

ECO-labels

Teacher's Notes

In the previous section we covered how fishing has an impact on the seas. This section looks at a positive solution to the global problem of overfishing.

Providing environmental information

Labels can provide all sorts of information on price, discounts, type of product, method of production, ingredients, who made the product, how to cook the product, whether it is 'NEW!' 'IMPROVED!' or has to be kept in the fridge. Labels can be used to give information, to promote a product or both.

It is difficult to give a precise definition for the term '**eco-label**'. In general, eco-labels are special symbols that signify a product has been produced with minimal negative impact on the environment. Putting an eco-label on a product is voluntary. In order to use an eco-label on a product, a company is expected to have had its environmental claim tested by an independent body. This allows people to trust in the environmental credentials of the product.

News headlines often portray devastating environmental problems such as unhealthy chemical food additives, deforestation, **overfishing**, problems with industrial farming or unfair trade relationships. Consumers can feel helpless in the face of such large-scale problems. Eco-labels empower people to do their bit to reduce these problems by using their purchasing power to support sustainable methods of production. Every shopping decision we make is an opportunity to 'vote' for more sustainable options.

• **Examples of eco-labels.** Organic produce is indicated by an eco-label. A product carrying this mark communicates that no artificial fertilisers or pesticides have been used in production. This label can be applied to any farmed product that has passed a rigorous certification process, including vegetables, meat, farmed fish and cotton. This example is from the Soil Association, the best-known organic eco-label in the UK.



• **Other environmental labels.** Some labels give environmental information on a certain quality of a product or its packaging. The top symbol shows that a material can be recycled, and the lower symbol indicates the packaging contains a percentage of recycled material. Energy information labels can demonstrate the energy efficiency of electrical equipment. These are not strictly eco-labels



Introduce this section with the **eco-labels** discussion card called '**Consumer power**'.



because they do not make an environmental claim about the process of production. Search for 'A Shopper's Guide to Green Labels' on www.defra.gov.uk.

Choose fish with the tick!

The MSC eco-label identifies sustainable fish. It is a distinctive blue oval with a white fish tick inside. Every product on sale carrying this symbol also bears the following statement and website address:



"This product comes from a fishery which has been certified to the Marine Stewardship Council's environmental standard for a well-managed and sustainable fishery. www.msc.org."

Complex scientific information (a rigorous assessment of fishing practices) is translated into a simple, memorable eco-label. Consumers can choose products carrying this label in the shops to support fishers who are fishing responsibly. Every shopper or diner who selects MSC-labelled fish can be confident that the fish they are eating comes from a sustainable source that has been independently assessed. This helps to make sure there will be fish to catch in the future and marine ecosystems are healthy. For more information on fishing and the associated problems, see the previous sections entitled *fishing* and *the impact of fishing*.

Everyone can make a difference

Learning about eco-labels teaches children to think about their influence on the world around them. The MSC eco-label is displayed on some seafood products sold by large companies like Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose in the UK, and in lots of schools. The MSC promotes use of the eco-label, but **consumer power** is essential if more sustainable fish is going to become available. Customers in shops and restaurants really can persuade businesses to provide more choice in sustainable seafood by looking for it and asking for it.

Ask for the eco-label on your school menu

As well as using this pack as a learning resource, schools can request sustainable fish is served in their canteens. Using consumer power in this way is an interesting project for a class, and this section provides a chance to think through all of the reasons why sustainable seafood is beneficial before taking some group action to change to sustainable seafood sourcing.



KS1 Lesson plans – Eco-labels



A visit to the shops

Learning objective: *to understand what an eco-label tells us. Geography: 5b. Science 2: 5c.*

Starting point: Discuss why the MSC eco-label seen on food packaging or menus is important. It tells us that the fishermen are not catching too many fish and that they are not harming other sea creatures. Show the children that the label is a fish and a tick, and ask them what they think this means.

Support: Ask the children to write a list of the fish products they like to eat (fish fingers, fish cakes, tuna sandwiches, fish and chips etc).

Extension: Show the children some different eco-labels and explain what they mean.

Plenary: Ask the children what products they like to pick up at the supermarket. What is it that attracts them? Is it labelling? Colours? Product? Pictures? After this exercise what else might they consider?

Look at the label

Learning objective: *to understand the importance of food labelling and what information it can tell us. Geography: 5b. Science 2: 5c.*

Starting point: Point out some of the information that can be found on food packaging, e.g. price, best before date, safety warnings, eco-labels. Discuss what labels can tell us. Remind the class that eco-labels are special symbols that provide environmental information.

Support: Draw the MSC eco-label on the back of the activity sheet.

Extension: Ask the children to design their own fish-friendly eco-label.

Plenary: Pass some items of food packaging round the class. Discuss what the labels mean and what the writing says. Why is this information useful for shoppers?

KS2 Lesson plans – Eco-labels



What's inside?

Learning objective: *to look at food packaging and find out what information it can tell us. English 2: 3a, 3d.*

Preparation: Ask the children to bring in an item of food packaging from home to look at next lesson, fish if possible.

Starting point: Show the class the MSC eco-label on the discussion card. Discuss food labelling and eco-labels then ask them to look at each other's packaging and see what information they can find out from it. Hand out the activity sheets. The children can work in pairs.

Support: Describe the MSC eco-label from memory.

Extension: Act out a role-play. Some children are customers looking for sustainable fish products, and the others are helpful shopkeepers who explain what the customer should look for.

Plenary: Packaging is very important. What kind of information should be included on a label? The MSC eco-label tells people that the fish has come from a sustainable source.

Making your voice heard

Learning objective: *pupils should learn to talk and write about their opinions and be encouraged to take positive action to influence change.*

Citizenship: *1a, 1c, 2a.*

Starting point: It is often possible to change things by making our voices heard. This can be through letter writing, boycotting, changing our habits or lobbying different individuals or organisations.

Support: Design a poster promoting tempting sustainable fish options.

Extension: Design a leaflet to explain to customers in shops what the MSC eco-label means.

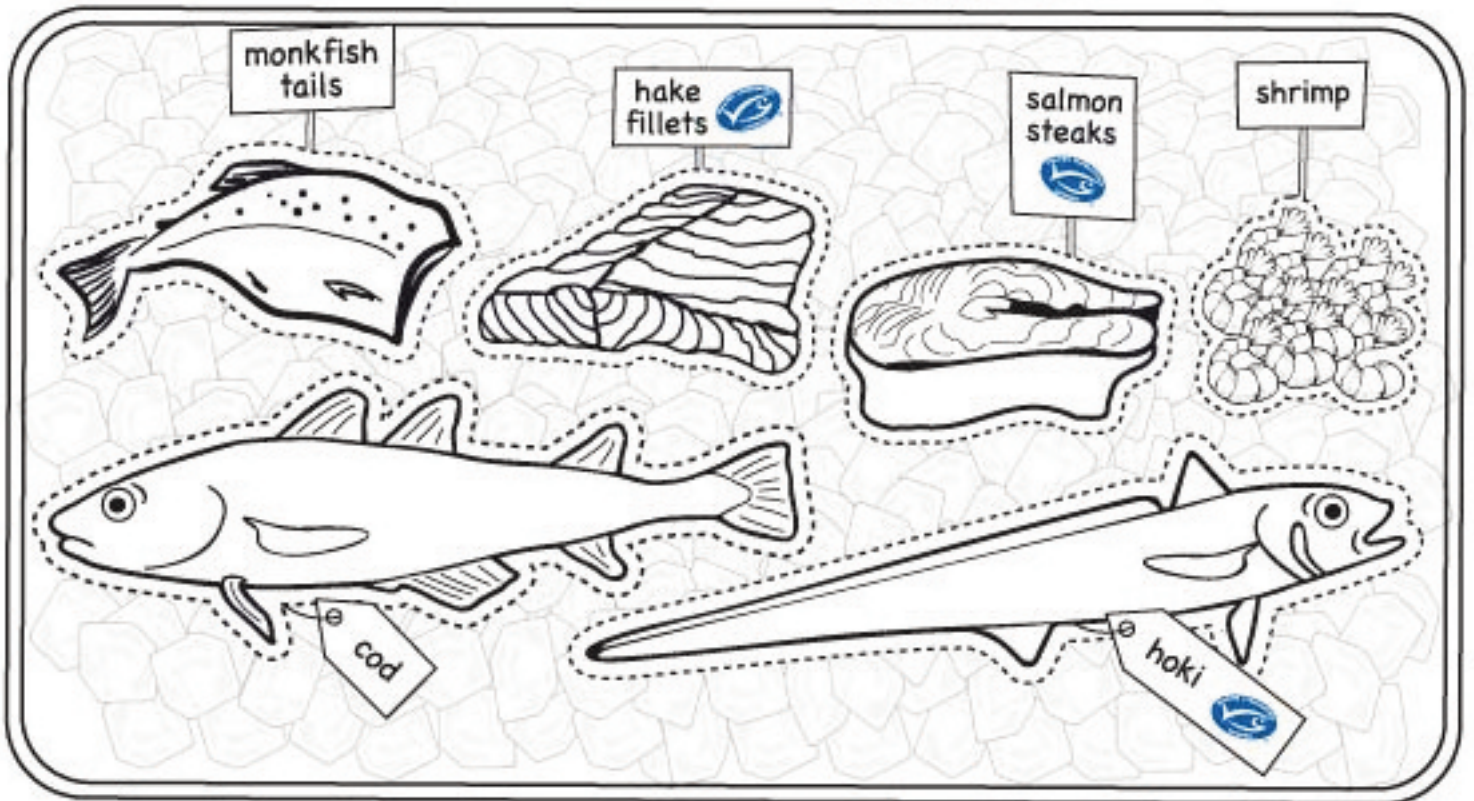
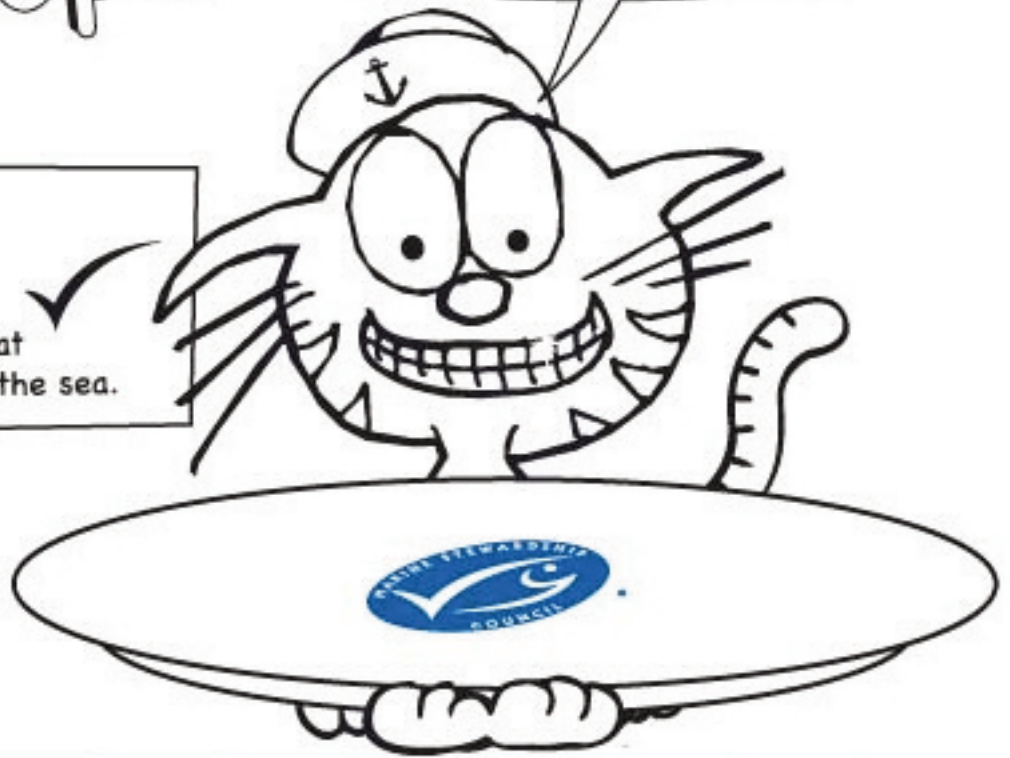
Plenary: Hold a class discussion. Ask the children how they could find out if the fish they are about to buy has come from a sustainable source. In a supermarket (look for the MSC eco-label); at a fish counter (ask the fishmonger and look at the label); in the school canteen (ask the person in charge); in a chip shop or restaurant (look for the label, ask or write to the manager).

A visit to the shops

Help me choose what to buy for my dinner. Cut out the fish with the eco-friendly labels, put them on my plate and colour me in!

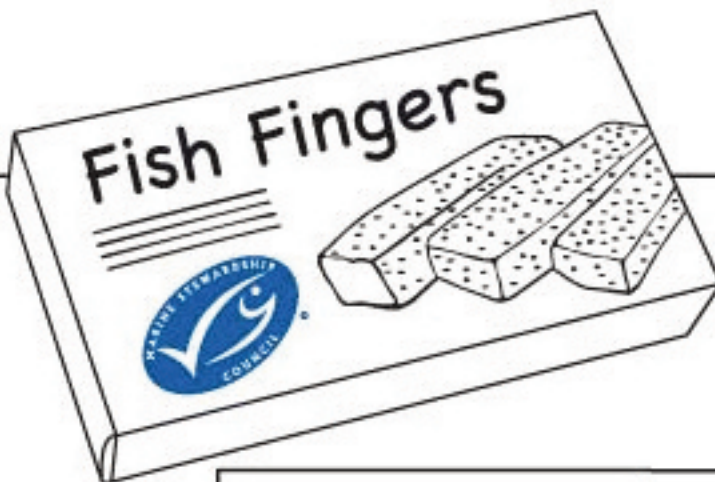
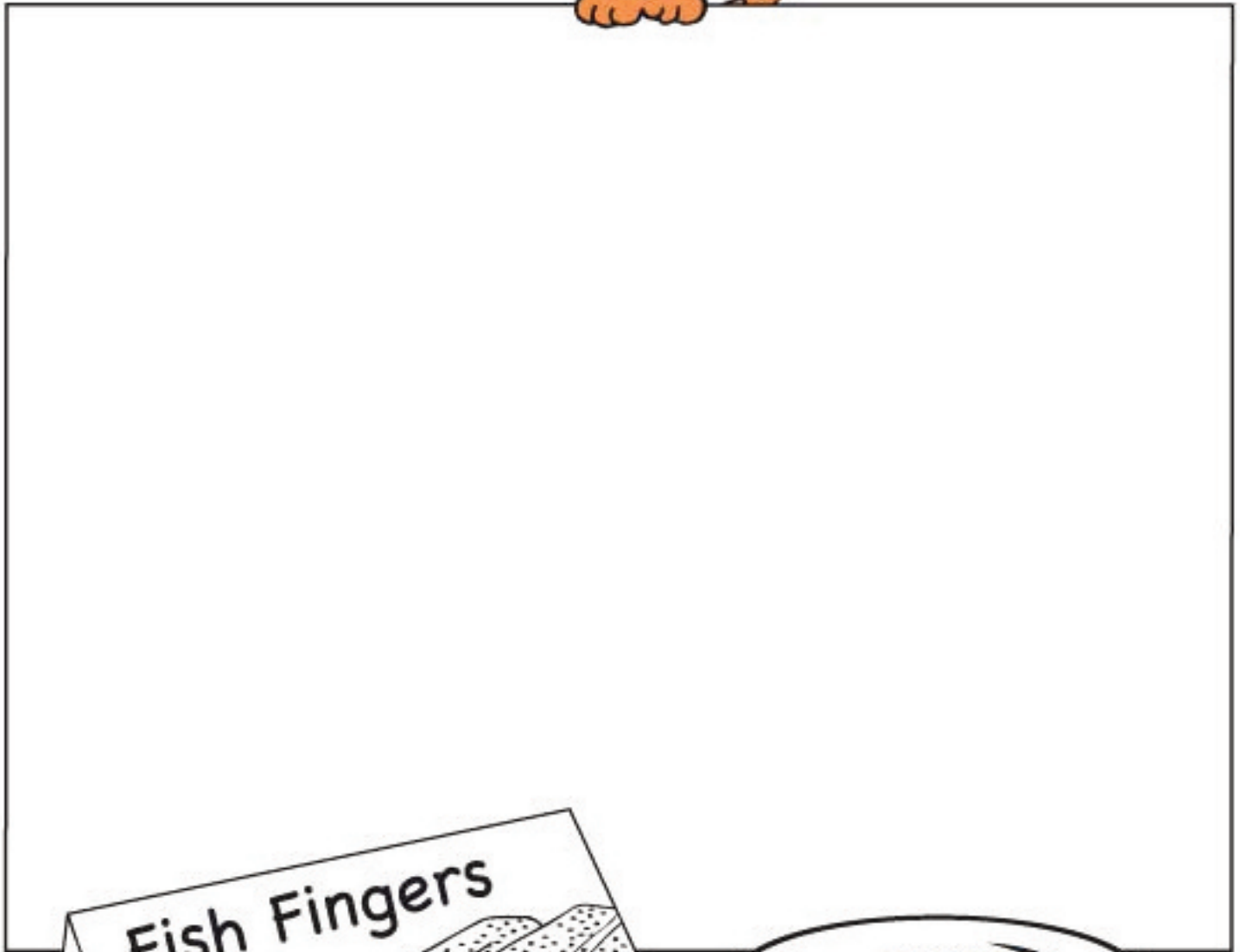
Now I know

Labels can help us decide what food to buy.
The fish tick label means that fishermen are looking after the sea.



Look at the label

Pick up your crayons and draw something fishy that you might find in the supermarket! Give it a name, and don't forget to include the MSC eco-label.



Now I know

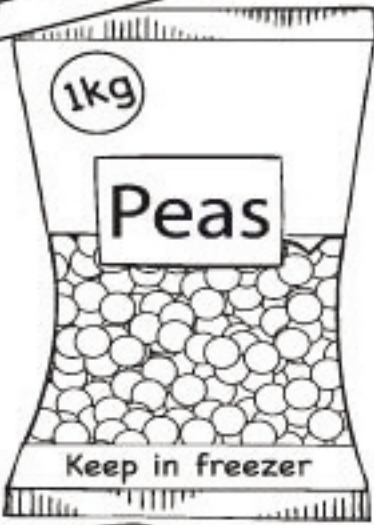
Labels tell us more about the food we eat.
Eco-labels provide environmental information.



What's inside?



Look at the food packaging in front of you. What information can you find out about what is inside from the words and pictures?



Now I know

Food packaging can tell us a lot about the product inside.
This information helps us choose what to buy.



Making your voice heard

I love eating fish!
Help me write a letter to my local supermarket asking the manager to stock more sustainable fish.



Murdock the Cat
The Old Fishing Boat
Pebbletown
England



MURDOCK

Now I know

People can make change happen by making their voice heard.
Writing letters is one way of doing this.

