



# Fishing for sustainability

Retailers should say “thanks, but no thanks” to Greenpeace sustainability rankings.

|By Chuck Anderson|

**G**REENPEACE HAS BEEN RUNNING what amounts to a series of extortion campaigns using the threat of bad press to extract concessions from business enterprises. Its campaigns against the grocery, electronics and other industries offer individual businesses an implicit deal: cooperate with our pressure tactics or risk being the target of them.

Greenpeace has been trying to influence U.S. seafood and grocery industries for five years using similar tactics. I am talking about Greenpeace’s seafood sustainability retailer ranking, called “Carting Away the Oceans” (CATO). The report annually ranks stores based on a Greenpeace survey of grocers’ sustainable seafood sourcing policies. Retailers get negative marks for not responding to the survey or if they carry items that Greenpeace says are not sustainable. Greenpeace’s red listed products include many well-managed species, including MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) certified fisheries.

The questions are loaded and much of the results are likely predetermined. The purpose of the survey and rankings is to bully grocers into supporting the environmental group’s radical and unscientific seafood sus-

tainability agenda. The implicit threat is that retailers who refuse to cooperate will be deluged with negative press and perhaps even boycotted by outraged consumers.

But it is becoming a hollow threat. In order to deliver on threats of bad press, reporters would have to find value in what Greenpeace says, but increasingly they do not. To mobilize consumers, they would have to care about what Greenpeace says, and consumers do not seem to care either.

It has been four months since the latest Greenpeace CATO report. Like the previous reports released over the past four years, the rankings appear to have had minimal, if any, impact on consumer demand for seafood, and virtually no impact on customer loyalty to their favorite retail grocer.

The latest Greenpeace report generated very little press. A review of the media during the first week of this year’s CATO release shows that Greenpeace generated seven mainstream media stories about the rankings. For comparison, the tabloid tale of a New Jersey mother who visited tanning sa-

lons too often generated 198 stories. Greenpeace’s report earned 78 tweets, while the “tanorexic” mom generated 698. “Tanorexic” is associated with six YouTube videos. There are none for the Greenpeace ranking.

Supermarkets are in integral part of the community, and consumers trust their supermarkets to do the right thing. Supermarket retailers have an obligation to responsibly source seafood and all products. Most are improving the sustainability of their products every year without help from the most radical voices on the subject, such as Greenpeace. There are many resources to help retailers to research and identify high-quality and responsible sources for seafood, including eNGO’s (environmental Non-governmental Organizations). However, the Greenpeace effort does not advance the cause of cooperatively and positively working together to improve seafood sourcing.

The next time the Greenpeace survey hits your in-box, offer a polite no thank you. We have a plan to continually improve our responsible seafood sourcing. **ff**

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