



The Fish Fight

The Mackerel Mission, as part of *Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's Fish Fight* aims to revolutionise Britain's favourite take-away. The aim is to get mackerel on the menu in Fish and Chip shops across the UK, but why?

In January 2011, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall departed River Cottage to embark on a journey of discovery. His mission was to find out what was really going on at the industrial end of the UK fisheries. He travelled across the country meeting fishermen, marine conservationists, politicians, supermarkets managers, and fish-eating members of the public.

The experience, and how it changed the way he thought about fish were shown in *Hugh's Fish Fight*, broadcast in January 2011 as part of Channel 4's *Big Fish Fight*. Hugh learnt that half the fish caught in the North Sea are being thrown back, dead, because of EU quota laws. It seems obvious that this constitutes a problem.

The problem is that in a mixed fishery where many different fish live

together, fishermen cannot control the species that they catch. Fishing for one species often means catching another, and if people don't want them or fishermen are not allowed to land them, the only option is to throw them overboard. The majority of these discarded fish die.

Discards are not monitored so it is difficult to know how many fish are being thrown away, but the EU estimates that in the North Sea discards are 40% to 60% of the total catch. Many of these fish are edible, but simply not in fashion. Others are prime cod, haddock, plaice and other popular food species that are over quota. The quota system is intended to protect fish stocks by setting limits on how many fish of a certain species should be caught and fishermen are not allowed to land any over quota fish. If they

accidentally catch them there is no choice but to throw them overboard before they reach the docks.

This situation led Hugh to launch *Hugh's Fish Fight* to try to change laws and influence public opinion and so far the response from the public has been incredible. Over 700,000 people have signed the fish fight petition available on www.fishfight.net and as a direct result of the campaign, the British Government funded a six month study into what would happen if a discard ban was introduced.

In July 2011 the European Commission published a proposal for a new Common Fisheries Policy including recommendations for a discard ban. This is still a work in progress but the pressure brought about by the campaign appears to be bearing fruit, with a reform of the policy due this year.

As well as the change in policy, Hugh suggests we need to diversify our fish eating habits. This is where

mackerel dives into the food pool. 'There are few more tasty, and often under-valued fish, than the great British Mackerel' says Hugh. Mackerel is in plentiful supply and it is fished in a controlled and sustainable way. The ready availability of these shoaling, fast growing pelagic fish means that the cost to the consumer is considerably less than fish such as cod.

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The aim of the Mackerel Mission is to start a revolution in fish consumption and the best place to begin is with the UK's favourite take-away; fish and chips. The goal is to get mackerel on the menu in at least one fish and chip shop in every town across the UK. With over 10,000 shops in this country, that's a tall order but head to the coast now and you will see change taking place. Mackerel baps are popping up everywhere. What's more, they taste good. In a personal taste test we found the cod unfavourably bland in comparison to the mackerel, which was bursting with flavour.

If mackerel is really not your thing, remember there are alternatives. The UK has a vast array of delicious fish, and by eating a greater variety of fish we can take the pressure off the more vulnerable species like cod and haddock, and open up new culinary horizons at the same time.

For more information on
The Fish Fight visit: www.fishfight.net

Serves 2

Pepper Mackerel Salad with Vegetable Crisps



Ingredients

3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 tbsp lemon juice
150g green beans
Small bag of salad leaves
2-3 smoked peppered mackerel fillets
Handful cherry tomatoes, halved
Handful vegetable crisps, crushed

Whisk the olive oil and lemon juice, season and set aside.

Cook the green beans in boiling salted water for 2-3 minutes until just tender, then refresh under cold water, drain and cut in half.

Tip the salad leaves into a large bowl and add the beans.

Peel off the skin from the mackerel fillets and tear the flesh into bite-sized pieces.

Add to the salad with the tomatoes. Add the dressing and toss well.

Divide between two large plates and scatter with the vegetable crisps to serve.