



After the Fact | [The Future of Fish and Chips](#)

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TRANSCRIPT

[Street sounds]

Dan LeDuc, host: This is "After the Fact." For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I'm Dan LeDuc. And today, we're in the Covent Garden section of London. We're here to learn more about how to end overfishing in European waters. And we're at, of all places, the longest continually operating fish and chips restaurant in the city. And yes, we're going to have lunch.

[Music]

Dan LeDuc: If you've ever had fish and chips in London, chances are you've eaten cod. But it wasn't so long ago scientists were starting to wonder if these fish would be around much longer. Overfishing brought cod to critically low levels in the late 2000s.

With a lot of work, the number of North Sea cod has nearly tripled over the past 12 years. It's up to 118,000 metric tons, and that's this episode's data point: 118,000.

For North Sea cod, there's more work to be done. Later, we'll talk about an important deadline the European Union is working to meet by the year 2020. And it's sometimes a struggle for consumers to tell if the fish they're buying is sustainably sourced.

To dig deeper into this issue, we headed to one of London's most popular spots for fish and chips. Or as a Londoner would call it, a "chippy."

We're in Rock and Sole Plaice, the longest continually operating fish and chips restaurant in all of London, right?

Ahmet Ziyaeddin, co-owner, Rock and Sole Plaice: Correct.

Dan LeDuc: OK, Ali and Ahmet Ziyaeddin. How are you? Thank you for hosting us here this afternoon. You've run this place for the last 40-some years. Tell us about, first of all, what fish and chips means to Londoners.



Ali Ziyaeddin, co-owner, Rock and Sole Plaice: It's not just to London, it's that—it's a British national identity. It's as synonymous with the British as much as going to a pub and having a pint of beer. It's something that was a food of the people, and it was the first means for which they were able to go outside spending their money. It was the first original take-away—outside kitchen food supply—that people were able to access.

Dan LeDuc: Right, and over time, that means people have been buying and eating a lot of fish. And more and more fish are being taken from the seas.

You have become known for your interest in sustainable fishing. So how do you actually go about buying your fish and knowing that you're getting what you want and desire from the markets?

Ali Ziyaeddin: We've been buying fish ourselves now for 40 years. And our known suppliers know quality control. So for us, we know a discussion point, if it's available, if they know our standard. If it's not what we require, they don't supply it to us. This way, we won't buy from them for a period.

Dan LeDuc: Is it good for business to buy this kind of food?

Ali Ziyaeddin: Indeed. Sustainability of the marketplace—there's been a lot of fluctuation over the years, as certain species tend to be overfished. And this is the problem a fisherman has—a farmer can look out to a field, and he can count 20 or 30 cows that he can send to market. A fisherman puts a net over the edge of a boat, he doesn't know what he's getting until it's on the deck of the boat.

And I believe that this leads to sometimes errant catches. But again, it's a situation that leads to something called bycatch, which is hugely wasteful. And that needs to be addressed, in my book, quite thoroughly.

Dan LeDuc: Are your fellow chippy owners starting to recognize this as well?

Ali Ziyaeddin: Indeed, yes. All the top operators are following these principles. And when one sees a good principle, you know, one adopts it. We're not belligerent to it, if you see, this is how you evolve. You have to be dynamic, you have to move with the times.

And again, with the British public, there's this perception—this is our problem—that fish and chips needs to be pennies, not pounds. And the people go to the supermarkets, they see what the cost of fish is. But yet, when it comes to buying it from a fish and chip shop, it's meant to be much, much more pocket friendly for them.



Dan LeDuc: Right. Well, I can't wait to have lunch.

Ali Ziyaeddin: Indeed. Well, let's get you some of this fare, and you can see what we do with it. Because we use quite a lot, so hopefully you'll find this a justified means to an end.

Dan LeDuc: I'm sure we will. I look forward to it. Thanks, gentlemen.

[Music]

Dan LeDuc: So we've sat down for lunch now with Griffin Carpenter, who's a senior researcher at the New Economics Foundation. You work on sustainable natural resources policies. And also with us is Andrew Clayton, who runs Pew's work to end overfishing in Northwest Europe. You're both based here in London. And food will be arriving any minute.

You know, every episode that we do has a data point. And the one that we're focusing on for this one is that North Sea cod has been able to triple its stock over the last decade. That's good news when we talk about overfishing concerns.

Andrew, how did that happen? And then how is that a model for what are some real, still serious overfishing concerns that are in this region?

Andrew Clayton, The Pew Charitable Trusts: So the situation with North Sea cod is a really good case study of how European fisheries management works. So the stock was really in a perilous state around 10 to 20 years ago, where decades of overfishing had left the stock close to collapse. And the situation was so bad that scientists were advising that the catches of the stock should cease immediately, and they should ...

Dan LeDuc: Stop them completely, wow.

Andrew Clayton: ... completely stop. At its worst. And the size of the stock hit rock bottom around 2006, where scientists assessed that there were about 44,000 tons of cod in the North Sea. And this was the lowest it had been measured.

Dan LeDuc: Let's stop for a minute and talk about why that particular species. Is it just because of good places like we're in now that serve a lot of fish? There was that much demand?

Andrew Clayton: Yeah, it's a staple of British cuisine and many other European countries. And the North Sea is quite a— it's an area with quite a lot of fishing activity, for many different species. And I think since the Second World War, the level of fishing



pressure in the North Sea had steadily risen through the course of the last century, the last half of the last century.

And cod is a fish that swims close to the bottom and is generally found in areas mixed with other species of fish. So a lot of fishermen who were catching cod at that time were possibly not even targeting the cod itself; they were trying to catch other species like haddock. And this cod was being caught at the same time because it's a mixed fishery and they all swim together.

Dan LeDuc: Griffin, this realization—in, what, about 2006 or so—prompted what? What happened next?

Griffin Carpenter, New Economics Foundation: Well, some of the immediate measures were reducing the amount of quota. So there's a limit on the amount of fish that can be caught each year—let's say 10,000 tons—and this is the quota limit. And that's divided amongst the various fishers.

Dan LeDuc: Hmm.

Griffin Carpenter: And so what the scientists were proposing, cease—to the fishery—entirely, zero tons, they didn't quite get there in the management, but they were reducing it. And year after year, they were reducing it.

This was a difficult transition, but what we've seen over the past 15 years is now, year after year, the size of the cod stock is increasing. So we're able to turn a poster child, or poster fish, of disaster into a poster child of recovery.

Dan LeDuc: That's an amazing story, because sometimes in the environment, you hope for change, and you're not always sure you can quantify it. But in this case, that's what happened—you were able to actually invoke some policies and pretty quickly see change.

Griffin Carpenter: Yeah, you're exactly right. I work on a number of environmental issues outside of fisheries, and there's so much uncertainty around how our actions will effect change. But fisheries is one story where we know if you reduce the amount of fishing, you can increase the size of the stock.

Dan LeDuc: See, it speaks so much to the resilience of the oceans and the fish, right? I mean, if managed properly, they really can come back.

Andrew Clayton: And resilience is really important, because the marine environment is very complex. And these fish stocks are facing threats from all kinds of different areas.



Griffin Carpenter: So this isn't some sort of tug of war between the economy and the environment, but this is the same. If we increase the size of fish stocks, it means more fish—that's good for the environment—but also more catches for us. These go together, which is really unique in environmental issues, and it's great to be working in this space.

Dan LeDuc: Yeah.

Andrew Clayton: And it's no coincidence that we're seeing these positive trends 10 years on from this situation with North Sea cod. And particularly at the EU level, with the European Union and the way that it manages fisheries, because it was only shortly after the cod situation reached rock bottom that the EU reformed its policies for fisheries. And in 2013, they agreed to a new policy, a new piece of legislation for European waters, which sets a legally binding deadline to end overfishing so that we can achieve all these benefits that Griffin's mentioned.

Dan LeDuc: And let's talk about that, because this is a big year as we move towards that deadline, which is coming up in just two years, right?

Andrew Clayton: The EU set itself this deadline of 2020 to end overfishing. It matches some wider international agreements. For example, the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals aim for the same thing. And the aim is not just to protect the environment, but it's to have well-managed fisheries that produce high yields of fish. So they produce more fish for the fishing industry, for the processing sector, for the consumer to eat—with rising profits in the fleet.

So this year, for example, for 2018, 44 percent of limits were set higher than the scientific advice. So that's much better than it has been in previous years.

Dan LeDuc: But 44 percent is still pretty high.

Andrew Clayton: It's still way too high. And we're running out of time now—the clock is ticking to this 2020 deadline.

Griffin Carpenter: And that's the problem. If you leave all the decisions till the last minute, then you can have much harsher reductions.

Dan LeDuc: Well, that's just it, right? Let's make sure everybody understands. You wait, and you wait, you wait, and if you had done it gradually, it wouldn't have hurt as much at that time, but suddenly if you're facing your deadline and need to do a reduction—that a fisherman is going to really feel.



Andrew Clayton: So it hurts a lot more, but also you delay the benefits. So you wait another 10 years to get the kind of booming fish stocks and profitability.

Dan LeDuc: We're talking so much about the EU, but we are in London as we speak, and Brexit is looming for the U.K. What impact, if any, does that have on all of this?

Griffin Carpenter: Most of the Brexit debate is around this issue of shares. How much goes to each country? How do you split the pie? But really, from a sustainability perspective, the same question arises: How large is the pie? Is it 10,000 tons or 12,000 tons? And so the important thing is that North Sea cod and all the hundred other fish stocks commercially fished around the U.K. are shared. They're inevitably going to require decisions made with our neighbors—Ireland, Belgium, France, et cetera—and so there will be some sort of framework where we set catch limits, and those need to be sustainable. You can't have one side fishing too much, or it erodes the fish stock for everybody.

Dan LeDuc: Well you noted that the U.K. fishing fleets are starting to see some benefit of the sustainability, right? They want to see some progress continue. That's a hopeful sign.

Andrew Clayton: Yeah, so certainly around the Brexit process, the U.K. fleet has been emphasizing they don't want to lose those gains, and this is good for their business. And the U.K. government also is emphasizing it wants to be a world leader in its fisheries management. So the U.K. is well-placed to get this policy over the finish line and to manage fisheries well in the future.

[Restaurant noise, voices]

Dan LeDuc: Uh-huh. Please come join us. We've been looking forward to this.

Waitress: A regular cod for you.

Andrew Clayton: Thank you.

Griffin Carpenter: Fantastic.

Waitress: Enjoy.

Dan LeDuc: Thank you so much. All right, we're having a fascinating conversation, but we have to take a break and try some of this.

Andrew Clayton: OK. Well, we need lots of salt and vinegar.



Dan LeDuc: Salt and vinegar. OK, let's do this.

And when it's sustainable, does it taste better?

[Laughter]

Griffin Carpenter: In your soul.

Dan LeDuc: In your soul. I like that.

[Laughter]

Dan LeDuc: Well, Andrew, Griffin, thanks so much for joining us. And now, let's eat before the fish gets cold.

Andrew Clayton: Yeah.

Griffin Carpenter: Absolutely.

[Music]

Dan LeDuc: If you'd like to learn more about Pew's campaign to end overfishing, visit our website at pewtrusts.org/afterthefact.

Our thanks to Rock and Sole Plaice for their hospitality during our time in London.

If you like what you hear, help us out by leaving a review on Apple Podcasts, or Google Podcasts, or wherever you listen.

Thanks for listening. For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I'm Dan LeDuc, and this is "After the Fact."