

Advice

“Taste the Ocean” campaign and other potential campaigns for awareness about fishery and aquaculture products in the EU

Brussels, 31 January 2024

1. Background

On 18 September 2023, the European Commission launched the third season of the “Taste the Ocean” campaign¹, which aims to encourage consumers in the EU to buy and enjoy sustainable fish and seafood, show who is behind our food, help consumers make informed food choices, and inspire people to have a green approach to fish and seafood with the help of local chefs. The campaign materials are especially focused on social media and include nine video recipes, a website, and the profiles of fishers and aquaculture producers.

At the 20 September 2023 WG3 meeting, DG MARE representatives delivered a presentation on the launch of the third season of the campaign. Members generally welcomed the launch of campaigns at EU-level to increase awareness among consumers about fishery and aquaculture products. Members also highlighted the importance of involving stakeholders, particularly through the MAC, in the development of potential future campaigns.

2. Potential other future awareness campaigns by the EU

In the view of the MAC, all actors, including institutional ones, have a role to play in raising awareness among EU consumers about fishery and aquaculture products. As outlined in previous advice², fishery and aquaculture products are a source of low-carbon animal protein with considerable benefits to human health, the climate and sustainability. As consumer choices keep on changing, a positive message from the EU institutions is needed to encourage healthy choices when grocery shopping. In this framework, the “Taste the Ocean” campaign

¹ <https://taste-the-ocean.campaign.europa.eu/select-language?destination=/node/1>

² <https://marketac.eu/health-environmental-value-of-seafood/>

is a powerful instrument to raise awareness, but future campaigns could be strengthened with some changes in messaging and content.

2.1. Messaging

The “Taste the Ocean” campaign rightfully focuses on sustainability, but there are other issues that should also be addressed, particularly on how the consumption of fishery and aquaculture products can be easy and healthy:

- Health – Consumers increasingly value the health aspects of food products, as demonstrated by the emergence of ad hoc labels dedicated to this matter (e.g., Nutriscore). The positive health effects of the consumption of fishery and aquaculture products should be emphasised, including that their consumption, and alternation between oily and lean fish, is essential from a nutritional point-of-view;
- Status of the stock – In the case of fisheries products, the consumption of healthy products should be linked to sustainably managed fish stocks. Therefore, products coming from overfished stocks should not be showcased in awareness campaigns. In the case of aquaculture, awareness raising should be linked to responsibly farmed aquatic species.
- Convenience – The recipes presented under the “Taste the Ocean” campaign are significantly long and complex, including for advanced non-professional cooks. While the inclusion of professional chefs advising on recipes is a positive idea, it should be taken into account that the audience is composed of non-professional cooks. Therefore, recipes should not exceed 30 minutes, with some requiring less than 15 minutes, in order to better reflect the cooking habits of the average consumer;
- Diversity of products – In general, consumer knowledge and consumption of fishery and aquaculture products is limited to only a few species, so the diversity of products should be part of the messaging;
- Diversity of price points – Depending on the geographical location of the consumer, across the EU, fishery and aquaculture products can be very affordable or very expensive, but some species are always more expensive than others (e.g., squids vs

lobster). Therefore, future campaigns should provide a diversity of species in the recipes with information on the price level, for example via a price label (high, moderate, low), allowing the audience to choose based on their purchasing power;

- Common Fisheries Policy – Future campaigns should provide information on the framework of the Common Fisheries Policy, which allows for the provision of fishery and aquaculture products to consumers as part of a management framework that aims at environmentally, socially and economically sustainable activities.

To ensure the success of the campaigns, these must show what is behind the fishery and aquaculture products consumed, while attributing a positive human element to food products. This is particularly needed given that there has been influential messaging, based on specific practices, directed at consumers that lacks nuance and can give a negative image of the sector. Campaigns by public institutions should also aim at grasping the attention of citizens, while providing accurate and fact-based information.

Several existing national and local campaigns are successful in showing men and women at work behind the products consumed, for example by showing fishers in action, but are not always inclusive of all the production methods and processes in the fisheries and aquaculture value chain. Most consumers lack information on the key role that trade and processing play in the provision of safe, healthy and information-rich fishery and aquaculture products to the EU market. It is important to highlight in campaigns the role of all stakeholders in the value chain, including the role of the retail sector in bringing fishery and aquaculture products closer to the final consumer. Therefore, future campaigns should provide a more accurate and positive picture of all the value chain contributing to putting fishery and aquaculture products in the plate of EU consumers.

Presently, the website of the “Taste the Ocean” campaign includes a page titled “sustainable fish and seafood”³ with five tips to assist consumers choose the most sustainable options and “respect the seasonality” is the first tip. In some cases, the concept of “seasonality”, due to its link to freshness and other elements, can be relevant for assessing the sustainability of

³ https://taste-the-ocean.campaign.europa.eu/sustainable-fish-and-seafood_en

products. Nevertheless, “seasonality” is a complex concept in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, which is affected by reproduction cycles of species, time limitations imposed by permits, authorised period of harvest in the case of products under Protected Designation of Origin, storage methods and processing, among other factors. Therefore, direct references to consumers about “seasonality” should explain that complexity, to avoid any potential misuse or misleading.

2.2. Target audience

Considering the length of time required for the preparation of the recipes presented under the “Taste the Ocean” campaign, it is clear that these are directed at upper middle-class citizens. This messaging risks creating a narrative that the consumption of fishery and aquaculture products is expensive. As wealthy individuals are generally aware of the benefits of fishery and aquaculture products, they should not be the main target of the campaign. The general public should be the target, but, in view of consumer trends, the following sections should be a priority:

- Young professionals and families – As a way to recruit new consumers, there should be a focus on the younger audience, particularly those with an average purchasing power and limited time to cook;
- Older 45+ and seniors – Since the population of Europe is aging, there is a strong segment of potential consumers growing every year, as these consumers want to stay fit and active for longer. In their case, the increase immunity and prolonged mental performance due to the consumption of omega-3 acids and vitamin D are the main benefits to mention.

2.3. Scope of products covered

The “Taste the Ocean” campaign focuses primarily on fresh products. Fresh products create value in the EU from production to consumption, so raising awareness about them can bring benefits to the whole value chain. Nevertheless, considering their relevance in the market and consumer preferences, prepared and processed products should also be adequately included, ensuring that the campaigns are impactful in reaching consumers.

In the view of the EU catching sector, the EU aquaculture sector, the environmental NGOs, and the Spanish retail sector for fish and frozen products, EU campaigns should exclusively focus on fishery and aquaculture products produced in the EU. The campaigns should be in line with the objectives of the strategic policies of the EU, such as the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy, namely, to reduce dependency from imports and improve the self-sufficiency rate of the EU food system. In their view, the focus on EU locally and regionally sourced products creates value in the EU supply chain.

On the other hand, in the view of the EU processing sector, since outsourced products represent more than 60% of the fishery and aquaculture products consumed by EU citizens, EU campaigns should cover both EU produced and outsourced products, avoiding leaving out a large range of consumers. Outsourced species are most often processed within the EU, adding an important local socio-economic value to the product offered in the EU market. With globalisation, the traditions and consumption habits of EU consumers have evolved. Therefore, in their view, future campaigns should demonstrate the importance of the consumption of fishery and aquaculture products, while respecting the preferences of consumers and valorising the processing that takes place in the EU.

As regards to the species covered, the “Taste the Ocean” campaign primarily feature fish fillets, but other products, when sustainably sourced, for example crustaceans and squid, should also be presented as ingredients of a sustainable diet.

2.4. Budget

The budget of awareness campaigns should be adequate to the defined media reach goals.

2.5. Media

For the target audience of young professionals and families, the main media to be considered is social media. Advertising in streaming platforms could be relevant. Partnerships with influencers should be considered, especially since the Commission-related channels are mainly followed by individuals with a specific interest in policy and institutions, instead of the general public.

In the case of the older 45+ and seniors audience, TV advertising should be considered, while keeping in mind that that it is generally more expensive than other means.

Cuisine magazines can also be considered to target chefs and amateur cooks, with a view to influence today's cooking trends.

As for the campaign actions, it may be interesting to carry out some of them at the point of sale, as this can achieve a high impact.

Besides the "Taste the Ocean" campaign, it is important to keep in mind awareness raising among a younger audience in the context of schools.

3. Language

Future EU-wide awareness campaign materials should be translated into all the official languages of the EU. Fishery and aquaculture products know no boundaries, especially within the EU market. Therefore, all recipes should be made available in all EU languages, especially considering that the species can be particularly interesting to know in other languages, given the national and local specificities of the terminology.

4. Involvement of the MAC

The MAC would be available to assist DG MARE in the development of potential future awareness campaigns about fishery and aquaculture products. MAC members have regular contact with consumers and know their preferences, while having the know-how to match consumer demands with the right product. MAC members are also at the forefront of fishery and aquaculture-related challenges and can better inform on solutions to overcome these. Furthermore, MAC members can provide a better connection between EU-level awareness campaigns and national-level campaigns.

The MAC could be consulted at the beginning of the development of the communication strategy for each phase of potential future awareness campaigns. Additionally, there could be updates to the MAC members about the impact of the campaign, for example when the

Commission services evaluate how the related Key Performance Indicators have been achieved or not.

The MAC commits to share the available information on EU-levels campaigns among its membership. The MAC members will also aim to further distribute the information.

5. Recommendations

The MAC believes that the European Commission should continue to develop and implement awareness campaigns about fishery and aquaculture products directed at EU consumers. In the context of these potential future campaigns, the Commission should:

- a) In terms of messaging, besides sustainability aspects, particularly focus on health, convenience, diversity of products, diversity of price points, Common Fisheries Policy framework, and positive human element aspects, while covering the different production methods and processes of the supply chain;
- b) In terms of target audience, focus on young professionals and families, plus on the older 45+ and seniors group;
- c) In terms of the scope of products covered, account for the views of the membership outlined in subsection 2.3;
- d) In terms of budget, provide adequate funding in accordance with the defined media reach goals;
- e) In terms of media, use social media, streaming platforms, and partnership with influencers when targeting young professionals and families, while considering TV advertising when targeting older 45+ and seniors audience – some campaign actions could take place at the point of sale to easily reach consumers;
- f) Translate the campaign materials into all the official languages of the EU;
- g) Involve the MAC and its members in the campaigns, particularly in the development of the communication strategy, plus through updates on their implementation.

Annex

Examples of national and local campaigns

DG MARE representatives expressed interest in knowing more about existing national and local awareness campaigns at the national and local levels. Therefore, some examples are made available below.

1. France

- Communication campaign to inform the consumer about the diversity of products and their accessibility for the consumer⁴
- Communication campaign aimed at a young audience⁵
- Communication campaign focused on the fisher and the transmission⁶
- Communication campaign from a recipes angle⁷
- Communication campaign about professions⁸
- Specific regional campaigns on products, for example scallops⁹, products from Normandy¹⁰.
- Campaign on smoked trout and smoked salmon¹¹
- Campaign on canned fish¹²
- Love Surimi campaign¹³

2. Spain

The Spanish Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food is in charge of the main awareness campaigns on the benefits of the consumption of fishery and aquaculture products in Spain.

⁴ <https://www.pavillonfrance.fr/articles/le-poisson-frais-moindres-frais>

⁵ <https://www.pavillonfrance.fr/articles/unusual-suspect-le-nouveau-film-de-pavillon-france>

⁶ <https://www.pavillonfrance.fr/articles/la-peche-francaise-presente-la-jeune-femme-et-la-mer>

⁷ <https://www.pavillonfrance.fr/recettes> and <https://poissons-coquillages-crustaces.fr/>

⁸ <https://www.francefilierepeche.fr/jetez-vous-a-leau-osez-les-metiers-des-filieres-peche-etaquaculture/>

⁹ <https://coquille-saint-jacques.com/>

¹⁰ https://www.normandiefraicheurmer.fr/media/2016_dp_poissons_normands_bons_plans_084630500_180_1_13122016.pdf and <https://www.lagrandedebarque.fr/>

¹¹ <https://saumonfumeinfo.fr/>

¹² <https://conservesdepoissons.fr/>

¹³ <https://www.lovesurimi.com/>

- “Alimentos de España” – National campaign on the promotion of the consumption of Spanish products, which included several examples related to fishery and aquaculture products¹⁴.
- “Galicia Sabe Amar”¹⁵ – Campaign by the regional government of Galicia to encourage citizens to consumer products from the sea, increase sales, and value the work of fisheries and aquaculture professionals.

Additionally, on different occasions, the Spanish authorities collaborated with national stakeholders to develop video about recipes¹⁶, good practices in the supply chain¹⁷, and about the fisheries and aquaculture sector¹⁸, to be used across different campaigns and projects.

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yetcg1GnUJU>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrMluHpiNy8>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Monn0wBWB6M>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VJZtr6oWxl>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiyLb9N7mUQ>.

¹⁵ <https://galiciasabeamar.xunta.gal/>

¹⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_lq53qInwA, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30fmKokRE-U>

¹⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdyOU126KDU&t=2s&ab_channel=ADEPESCA

¹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CK76YIx-7OI&ab_channel=ADEPESCA