



## SEALORD TUNA. WHAT'S THE CATCH?

Industrial tuna fishing methods are indiscriminately killing other sea creatures. You can help to stop this. Tell Sealord to move to more sustainable methods now. [www.greenpeace.org.nz/tuna](http://www.greenpeace.org.nz/tuna)

CHANGE YOUR TUNA  
**GREENPEACE**

ALISTAIR GUTHRIE

# Cool running

As wild stocks of salmon disappear around the world, a Kiwi company has found a way of sustainably farming this healthy and wonderfully tasty fish. VINCENT HEERINGA takes a closer look



In the mountains above Twizel sit two of New Zealand's most picturesque and pristine lakes, Tekapo and Pukaki. Fed by pure glacial water that melts from the surrounding peaks of the Southern Alps, the lakes are joined by man-made canals, gushing with near-frozen river currents. The water is good enough to drink, good enough to bottle.

But rather than being extracted and poured into plastic bottles, this precious water is home to a much more sustainable and delicious export success, alpine salmon. Twenty years ago enthusiasts established an experimental salmon farm in these canals. It kind of worked. Up to then few people had farmed salmon in such fast-moving water or so high in the mountains. The company struggled, and in 2009 Geoff Matthews, an entrepreneur and former private secretary to Prime Minister Jim Bolger, formed a consortium to buy it. Renamed Mt Cook Alpine Salmon, the company must be doing something right as its salmon are now exported to high-end restaurants in the USA and Japan. Some of New Zealand's best chefs rate them as their favourite sushi and sashimi fresh fish.

The company itself calls it "the benchmark for all salmon" – which is a bold call for lots of reasons.

Freshwater salmon are perceived by chefs to lack colour and taste. Their marine siblings (both are King or Chinook salmon) eat a more diverse range of food and tend to be more robust, growing up to four times as large. Moreover, as wild salmon disappear from their natural habitat through encroachment and overfishing, the world is consuming mostly farmed salmon, which are notorious for disease and treatments that include hormones, GMOs and antibiotics. Fish farming has a bad rap – both for the feed and chemicals that go into it and the polluted effluent and dead fish that come out.

What makes this farm any better?

First the purity: no disease, parasites, algae, antibiotics, hormones or pollution. The company claims that not a single fish has died of disease in its 20-year history. And the water flows faster than in any other fish farm in the world, causing the fish to swim hard like wild salmon.

These fit and healthy salmon are not just free of chemicals and heavy metals, but are also high in omega-3 and low in fat.

Hot smoked salmon is cured and then cooked by smoke at a high temperature. Cold smoked salmon is cured and flavoured using wood smoke, salt, sugar and herbs. See page 86 for recipe ideas



FROM TOP: Tekapo canal's salmon rafts in winter; the canals flanked by the Southern Alps; give a man a fish: Geoff Matthews, the entrepreneur behind Alpine Salmon

MT COOK ALPINE SALMON

MT COOK ALPINE SALMON



ALISTAIR GUTHRIE

And they taste great. Geoff remembers presenting the fish to a chef at a seven-star hotel in the Middle East. "I managed to talk my way into seeing the executive chef and laid out the fish. He cut it, looked at it, smelled it and tasted it, and said 'it's very good, very fresh'. When I told him that it had been snap frozen, flown from New Zealand and thawed that morning he didn't believe me."

Along the way, Geoff joined forces with Scott Murray, a professional chef, trained in Japan and working in California. Scott's the kind of burly, taciturn character you'd find in a reality TV kitchen, barking curt instructions. "I don't suffer fools," says Scott. "If you'd asked me a year ago if I would cook frozen, freshwater salmon, I'd have said 'no'. If you'd asked whether I'd invest in it, I'd have laughed."

Back in New Zealand on holiday, he was cajoled by a cousin to test the salmon. "For his sake I lay out the fish and the first thing I notice is how small it is. I'm already dark about this but now I'm feeling darker. Then I'm told they freeze their fish and I'm like 'are you serious? Don't waste my time'. But

as I cut it, I notice it has no oily residue and no fishy odour. It has texture and subtlety. When I taste it, it is just like the premium salmon I used to eat in Japan."

Scott was especially impressed the next day when he made sushi from some salmon he'd frozen overnight.

Two weeks later he was back home and opened the newspaper to read: No wild salmon left in California. After nearly falling out of his chair he got on the phone to New Zealand. "I was in," he says.

So were others, including the newly appointed chairman and former Prime Minister Jim Bolger. "We deliberately avoid people with seafood or salmon farming experience. We don't want to have people say to us 'oh, you can't do that' or 'this is how it's done round here'. We're a bunch of passionate investors, owners and workers trying to build an amazing export business," says Geoff.

They developed a brand – Saikou, meaning 'sweet spot' – and are now selling to top local eateries, such as Shinobi in Wellington and Auckland's Clooney, as well as to premium restaurants in Japan and the US.

In California the company have

numerous outlets, most notably the French Laundry, a winner of three Michelin stars and twice named 'Best Restaurant in the World' by Restaurant Magazine. In Japan, the second-largest market for New Zealand salmon, Mt Cook salmon have the rare honour of being served at the 'Emperor's table', meaning they are on the menu for the imperial court. This choice reflects again the uniqueness of the fish – emulating the near-extinct alpine salmon of the Toyama region.

**A ban on the import of salmonids and gametes into New Zealand since 1945 has helped protect local salmon against diseases that have afflicted other salmon populations around the world**

## Fishy business

Aquaculture is expanding fast worldwide, thanks to the combined effect of rising demand, especially from the developing world, and the depletion of wild fish stocks through overfishing. It's also becoming big business in New Zealand – with about \$300 million in total sales each year, including exports of \$252 million. Green-lipped mussels account for 72 percent of this figure, salmon 22 percent, and oysters 6 percent.

Done well, with adherence to strict standards, aquaculture can provide shoppers with an eco-friendly supply of fish and shellfish, and help relieve some of the pressure on the world's oceans. But done badly, aquaculture is an environmental blight on its own, causing serious water pollution, making heavy use of prophylactic antibiotics, and further depleting wild stocks to provide feed.

Sales and marketing manager

Nicolet Simon says that Mt Cook Alpine Salmon is constantly seeking new approaches to make the farm as sustainable as possible, with feed being one of the critical components.

Mt Cook salmon are fed sustainably sourced feed produced by Australian-based suppliers Skretting and Ridley, says Nicolet. For the majority of their growing cycle the salmon eat 9mm pellets containing less than ten percent fish meal, sourced from certified sustainably fished stocks in the southern ocean. The remaining protein comes from vegetables and poultry meal (including feathers) and provides a rich source of several essential amino acids.

The salmon farm is the highest in the world, and claims to cause no agricultural or human run-off or pollution. "The mountain water is so pure you can drink it above and below the farm," says Nicolet.



wholesome organic  
muesli  
porridge  
gluten free

Nicola's  
Organics

natural wholefoods by Harraways

