

China Emerges as Key Growth Engine in Global Seafood Market: NSC Report

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The latest seafood consumer insights from the Norwegian Seafood Council highlight China as a central force shaping global seafood demand, with the release of Seafood Trends 2026: The China Report. The report offers an in-depth look at evolving consumer behaviour, market dynamics, and growth drivers in one of the world's largest and fastest-changing food markets.

With a population exceeding 1.4 billion, China presents a complex and diverse consumption landscape. The report identifies several global megatrends influencing seafood demand, including the rise of the middle class, declining birth rates, an increase in single-person households, and growing concerns around supply chains, geopolitics, and tariffs.

Convenience and health are also emerging as critical decision-making factors for Chinese consumers. According to Sigmund Bj rgo, these trends are significantly shaping trust, preferences, and purchasing behaviour in the seafood category, particularly as China becomes an increasingly important destination for global exporters.

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Key species driving this growth include Greenland halibut, redfish, cold-water prawns, haddock, and mackerel, reflecting both strong demand and diversification in consumer preferences.

China's culinary diversity—rooted in its eight major regional cuisines—continues to foster openness toward new food experiences. This cultural flexibility, combined with rising disposable incomes, has made Chinese consumers increasingly willing to experiment with imported seafood.

However, certain products retain strong cultural associations. Björge notes that salmon, for example, is predominantly consumed as sashimi and is closely linked to Japanese cuisine rather than being adapted into local dishes. Despite this, its premium positioning and reliance on cold-chain logistics enhance perceptions of freshness and quality, particularly among middle-class consumers.

Unlike previous editions, the 2026 report adopts a case-study approach, tracking 24 consumers across tier-one cities—Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen—over seven days. Conducted in October 2025, the study provides granular insights into shopping habits, meal planning, and purchasing triggers.

Lars Moksness emphasised that this methodology enabled a more detailed understanding of the motivations influencing seafood consumption, offering valuable intelligence for exporters and industry stakeholders.

The report also features insights from NSC Marketing Advisor Savindar Xie, along with external experts including Rabobank analyst Novel Sharma and Undercurrent News journalist Louis Harkell.

As China continues to evolve into a high-value, high-growth seafood market, the report underscores the importance of understanding local consumer behaviour, cultural nuances, and macroeconomic trends. For global seafood exporters, aligning with these shifts will be critical to capturing opportunities in this increasingly influential market.