

COPE calls for sustainable seafood

By Sandra Thomas-Staff writer

If COPE parks commissioner Spencer Herbert has his way, the fish and chips you buy at the beach next summer will be served with a side of environmental responsibility.

Herbert wants the parks board to join the Vancouver Aquarium's Ocean Wise program as a way to encourage its 26 concessions, restaurants and clubhouses located within parks and on beaches to re-examine the environmental impact of the food they serve.

"When our ethical purchasing policy was cancelled by the city, there was a second section that deals with sustainable purchasing," said Herbert. "Since this is Wild Salmon Month I thought it would be a good time to bring forward a motion asking the board to encourage our concessions and restaurants to look at sustainability."

According to the aquarium, 90 per cent of all large, predatory fish have disappeared from the world's oceans. In an attempt to reverse those losses, the Ocean Wise program encourages local restaurants to explore menu options that use sustainable seafood or fish that is abundant and resilient to fishing pressure. For example since sockeye and chinook salmon stocks are rapidly dwindling, many chefs experiment with chum and coho.

The program also encourages the use of seafood that is well-managed with a comprehensive plan based on current research and harvested in a way that limits the accidental catch of other species while ensuring limited habitat loss. Menu items that meet the criteria are branded with the Ocean Wise logo.

Restaurants or food-service venues that commit to the program must also agree to complete a full assessment of all seafood on their menus, immediately remove at least one non-sustainable species from their menu, add the Ocean Wise logo to relevant menu items and remove at least one additional non-sustainable seafood choice from their menu every six months. A completely sustainable menu for six consecutive months earns a restaurant the opportunity to become fully certified by Ocean Wise. A large number of Vancouver restaurants are participants in the program, including the Fish House in Stanley Park, which sits on parks board land.

Herbert believes the program could be implemented now because changes to the way the concession stands are being operated mean leases on the venues are being renewed on some locations, while new leases are being created for others.

He said the program will likely not be mandatory, but he hopes with encouragement from the parks board, leaseholders will see the benefits of such a program and voluntarily take part.

"This is not a one-size fits all program," said Herbert. "If your big thing is clams and oysters, maybe you can concentrate on that. If that turns out to be prohibitively expensive maybe you can find another way to go."

Aquarium president John Nightingale said overfishing is the number one reason for depletion of the world's fish stocks.

"Ask any expert and they'll tell you it's not climate change and it's not pollution," said Nightingale. "It's overfishing."

Nightingale says that while there are similar sustainability programs operating in Canada, the aquarium's is unique because of its focus.

"Other programs have concentrated on the consumer and the seafood they purchase and take home," said Nightingale. "But only 35 per cent of consumers eat seafood at home. Our program focuses on restaurants."

Nightingale said while consumers often don't know what they can do to help concerns such as overfishing, they also don't want to be part of the problem.

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