

# ALR

## CONSUMING PASSIONS

### CANNED!

Only a few months ago, eating a tuna sandwich was no big deal. But there came a time when the person next to you at the sandwich shop started muttering darkly about driftnetting as you placed your lunch order. Friends who spotted you serving up Snappy Tom Tuna in Jelly to your cat shrieked in horror and disgust. Dinner guests paled and turned away from the tuna casserole or the sashimi. Suddenly tuna was on the list of 'bad guys' for the ideologically sound - or even just plain sentimental - consumer. The reason? Dolphins.

Greenpeace estimates that, since 1959, 6.5 million dolphins have been killed by tuna fishing practices of purse seine netting and driftnetting. Schools of yellowfin tuna often swim below herds of dolphins, and fishing boats will deliberately track, chase and capture the dolphins, so that tuna will come up with the catch. Dolphins, as well as other marine mammals, tortoises and sea birds, also get entangled in the enormous driftnets set to catch tuna. They suffocate. Driftnetting has been likened to stripmining the oceans. One driftnet may be up to 56 kilometres long and 15 metres deep. It's also estimated that 1,000 kilometres of these plastic, non-biodegradable drift nets are lost or abandoned in the Pacific each year. Greenpeace has been campaigning against these

practices for many years. Their goal is a global ban on both purse seine and driftnet fishing, and the development of alternative fishing methods which do not kill dolphins and are not so ecologically damaging.

Driftnetting is banned in Australian waters. South Pacific countries ban drift net fishing within their coastal waters and their canneries will not buy driftnet caught tuna. The anti-driftnetters' most recent success is impressive. The world's largest tuna supplier, Starkist (a Heinz subsidiary) has announced it will now only buy "dolphin safe" tuna.

In Australia, Heinz markets the Greenseas and Seahaven brands of tuna. Heinz claim that their tuna is already "dolphin safe", as it's caught in areas where no dolphins congregate with tuna schools - the Eastern Tropical Pacific (ETP). They have embarked on an aggressive marketing campaign to reassure consumers and are negotiating for Greenpeace Australia's seal of approval. Greenpeace are withholding this approval until Heinz agree to allow Greenpeace observers onto their boats to verify the claim. So don't go rushing out to buy Heinz brands just yet.

Greenpeace are lobbying the government for a labelling law to force companies to specify the origin of their tuna and the way in which it was caught. Australia imports fish canned in Thailand and the Philippines, much of which may be caught by driftnetting nations - Japan, Taiwan, Korea. It's impossible to tell the source just from reading the label. Some brands don't even have a company name, just a distributor. This is the Ministry for Consumer Affairs' rationale for not enforcing such strict labelling laws as Greenpeace would like to see. But surely that lack of accountability in the industry is the best reason for introducing such legislation.

Greenpeace surveyed 25 companies last year to try to establish the sources of their tuna. The results - which have been published in the *Greenpeace Australia News* and the *Green Consumer Guide*, are not altogether satisfactory. Only Seakist

and Sirenia claim to use only locally caught Australian tuna. But if you peruse the Sirenia tins you'll find that many are stamped "Product of the Philippines", or "Product of Thailand". As for Seakist - the can says the contents are "processed in South Australia from imported fish". So their claims must be treated with caution.

Brands which use imported fish, but not from the ETP, are John West, Safcol, Home Brand, No Frills, Payless, Black and Gold and the two Heinz brands. But here's another thing to consider if you're ideologically pure, and not just sentimental. John West is a subsidiary of the giant corporation Unilever, renowned for its continued dealings with South Africa. Heinz International and Seakist also have South African connections according to the *Non-Buyers Guide*. Your shopping list is getting smaller by the minute. On Greenpeace's list of companies to boycott, either because they refused to answer the survey or because their fish is of unknown origin, are Trident, Coles Brand and Coral Reef.

An alternative is to buy tuna caught and canned in the South Pacific. Fiji and the Solomons both have big fishing industries - Fiji's IKA corporation and Pasco cannery account for exports worth \$50 million. The industry is the country's third top income earner and a big employer. Tuna are caught using pole-and-line. You could go looking in Fijian and Indian groceries for brands such as King of the Sea, (Solomons) In Sydney Pasco brands Ovalan Blue and Sun Bell are available at the Fiji market, 591 King Street, Newtown.

For the ideologically sound cat, Greenpeace favour Whiskas, Dine, Whiskettes, Sheba and Kit-E-Kat, as they are assured that the manufacturers only use waste materials from tuna caught in Australia. Snappy Tom and Pounce use imported tuna, but are both produced by Safcol, which claims to be dolphin safe. The brands to avoid are Go-Cat and Black and Gold.

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