

# CATCH-UP

## WINTER 2020

FEATURING THIS SEASON'S **MARKET REPORT**,  
OUR FISH **BUYERS' PICKS** AND A ROUND-UP OF  
**FISHY INDUSTRY NEWS**



[directseafoods.co.uk](http://directseafoods.co.uk)

## Bluefin Tuna Farming

Source (full article): [aquaculturealliance.org](http://aquaculturealliance.org)

**Ichthus Unlimited, primarily a fish feed company, brings fresh farming hopes to the 'Tuna Capital of the World'**

Like a doting father, Alejandro Buentello eagerly shows off the petite 44-day old bluefin tuna swimming and darting in a tidy row of see-through tanks. Getting the first bluefin tuna hatchery in North America up and running has been no small task, and Buentello still has a ways to go before his company, Ichthus Unlimited, reaches its goal of supplying hatchery-raised bluefin tuna for tuna ranchers south of the U.S.-Mexico border.

The illuminated tanks are lined up near the wall of the 6,500-square foot San Diego facility. They're tucked behind a large tarp used to cordon the fish off from the rest of the building in an effort to create an area of calm – an improvised tuna Zen garden. At only 9 cm, the 20 or so Atlantic bluefin tuna inside each tank are sensitive to loud noises, which can cause them to startle and careen into the walls of the Japanese-designed systems.

Mariana Michelato Kawakami, Ichthus Unlimited's project manager, gently taps a vial of tiny-sized pellets of feed into each tank, watching as the months-old tuna snap them up.

Bringing bluefin tuna aquaculture to a city once deemed "The Tuna Capital of the World" may seem a risky bet in a time where the pandemic has shuttered restaurants around the globe; as NOAA Fisheries pleads with tuna fishermen to secure buyers before fishing for the prized fish over concerns of sagging sales; and emerging cell-based seafood companies like San Diego-based BlueNalu or Bay area Finless Foods have set their sights on growing the premium product in labs. But Buentello insists the future looks bright for bluefin tuna aquaculture, emphasizing that Ichthus Unlimited is first and foremost a feed company.

## BUYER RECOMMENDS...

Good picks this season include:

- **ChalkStream® trout**
- **Farmed halibut**
- **Gurnard**
- **Mussels**
- **Coley**

## SOCIAL CATCH-UP...

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## Salmon sector makes carbon neutrality pledge

Source (full article): [thefishsite.com](http://thefishsite.com)

**Achieving net zero emissions by 2045 is among the pledges made in a major new blueprint setting out a long-term vision for Scotland's successful farmed salmon sector.**

Green jobs and sustainable operations underpin this radical new roadmap for Scottish salmon – the country's number one food export.

Called A Better Future For Us All, it covers a wide range of farming aspects and features key environmental pledges. These include a commitment to becoming 100 per cent reliant on renewable energy. The sector has also pledged to purchase all of its feed ingredients from sustainable and fully traceable sources and work towards having 100 per cent recyclable packaging.

It also makes commitments relating to achieving key targets in fish health and welfare, community support, employment and maintaining the highest food quality standards. There will be a clear new focus on qualifications, careers and a diverse workforce as well as innovation-led development which will secure further progress in tackling some of the key challenges the sector faces.

Tavish Scott, incoming chief executive of the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO), hailed the document as "momentous" and "ground-breaking".

## Bluefin Tuna freed after raiding Scottish salmon farm.

Source (full article): [fishfarmermagazine.com](http://fishfarmermagazine.com)

**A Bluefin tuna, thought to weigh up to 47 stone (300 kg) has been set free after it became trapped in a fish farm in the Outer Hebrides owned by the Scottish Salmon Company.**

The huge fish broke through the nets at the Loch Roag site, apparently chasing after mackerel. The tuna was captured by a member of staff and returned to open water. The company, bought by the Faroese Bakkafrost Group last October, said they found a small tear in the net caused which was made when the predator broke through at speed. The net has been repaired and no salmon have escaped, but the Scottish Salmon Co plans to fit stronger nets to avoid a repeat incident.

Warmer seas have brought a marked increase in the number of Atlantic bluefin tuna operating in Scottish west coast waters in recent years and there have been reports of similar incidents in the past. Atlantic bluefin tuna were once common in British waters but numbers declined steeply between the 1940s and 1990s. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) says the bluefin, the largest of the tuna species, is considered an endangered species and are heavily overfished. They are regarded as a very strong predators, which is why one was able to break through the nets at Loch Roag last week.

# FISH MARKET REPORT WINTER 2020

## OVERVIEW

This is a less of an overview, and more of a retrospective look back given the strange year we are about to finish. I have been writing market reports for most of my 21 years working in the fish industry. Up until 2010, the main focus of these reports would be the seasons and the quality of the fish within those seasons – in addition to the prices we would typically expect to see at local auction. At this time, we also started to see an interest in alternative species when cod was under severe fishing pressure. Pollock was the new kid on the block and there was a lot of excitement about using this more sustainable species at that time. We started to see a surge in demand for more sustainable choices. Market reports started to include a focus around available alternatives to other species in addition to cod. The Marine Conservation Society rating system became our bible, and a week would not pass when someone didn't need their menu auditing for how sustainable it was.

Roll on to the last ten years and market reports began to include a heavy focus on what salmon may or may not do in terms of cost. We started to see huge swings in price that caught out suppliers and customers alike. Infectious salmon anaemia was responsible for wiping out significant biomass, so we contemplated such factors in our price predictions. We similarly dealt with white spot disease in the farmed warm water prawn market which pushed up the prices. Then the BREXIT vote came and went, and suddenly the exchange rate became an important part of our forecasting each month. The environment was much more political and we saw our native fish prices rising on the back of buoyant export markets as the GBP weakened. Conversely we started paying more for our imports due to weak exchange rates. An algae bloom was to blame for wiping out more salmon biomass in Norway, so we closely followed this in our monthly catch ups to try and anticipate what the market would do.

Then came 2020 and a global pandemic on a scale that we will hopefully never see again in our lifetimes. I find myself writing a market report to cover December, January & February whilst we are continuing to try operating in a world of restrictions and lockdowns. This is combined with, at the time of writing, the prospect of leaving the EU without a deal on January the 1st 2021. The truth is that it was hard enough finding something to conclusively write about each month back in 2004 when it were a simpler time. When all anyone needed to know was whether the fish was in season and therefore great quality. When farmed fish was a sound choice that rarely fluctuated and therefore was not worthy of market report consideration. When we promoted sustainable species such as mackerel and mussels and encouraged diversification of species on menus. The truth is that we are fishmongers – not politicians, scientists, marine biologists, meteorologists or currency speculators. We simply don't know what the next three months will bring, and we have never had so many factors to consider when predicting the fish market over the winter period.

We will, however, endeavour to guide you towards the right choices on your menus as we always do every quarter. We just ask you to consider that this market report is, more than ever before, a guesstimate of what might happen. We have no crystal ball and we have never had so many potential scenarios to consider over a single period in time. Please also be mindful that our stock levels are difficult to manage during periods of restriction. As always – and certainly over the festive period – please do offer us as much notice as possible of your requirements so that we have a good chance of fulfilling them.

At the end of the most difficult year that many of us are likely to ever see in our lifetimes, we want to reach out to each one of you to thank you for your loyalty and support. To all of our friends and colleagues who have sat at home furloughed and praying that they have jobs to come back to. To those on flexi-furlough who desperately try to fit their work into a short working week – work which doesn't seem to reduce despite devastated trade that doesn't support full time staff. To those who have remained employed full time and never worked so hard to cover their colleagues despite decimated sales. With the possibility of a vaccine looking ever nearer, we cannot wait to return to a normal trading environment. How we long for your calls demanding your delivery earlier as your establishments are packed with customers and you have run out of fish. How we crave your emails asking us what specials we have available for the week. The hospitality industry has borne the brunt of the restrictions, but we should be heartened by the demand for our services in those times where restrictions were lifted. Customer confidence is high, and that is due in no small part to all the procedures and changes each one of you have implemented in response to the pandemic. We, as an industry, have proved we can be fleet of foot and are able to creatively adapt to changing circumstances.

If there is something we have learned this year, it's that good health is key to everyone. With fish as a classically healthy protein, fill up your menus with fish dishes! Be it oily fish, white fish, shellfish, molluscs, or the broad variety of frozen fish we carry – there will be something in all these areas we can recommend over the next 3 months.

Wishing each and every one of you a very Merry Christmas and, more than ever before, a most Prosperous New Year.  
**Natalie Hudd, Director of Sales, Direct Seafoods.**

## FARMED FISH

Species	Comments
<b>Sea Bass &amp; Gilthead Bream</b>	Bass and bream look to be stable currently. We do, however, have potential scenarios over the next 3 months on these key menu staples. The first is no deal with the EU and no deal with Turkey where the fish are farmed. In this scenario, we could be looking at 14% tariffs with Turkey, and a weakened exchange rate in addition to extreme delays bringing fish into the UK. If we broker a deal with Turkey, but fail to reach a deal with the EU, we could still see price pressure due to the Euro rate and delays. The best case scenario is that our exit from the EU causes some temporary delays in imports whilst new customs declarations come into play. We normally recommend both species around Christmas and beyond, but we urge some caution for the above reasons. If you have a heavy reliance on either bass or bream, it would be worth considering what alternatives you could use that are more local to our shores. Do talk to your account managers. We will have some stock that we have frozen down from fresh to help legislate for shortages, and we will be working ahead to allow more time for imports to get to us.
<b>Salmon &amp; Trout</b>	Salmon farmers have been punished during the periods of lockdown. Salmon demand has fallen and this has left them with fish that they need to harvest. There have been moments where the price has lifted, but it feels like they are fighting a losing battle at the moment. Salmon prices are notoriously difficult to predict. If restrictions remain in place in Europe and around the world, then we could see low and stable prices into the New Year. Any lifting of lockdown that enables hospitality to re-open to August levels in December could see a rapid upswing. It is normally the case that prices rise through December and stay very firm going into January and February. If there is an upswing, it is likely to be to lower levels than we have seen in prior years. As we source our salmon from Scotland and Norway, and we have a deal with Norway, it will not be subject to tariff increases. However, it may be subject to delays. For this reason, we recommend considering farmed trout from the UK. ChalkStream® trout farmed in Hampshire offers a great swap for farmed salmon and will not be affected by issues with logistics in January. The same can be said of the smaller rainbow trout which are a great oily fish with a stable price point to offer through this volatile time.

# FARMED FISH cont

Species	Comments
<b>Halibut</b>	Farmed halibut is a fantastic choice in terms of quality, flavour, sustainability, and price stability. With fish primarily farmed in the UK or Norway, there will be no tariffs implemented on this fish. There may be some delays in importing Norwegian fish, but there is enough choice from Scottish sources to negate any major issues. If you want to choose a first-class fish for a Christmas menu, or need something to occupy a premium spot on your menu through January & February, we really cannot recommend halibut enough. A real classic dish either pan fried or roasted, but equally special when served as a ceviche with its wonderful clean taste.
<b>Other Farmed Species</b>	We regularly purchase farmed turbot from Spain, so have identified this as a high risk line if there is no deal with the EU. The fish could attract a tariff of 15% in this scenario. We usually recommend farmed turbot at this time of a year when our native wild fish becomes very short in supply at the end of December / beginning of January. However, the possibility of tariffs and delays means that we are recommending avoiding this fish in January unless we do agree a deal with the EU. The same will be true of farmed soles. Similarly, and as per the farmed bass and bream, meagre may attract 14-15% tariffs given it is farmed in Europe / Turkey. Import delays are also a possibility. It is strange for us to suggest avoiding so many farmed species in January, but we do urge you to consider that we may not have these issues if negotiations allow a trade deal to be brokered with the EU. Whilst import delays are probably somewhat inevitable, the price increases may not materialise. Do, of course, utilise these species in December before we leave the EU. Meagre is a great versatile fish to offer with a value price point. Farmed turbot will also work well in the premium slot of a festive menu. Just be aware that, come January, British fish may be a safer option.

# WILD FISH

Species	Comments
<b>Flat Fish</b>	One more month of plaice before it roes up and goes out of season for the first three months of next year. Prices are still reasonably firm, but this is a great fish that can be sustainably sourced from around the UK. Make the most of it on your specials boards in the first 2 weeks of December. Lemon soles usually hit record highs in December due to a combination of popularity and scarcity. Whether this will be the case this year is yet to be seen as a lack of demand could see greater affordability. However, last year the fish stayed firmly at the higher end of the price scale until the end of February, so possibly one to avoid over the forthcoming period. Dover soles should be available and the price should be steady (although high as always!) for the next quarter. If you can afford them, then no reason why you shouldn't make use of any local landings. Megrim stocks around the UK are doing well but, like plaice, will spawn in January so make use of them in December only. Typically a great margin win! Brill will be good quality, but prices will be quite firm given last year's trend. Like many of our native wild fish, if you have a requirement to use brill over the festive period, we suggest freezing down some stock as fishing efforts will be limited. Wild turbot will be similar. In general, flat fish will not be the best choice for menus in terms of price, quality and availability over the next quarter. However, you should consider using on your specials boards where possible.
<b>White Fish</b>	Hallelujah! Deals have been brokered with both Iceland and Norway – our two most important partners for white fish. With Icelandic fish arriving into Immingham by boat already, we are more hopeful of consistent supplies throughout any BREXIT transition. Large cod is still very expensive. Last year we saw record prices in December and January. The fish that is available is great quality, but it does typically disappear due to lack of fishing effort over Christmas and the New Year. Please be open minded for defrosted substitutions over this period. This principle also extends to haddock and smaller cod fillets. Improvements in both availability and price should be seen towards the end of January and through February. It has been reported that large cod prices should also reduce as we get deeper into 2021 due to greater availability. Our reliable and underrated friend – the coley – should provide a great fall-back position in terms of a great value white fish over the next 3 months. The coley is not immune from shortages over the festive period either, so please bear this in mind when planning. Hake was a revelation to us all last year. Never have we seen whole fish reach the extortionate prices that we saw in the middle of December through to the end of January. With continued demand for this fish from around our shores, we recommend avoiding in December and January. Wait until February when it should be more affordable if last year was anything to go by.
<b>Round Fish</b>	Gurnard would be a solid recommendation from us for the next quarter. A superb winter fish that is currently readily available from around our local UK auctions. Low in price and full of flavour. These fish spawn in spring & summer so get stuck in now. Great in stews or bouillabaisse as gurnard can well tolerate longer cooking times. Monkfish will be great quality as it always is, but it will be expensive over the next three months so one to avoid. Mackerel will likely be non-existent in December. What little there is will be prohibitively expensive. Avoid until the middle of January at the earliest. There will also be a lack of sardines, although we do have great frozen alternatives if you can't live without them. Red mullet will also be in short supply in December. If you are using native red mullet, make sure you draw from Cornish stocks as all other origins are now red rated by the Marine Conservation Society.
<b>Cephalopods</b>	UK squid should be great quality and in good supply throughout the next three months. A fish that actually benefits from the freezing process, you can feel assured that if there is no fresh available, we have quality frozen and defrosted substitutions that will not disappoint. We are sad to report that most cuttlefish around our UK shores are now rated a 5 by the Marine Conservation Society. Only trap caught fish from the English Channel are a 4. All beam trawl caught cuttle should be avoided – and 94% of catch is by this method. For that reason, we have to suggest that cuttlefish be removed from menus wherever possible as studies are in agreement that the English Channel cuttlefish population is either fully or over exploited.
<b>Exotics</b>	We are reasonably hopeful that due to something called the "Generalised System of Preferences" (GSP), which allows originating products from a range of countries to be imported at a reduced or zero rate of duty, our tuna and swordfish should be unaffected by tariff changes in a no deal scenario. The exchange rate is more likely to create price pressure if the GBP weakens. On the whole, there should not be any issues with these lines, and either will be a good choice for a menu over the next quarter. Both species always prove popular amongst those who are not keen on the more typical "fishy" species. Swordfish is delicious served plain and simple with a garnish, or with a marinade such as lime and chilli. Protein rich, but low in fat and calories, this fish offers you a healthy choice.
<b>Shellfish</b>	Mussels, mussels, mussels! In season, cultivated around the UK, super sustainable, great value. Whilst they will be in short supply over the festive period, you generally can't go wrong with mussels on your menu over the next quarter. Great in stews, pasta dishes, or steamed on their own. We really are in the prime season for these wonderful bi-valve molluscs until the end of April. Native lobsters will now be virtually non-existent until next summer. There will be some Canadian fish available as their season continues until the end of this year. During the winter months, lobsters move further offshore, requiring fishermen to travel greater distances, whilst the harsh weather makes it more difficult for them to work. At this point, we will be drawing off stored stocks until the spring season begins. Depending on the pandemic, we may or may not have the usual demands over Chinese New Year and Valentine's Day. If that demand is there, you can rest assured that prices will escalate rapidly making lobster an unwise choice over the next three months. We do have some amazing raw lobster meat you can use as an alternative which is an easy, yet high quality, product to use. Native king scallops, unless hand dived, do not currently have the best sustainability credentials. They are also typically very expensive from now until the middle of January. USA scallops are a good alternative over this period. However, due to the pandemic, fishing vessels have limited their number of trips which means that raw material is not at the level it would traditionally be at in the US. Additionally, the raw material which is available is being sold to the US domestic market which has a strong demand. This has resulted in the pricing for the USA scallops increasing. That being said, despite these issues, USA scallops will still offer a more stable option over this period. Clams should be great quality and well-priced in December. Expect some increases in January & February in line with prior years. UK oysters – native or rocks – will also be a good choice over the next 3 months. UK Devon crab meat will be readily available, although plan carefully around the festive period when the processing facilities close down.

**Disclaimer** - the market report is a guide using information from our buyers who have a wealth of experience.

Other influences still effect greatly the market place, weather, seasonal changes, supply and demand in retail and catering alongside exchanges rates.

# SMOKED, DELI & FROZEN FISH

## Smoked Fish

If you want to use smoked salmon over the next quarter, it should be reasonably priced due to the trends we have explained on fresh salmon. In terms of import delays, the smoked salmon should be easier to manage as, once smoked, it typically has a 3-4 week shelf life. Always a highly popular festive option, please remember the variety of inventive cures we can offer alongside the more traditional oak smoked. If you are working with a British theme to avoid import and tariff issues, we offer ChalkStream® trout in cold smoked and hot smoked varieties. Don't forget traditional UK smoked haddock. Smoked haddock kedgeree has always been a winner as breakfast on a cold day, and this is a great menu staple that can be used in breakfast, lunch or dinner menus. A sound recommendation over the next quarter. Smoked mackerel, whole or fillets, are also a good choice when fresh mackerel will be in short supply. Longer shelf life smoked fish makes it much easier to legislate for the potential fluctuation of business levels during lockdowns and restrictions.

## Deli

Some of our deli lines may be affected by a no deal BREXIT as many of them come from the EU / Europe. Seafood salads, rollmop herrings, crayfish in brine and prawns in brine may all attract tariffs of 12-14% in a no deal scenario. Prepare for increases. If you can talk to your account manager about alternatives, it will serve as great preparatory work to avoid interruptions in supply and the accompanying price inflation. On some long life deli lines, you may be well advised to purchase some stock in December to carry you through into next year.

## Frozen Fish

Managing run rates on frozen stocks has proved challenging. Most prices are stable due to stock moving slowly. This does mean that increases and decreases at source are not being passed on as quickly as we would normally expect. On the whole, we are holding good stocks on a wide variety of frozen lines which will help avoid delays in imports and any immediate exchange rate impacts. One line which is likely to see significant increases in the future is pollock. There is not enough stock from Russia (B season) and prices are rising. This is one to keep an eye on in the future. Remember to review our Christmas buffet promotion with a variety of breaded and battered prawns, smoked salmon canapés, smoked salmon roulades and MSC certified raw lobster meat. All easy and manageable additions to your menus.

## Fish that eat microplastics take more risks and die younger, study shows

Source (full article): [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com)  
**Joint study conducted finds that fish fed a diet including plastic were more likely to be eaten themselves**

Microplastics can alter the behaviour of fish, with those that ingest the pollutants likely to be bolder, more active and swim in risky areas where they die en masse, according to a new study.

The survival risk posed by microplastics is also exacerbated by degrading coral reefs, as dying corals make particularly younger fish more desperate to find nutrition and shelter, and to venture into waters where they are more likely to be taken by predators themselves.

In a joint study conducted by Australia's James Cook University as well as other institutions including the University of Cambridge, marine ecologists pulse fed groups of juvenile ambon damselfish, housed across several tanks, a diet of brine shrimp.

## Famous fish that ate all his friends gets cheered up by 16th birthday party

Source (full article): [livescience.co.uk](https://www.livescience.com)  
**Glum grouper Mikko enjoys having friends for dinner.**

A grumpy-faced grouper named Mikko in a Finland aquarium was more down-in-the-mouth than usual, after the facility temporarily closed to the public due to the coronavirus pandemic. So the aquarium's staff threw him a birthday party.

Mikko missed seeing human visitors at the Sea Life Helsinki's Sea Lab ocean laboratory, because he had no fish companions in his tank ... due to the fact that he wouldn't stop eating them, an aquarium representative told Live Science in an email.

Since the COVID-19 shutdown in the spring, Mikko's caretakers noted that the already-solitary fish seemed listless and apathetic, though he was still physically healthy. To cheer him up, they recently brought him a special treat to celebrate his 16th birthday: a salmon "cake." In a video shared on Facebook on Oct. 12, the birthday fish enthusiastically devoured the delicacy — and he didn't have to share it with anyone.

## Take it or leave it: Fishing standoff reaches endgame as Boris sends Barnier final warning

Source (full article): [theexpress.co.uk](https://www.theexpress.co.uk)

**Boris Johnson believes the chances of a Brexit deal are fading away unless the European Union accepts the "reality" that Britain will reclaim control of its coastal waters.**

Downing Street is concerned the trade and security talks will collapse as there has been zero movement from Brussels on its hardline fishing demands. British officials are set to warn their European counterparts there won't be a deal unless the bloc accepts the UK's status as an independent coastal state after the end of the year. Lord Frost is warning the EU's fleet faces being blocked from British waters if there is a no-deal Brexit.

## Shark washes up on beach after being stabbed by swordfish

Source (full article): [independant.co.uk](https://www.independant.co.uk)

**Attacker may have been trying to secure food in a high-competition environment, scientists suggest**

Scientists are investigating a fatal shark attack — but not the kind you might expect. After a huge female thresher shark washed up dead on a Libyan beach earlier this year, researchers have been trying to understand why its killer may have struck.

The 4.5m shark was impaled by a swordfish's blade, which penetrated behind its head and likely damaged or severed major nerves and blood vessels, they wrote this month in the journal *Ichthyological Research*.

The grisly scene was uncovered by citizen scientists in April. Images show a roughly 1ft length of the swordfish blade, known as a rostrum, had broken off in the shark; researchers estimated the attacking swordfish to have been about 3m long.



*If you're looking for Christmas party food ideas, we have put together a selection of time saving starter & buffet items - simply call your account manager to hear more about the range.*

**Please contact your local Direct Seafoods depot with any seafood queries, and for information on daily landings, new products or assistance with menu planning.**  
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