food&waterwatch

FISH

Sustainable Seafood: The Benefits of Choosing Mahi-Mahi

Fact Sheet • May 2009

Mahi-mahi is a sweet and mild-flavored whitefish that may also be sold as "dolphin-fish" or "el dorado." Formally known as *coryphaena hippurus*, it is an excellent choice if you're looking for a tasty and sustainable seafood option.[1]

Mahi-mahi is a schooling fish and can be found in all major tropical and sub-tropical oceans, especially congregating around coastal areas.[2,3] It is a highly migratory species, which means these fish don't stay in any particular region for very long. One benefit of the mahi-mahi's constant travels is that the population is less prone to being repeatedly fished from a single habitat area.

When purchasing mahi-mahi, look for U.S.-caught fish. U.S. fisheries are regulated by management plans that monitor for overexploitation — something that is a particular cause for concern with highly migratory species that are fished internationally.[4] Estimating the size of a migratory fishery is inherently difficult, but the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) suggests that both Atlantic and Pacific populations are healthy.[5] The Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Atlantic limits catch to 75 percent of the fishery's estimated maximum sustainable yield to ensure that overfishing does not occur.[6] There is no FMP for the Pacific, as it is considered a primarily recreational fishery, although catch landings on both coasts are monitored by NMFS annually.[7]

Look specifically for U.S. hook-and-line caught mahi-mahi (including caught by troll, rod and reel, and hand line). These methods usually require someone to watch the lines at all times, so any marine life caught other than the mahi-mahi (known as "bycatch") can be released back into the water quickly, increasing their chances of survival. Catching mahi-mahi by these attended methods is less likely to harm other sea creatures and important habitat, thereby protecting ocean ecosystems and sustaining many types of fisheries for the future.

Most mahi-mahi live for a maximum of only five years. These fish also reproduce quickly and often. They reach sexual maturity at a very young age — about four to five months — and release thousands of eggs into the ocean environment every two to three days during a months-long spawning season.[8,9] These life characteristics

make them likely to have a thriving population, despite their popularity as a seafood choice. Even if the stocks were to become depleted, it is very likely that minimal fishing limitations would allow the stock size to recover quickly.

Mahi-mahi is high in omega-3 fatty acids which are good for brain development and recommended for consumption by the American Heart Association.[10] Although this fish has moderate amounts of mercury — with an average of .19 parts per million (ppm) in their flesh — this is far below the Food and Drug Administration's limit for human consumption of 1 ppm.[11, 12] The Department of Health and Human Services and the Environmental Protection Agency state that the average person can consume fish with levels similar to those of mahi-mahi as much as once per week without any risk, although children and pregnant and nursing women should limit their intake to twice per month.[13]

Endnotes

1 http://www.fao.org/fishery/species/3130/en
2 http://www.fao.org/fishery/species/3130/en
3 http://www.fishbase.us/summary/SpeciesSummary.php?id=6
4 http://marinebio.org/species.asp?id=147
5 http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/species/dolphinfish.htm
6 http://www.fishsource.org/fishery/atlantic%20mahi%20mahi%20(us)/summary
7 http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/images/dolphinish_chart_landings.gif
8 http://marinebio.org/species.asp?id=147
9 http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/species/dolphinfish.htm
10 http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4632
11 http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3013797
12 http://www.fda.gov/fdac/reprints/mercury.html
13 http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admehg3.html

For more information:
web: www.foodandwaterwatch.org
email: info@fwwatch.org
phone: (202) 683-2500 (DC) • (415) 293-9900 (CA)

Copyright © May 2009 Food & Water Watch

Try This: Lemon Pepper Mahi-Mahi with Green Onions and Garlic Butter

Ingredients:

- 2 6-oz U.S. wild troll- or pole-caught mahi-mahi fillets
- 2 large lemons or 8 tbsp lemon juice
- 3 cloves of garlic, chopped finely (or 1 mounded tbsp of minced garlic)
- 3 large green onions (scallions), sliced thin (white and green parts)
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter
- salt and ground black pepper to taste

Directions:

For the lemon pepper mahi-mahi:

Squeeze ¼ lemon over top side of each mahi-mahi fillet (or 1 tablespoon of lemon juice each). Sprinkle ground black pepper to cover fillets lightly. Add 2 tablespoons of olive oil to a small sauté pan. Heat pan over medium-low heat. Place lemon-peppered side of mahi-mahi fillets down in the pan. As the fish cooks, squeeze another ¼ lemon over each fillet and lightly pepper the other side. When fish is cooked half through, flip the fillets. Repeat lemon and pepper process once more each side. Remove from pan. Pour any liquid from pan over fillets. Salt to taste.

For the green onions and garlic butter:

Add 1 tablespoon olive oil and 2 tablespoons of butter to a small sauté pan. Turn on low heat to melt butter. Add chopped garlic and let combine with butter/oil mixture for about 1 minute. Add sliced green onions. Heat slowly and mix gently, periodically. Do not overcook — onions and garlic should not brown. Mixture should become aromatic and onions should soak up butter and oil. Cook about 4 minutes. Mixture should be moist, but not greasy. Spoon mixture over mahi-mahi fillets.

This recipe is reprinted from *Fish & Tips: Recipes for Healthier, Delicious Seafood*, Copyright © 2008 by Food & Water Watch. Get more free sustainable seafood recipes at www.foodandwaterwatch.org/fish/seafood/fish-tips