called Roots asked me to speak about sustainable seafood at a conference he organised called ConversationNZ. I took that as a sign. It was time to learn the truth about what I serve at Fishbone. My truth. Not what the green groups tell me, not what the Seafood Industry tell me. It had to be what I thought was right. I decided to do my research and find out for myself what I thought about the New Zealand fishing industry and our Quota Management System.

What I learnt is this:

I learnt that the New Zealand seafood industry is one of the most self-regulated industries in the world.

I learnt that no one, it seems, tries harder to improve the sustainability of New Zealand seafood more than the people in this room.

I learnt how fisheries in North America were adopting the New Zealand quota system and are now watching their fish stocks increase.

I learnt that fishing uses no water, no pesticides, no fertiliser and causes no soil erosion.

I learnt that wild caught fish are not pumped full of antibiotics, growth hormone and the like.

I learnt about the Marine Stewardship Council which I had never heard of - I have been buying fish for ten years and had never heard of the MSC.

I learnt that you guys are constantly in the firing line, often vilified by green groups who keep telling us over and over again not to eat fish.

And yet I learnt this, I learnt that the poster child for bad fishery practices, for overfishing, Orange Roughy was on the verge of being declared an sustainable catch.

No longer was I drowning in a sea of guilt, but riding a wave of enthusiasm for our seafood industry

My research also made me look at other industries in New Zealand, particularly our lauded dairy industry and when I had finished my research I asked myself this, why does no one ever say don't drink milk.

I do not want to sound anti-farming nor anti the dairy industry - I love our milk, our butter and our cheeses but that love comes at a much greater cost than my love of fish.

And I learnt this – if you care about the New Zealand environment, you should drink less flat whites and eat more orange roughy.

Congratulations to everyone in this room for caring enough to make New Zealand seafood the most sustainable in the world. But Orange roughy getting a big blue tick isn't the end of something; it is the beginning.

Last year my restaurant, Fishbone, was awarded a hat by Cuisine magazine - a big honour for me and Mark my business partner. But the next day we did what we have done every day for the past 12 years – we have said to ourselves, "how are we going to make Fishbone better today."

I hope everyone in this rooms thinks about the Quota management system and sustainable fishing the same way and asks themselves every day; how are we going to make it better.

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