

FINDING **SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD** IN HONG KONG RESTAURANTS AND FOOD OUTLETS



Background

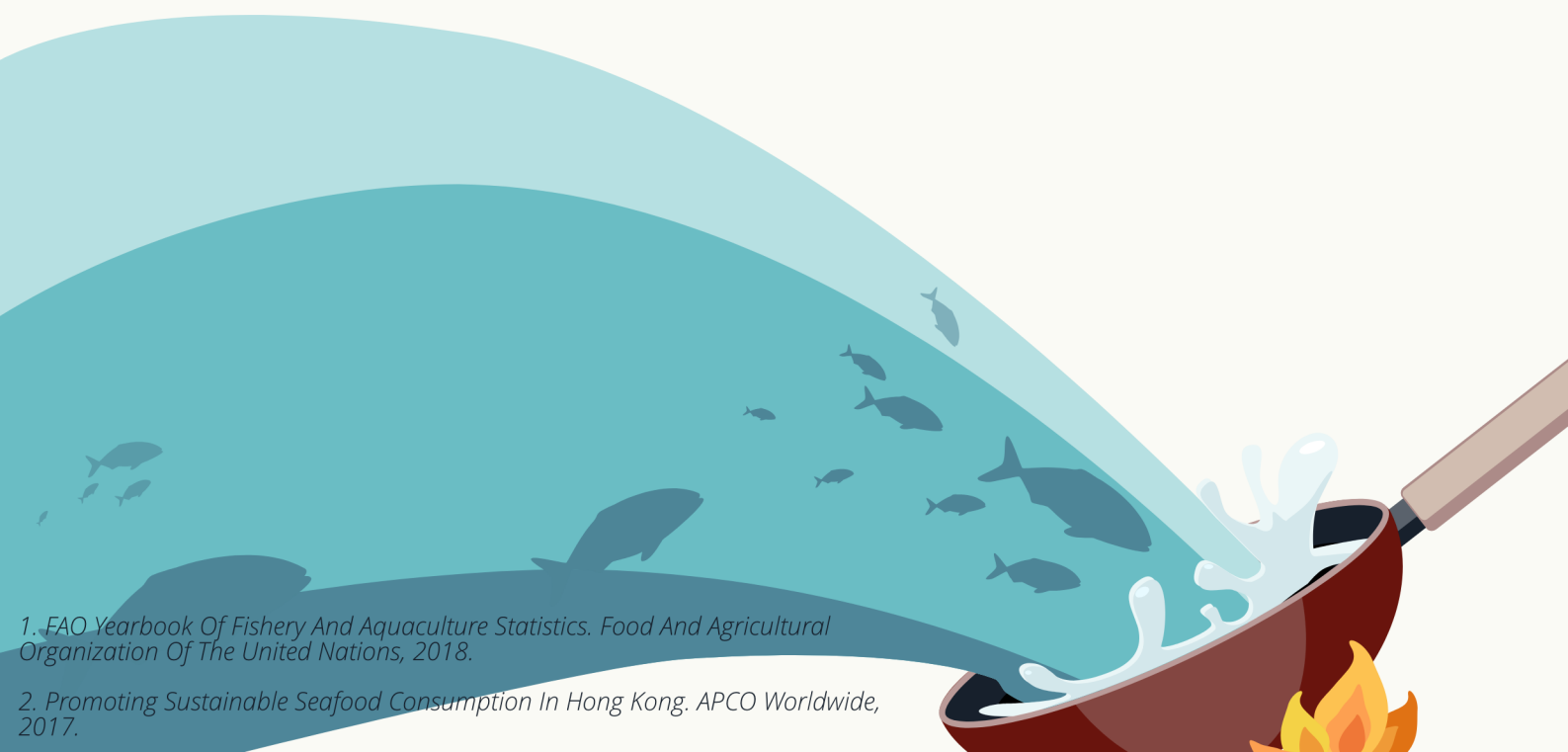
Hong Kong is the 2nd largest per capita seafood consumer in Asia, and each of us here consume over 66.5 kg of seafood every year, according to the FAO. [1]

Given that Hong Kong imports about 90% of its seafood from over 150 countries/territories, the sustainability of the seafood choices made by Hong Kong consumers has a significant impact on our ocean.

Sustainable seafood is seafood that has been captured or farmed in a way that minimizes harm to the marine environment and target populations.

Since years, environmental groups have encouraged the public to choose sustainable seafood in their daily diet. Yet, the availability of sustainable seafood in the food & beverages industry remains unclear due to lack of sufficient labelling on seafood species, origins or production methods. This might lead to some to believe that sustainable seafood might not be accessible to most or might be only accessible only when a premium is paid. [2]

To provide a clear picture on the availability of sustainable seafood in restaurants and takeaway outlets, Choose Right Today conducted a citywide survey in 2020 to identify restaurants and takeaway outlets who provide sustainable seafood in Hong Kong. To aid the public access sustainable seafood, restaurants and takeaway outlets identified to serve sustainable seafood were listed in an online sustainable seafood dining guide.



1. *FAO Yearbook Of Fishery And Aquaculture Statistics*. Food And Agricultural Organization Of The United Nations, 2018.

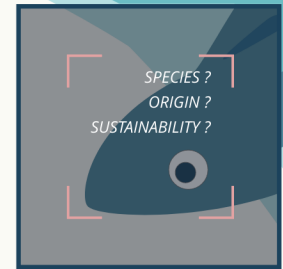
2. *Promoting Sustainable Seafood Consumption In Hong Kong*. APCO Worldwide, 2017.

Method

Part-time surveyors and volunteers were recruited to conduct the survey.

Enquiries were conducted with food outlets listed on the internet (e.g. openrice.com). Food outlets who do not provide seafood, such as dessert places and bakeries, or were temporarily closed due to COVID-19 restrictions were excluded from the survey.

Enquiries on the sustainability and origin country/territory of seafood items shown on menu were made to a total of **11,526 food & beverage brands** (which adds up to 21,763 restaurants) via telephone, email, social media or in person.



Commonly employed questions include:

"Are there any sustainably-sourced seafood available here?"

"Would this item be sustainably sourced?"

"What kind of certificates are held by this seafood item?"

A seafood item is deemed sustainable if the food outlet claimed that the relevant item is:

- *Certified sustainable, or*
- *Considered sustainable by any seafood ratings*
- *Deemed sustainable by the food outlet itself*

If the food outlet could not answer these questions, or if the food outlet indicated that sustainable seafood was not available, questions on seafood origin would be asked, such as: "Where was this seafood sourced from?" "Was this seafood sourced from (name of origin)? "

Restaurants or takeaway outlets who can claim at least one of their seafood items to be sustainably sourced and restaurants or takeaway outlets who can provide the territory-level origin of at least one of their seafood items were recorded.



Result

1 Sustainable seafood is available

Spending

In total, 1,500 restaurants or takeaway outlets were able to provide at least one sustainable seafood choice on their menu.

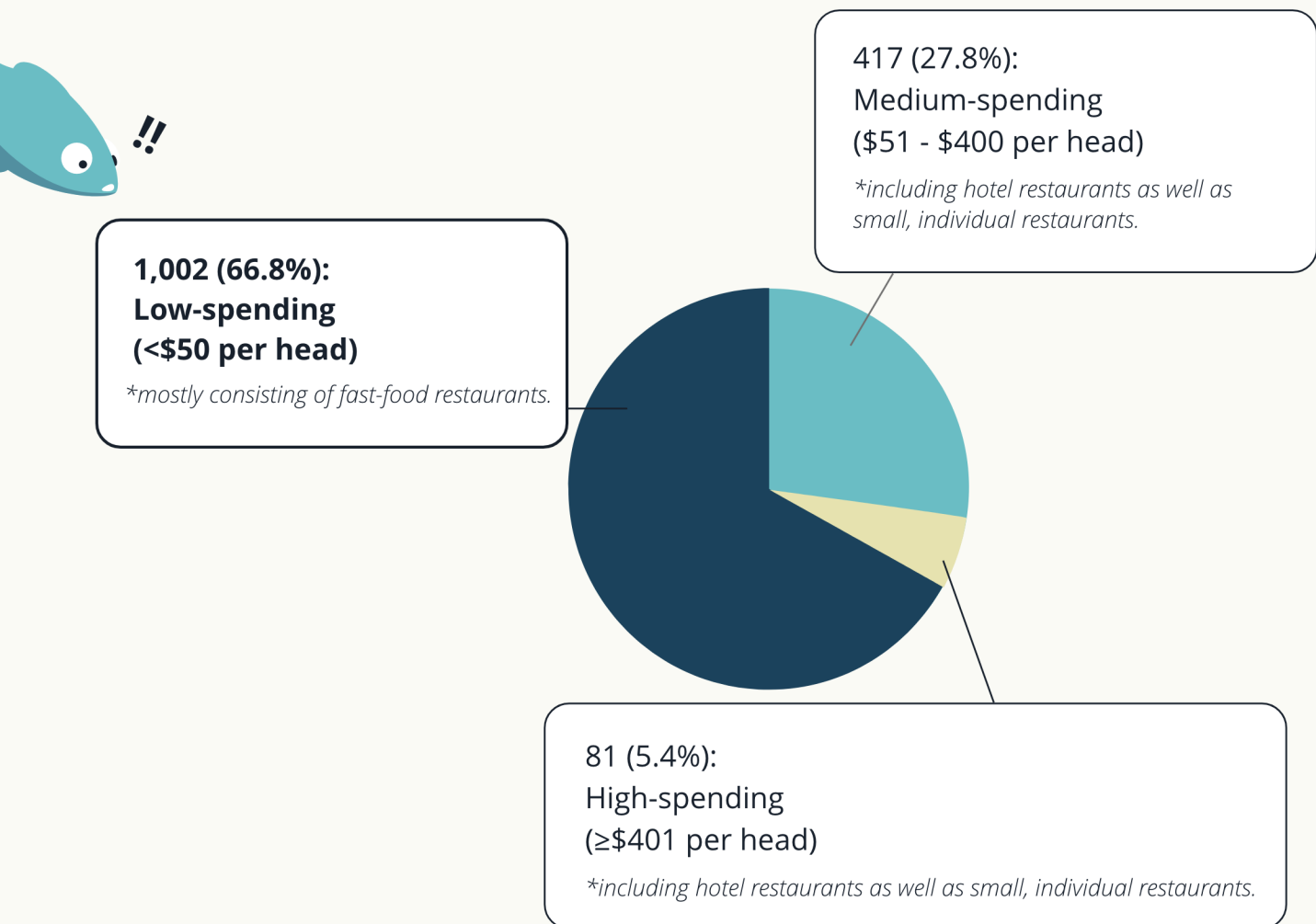


Figure 1. Number of restaurants that serve sustainable seafood across price categories

Despite the belief that sustainable seafood is only available in high-spending restaurants [2], the majority (66.8%) of restaurants that serve sustainable seafood are low-spending restaurants or takeaway outlets, mostly due to the adoption of sustainable seafood by fast-food chains.

Distribution

Among the 79 districts surveyed, the following 10 districts host the largest number of brands of food outlets that provide sustainable seafood.

Central provides the largest variety of sustainable seafood choices, with 80 different brands. Tsim Sha Tsui comes after with 55 brands, and Wan Chai comes third with 38 brands.

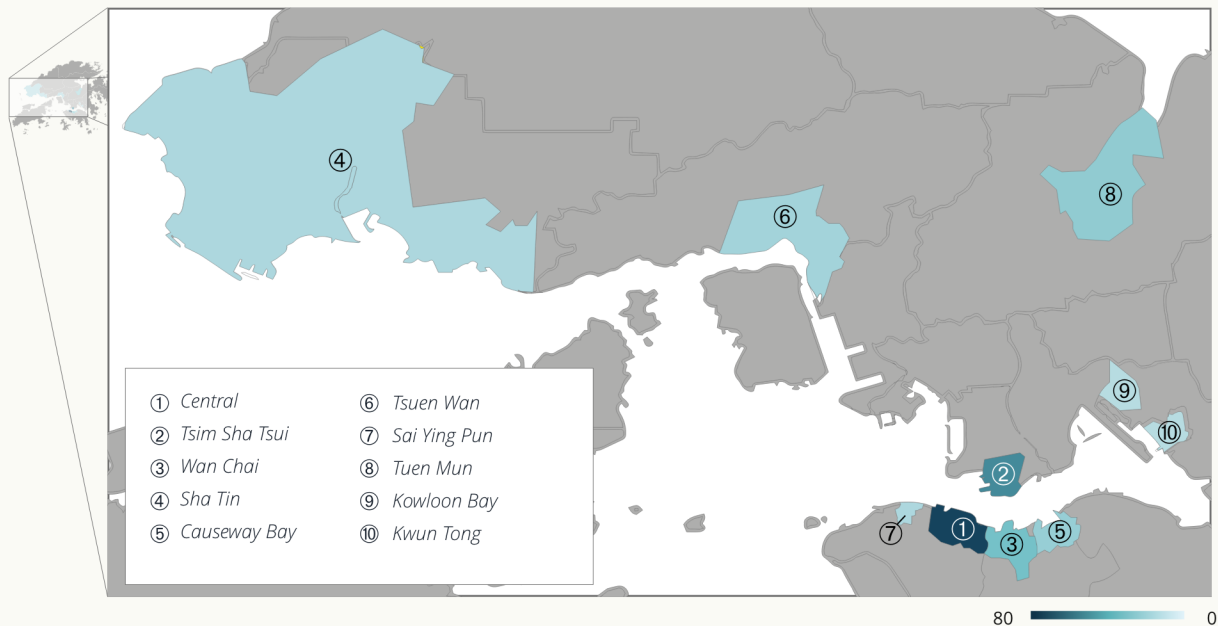


Figure 2. Number of brands of food outlets serving sustainable seafood by district

Cuisine categories

It would be the easiest to find sustainable seafood in Western restaurants, as 625 restaurants serving sustainable seafood belonged to the category.

On the other hand, finding sustainable seafood would be the hardest in Korean, Middle Eastern, Thai restaurants.

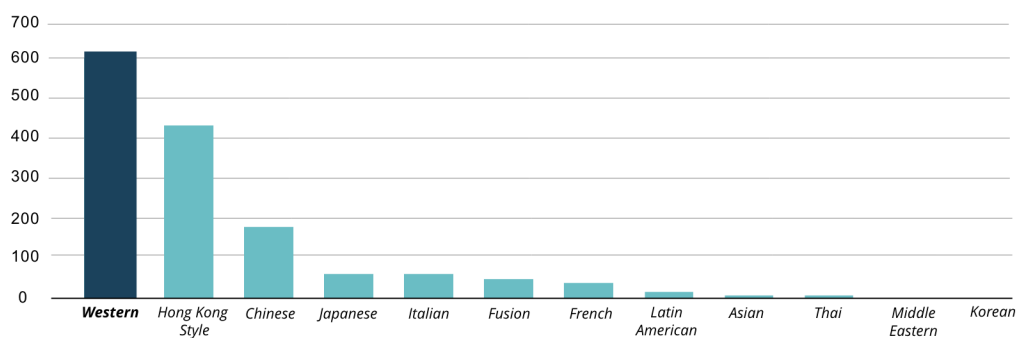
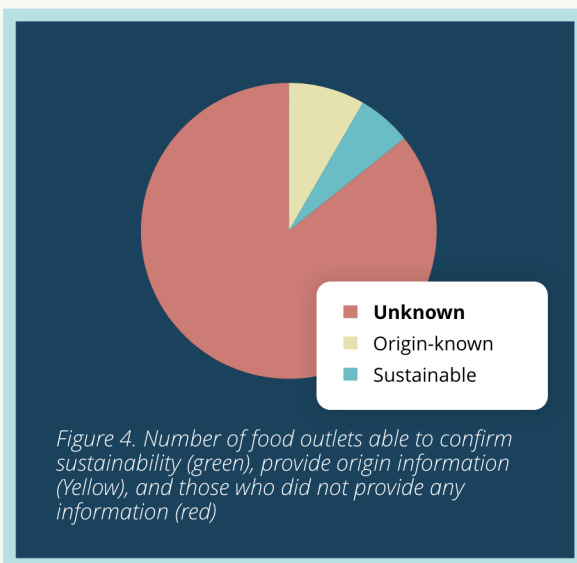


Figure 3. Number of food outlets serving sustainable seafood across cuisine categories

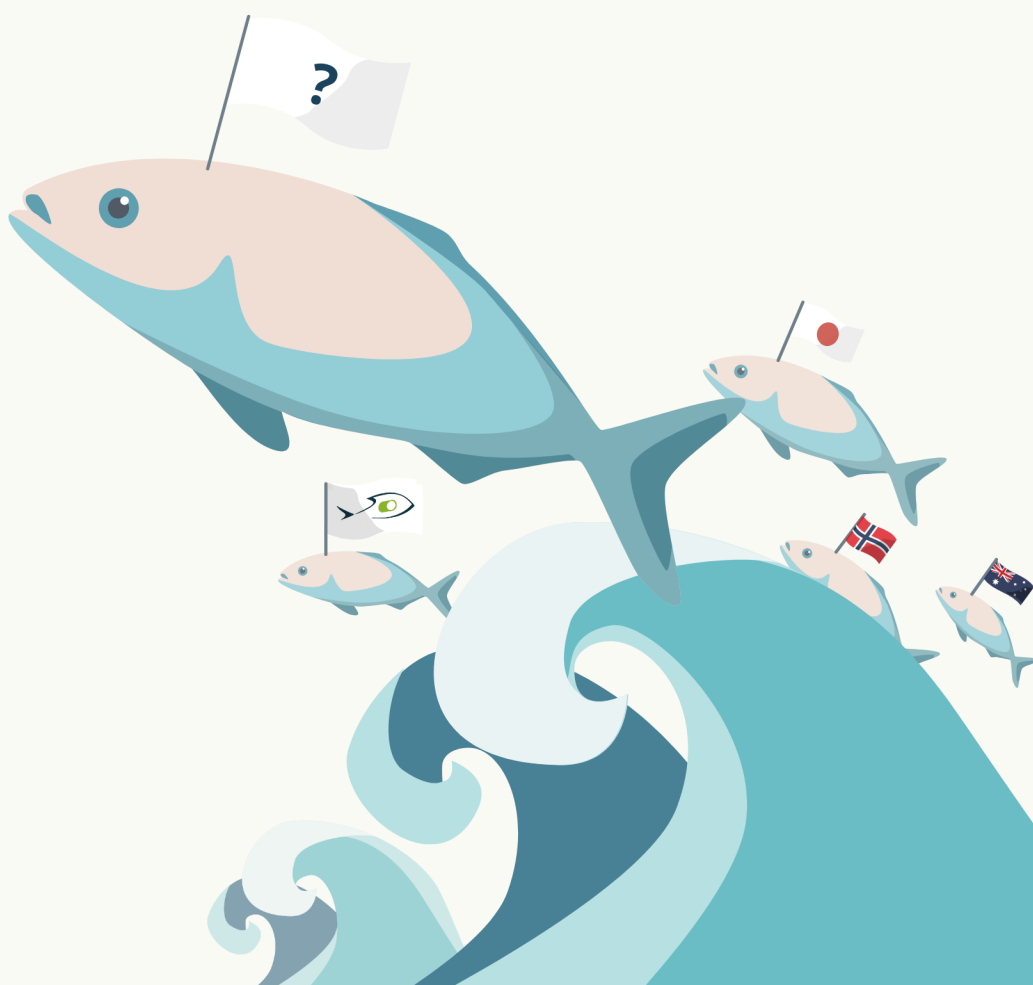
2 Sustainable seafood is not yet widespread

From a broader perspective, **less than 7% of all food outlets surveyed (1,500 out of 21,763)** could provide at least one sustainable seafood choice on their menu.

In hotel operations where commitments have been made to improve seafood sustainability, only 41% from 135 individual restaurants under 12 identified corporations were able to confirm the provision of sustainable seafood.



Meanwhile, less than 10% of all food outlets surveyed (2,118 out of 21,763) were able to provide the origin country/territory of at least one seafood item on their menu.



Conclusion

Sustainable seafood is accessible in Hong Kong regardless of spending. However, it is far from being popular, especially in small scaled local restaurants and food outlets.

It was noticed from the survey that **in most food outlets, their staff are not aware of the concept of “sustainable seafood”**, nor the sustainability and traceability issues linked to seafood trade in Hong Kong.

As a result, sourcing sustainable seafood is not a common practice in Hong Kong caterers, although the situation is slightly more optimistic among hotel operations. In cases where sustainable seafood is sourced outside of hotel operations, the food outlet itself might not be aware of it, and explicit communication of seafood sustainability on menus is rare.

Consequently, much effort is still required on explaining the term “sustainable seafood” and seafood-related sustainability issues to the food and beverage industry. Close engagement with the industry will also be crucial to help them transition towards sourcing sustainable seafood, and communicating its importance and availability to the wider circle of consumers.

