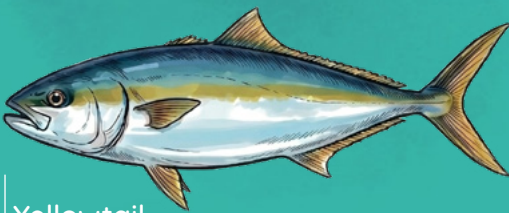
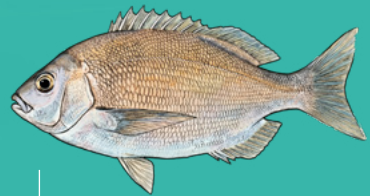


AN INFORMATIVE CULINARY GUIDEBOOK OF THREE SPECIES



Yellowtail
Seriola lalandi



Cape bream
Pachymetopon blochii



Carpenter
Argyrozona argyrozona

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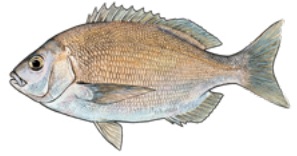
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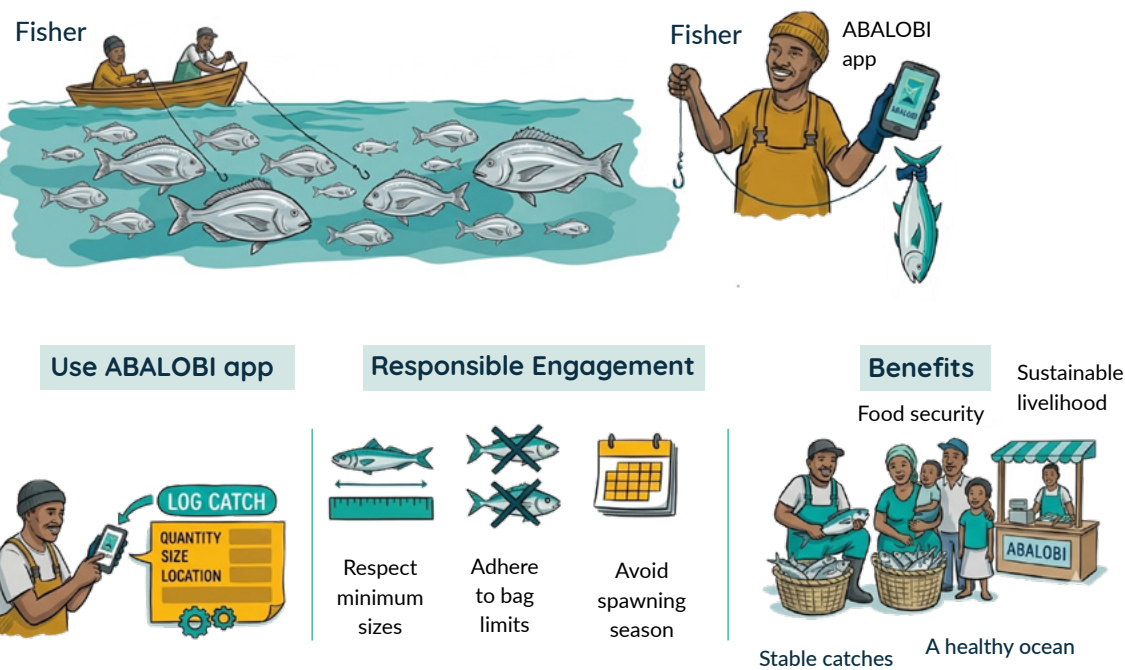
Embracing underutilised, abundant species and supporting small-scale fishers

As our awareness of ocean health grows, so does our responsibility as chefs and consumers. For conscious buyers, exploring species caught by small-scale and traditional fishers not only diversifies our palates but also challenges our creativity by offering a wider range of cooking and processing applications. And in turn, we start to play a crucial role in sustaining the ecosystem. Engaging with small-scale fishers can enhance this experience, ensuring that the fish you buy is both high-quality and traceable.

Underused fish species are those that are not widely consumed. They are often overlooked or carry with them a stigma of being less tasty or less valuable in commercial markets. Yet they can offer excellent flavour and nutritional benefits when handled correctly. In South Africa, species such as yellowtail, cape bream, and carpenter (silvers) often take a back seat to more popular choices like hake, kingklip, and tuna.

By choosing to explore these alternatives, you not only discover new flavour profiles, culinary possibilities and interesting combinations, but also contribute to a more balanced demand for fish, thereby alleviating pressure on overfished species while supporting small-scale fishers and less impactful fishing methods.

Understanding the availability of more abundant fish species and how to engage with them





The ABALOBI QR code brings the “From Hook to Cook” philosophy to life by transforming seafood into a transparent narrative. By scanning the code, consumers instantly access the meal’s social and ecological history — identifying the specific fisher, vessel, and low-impact methods used. This “Story on a Plate” humanises the supply chain, allowing diners to send direct “thank you” messages to fishing communities while promoting the consumption of sustainable, lesser-known species.

These underutilised species thrive in local waters and can be caught sustainably. By using hook-and-line methods, size grading is controlled, and proper, immediate storage on ice ensures a superior product. By supporting this thoughtful, time-sensitive approach to harvesting from the ocean, you can help foster a healthier marine ecosystem. Consuming these fish reduces demand for threatened fish populations, allowing them to recover and maintain the biodiversity necessary for a healthy ocean environment.

The journey to becoming a conscious fish buyer goes beyond simply choosing the right fish; it also involves forming connections with small-scale fishers. These individuals have a profound understanding of their craft and the marine environments in which they work. Knowledge and wisdom are passed down through generations in fisher communities. However, ideologies that once formed the backbone of fishing villages are

becoming lost. Small-scale fisheries are anchored in a stewardship ideology that treats the ocean as a shared heritage, yet this identity is increasingly threatened by industrial dominance, climate shifts, and economic marginalisation. When small-scale fishers are excluded from high-value markets or ignored in policy, their traditional knowledge and sustainable practices are undervalued.

Meaningful engagement restores this balance by integrating technical excellence, such as rigorous cold chain protocols, with transparent traceability. By bridging the gap between the fisher’s story and the consumer’s plate, we transform underutilised species into premium products, ensuring that the preservation of coastal ecosystems goes hand in hand with the dignity and economic resilience of the people who harvest them. Working with small-scale fisheries positively impacts local economies and communities while ensuring sustainable and ethical fishing practices.



Engaging in conversations with fishers about their methods, the species they catch, and their environmentally conscious fishing practices can provide valuable insights into your seafood choices. By prioritising traceability, you can make informed choices and minimise the chances of supporting illegal or environmentally damaging fishing practices.

Engaging in small-scale fisheries and traceability





© ABALOBİ



Chefs, restaurants and home cooks have the power to influence both supply chains and public attitudes. By making informed, responsible choices, we support small-scale fishers as stewards of the sea, helping to ensure that oceans remain healthy and bountiful for generations to come.

The Role of Chefs and Consumers in Supporting a Healthy Ocean:



Responsible sourcing:

By selecting seafood that is caught responsibly – harvested with minimal environmental impact – chefs, restaurants and home cooks can help reduce overfishing and destructive fishing practices. Their demand encourages suppliers to prioritise ethical sourcing and transparency.



Education and advocacy:

Through storytelling, menu descriptions, and interactions with diners, chefs can raise awareness about the importance of ocean health and sustainable seafood. They can advocate for marine conservation, responsible fisheries management, and the value of supporting small-scale fishers.



Shifting consumer demand:

What do chefs have the ability to showcase and highlight?: when we feature abundant or lesser-known fish species on our menus, we introduce diners to alternatives to traditionally overfished favourites. This helps take pressure off vulnerable species and promotes a more balanced approach to seafood consumption.



Reducing waste:

Restaurants can minimise waste by using whole fish – creatively utilising fewer popular cuts and designing dishes that make the most of available ingredients. This approach lessens the strain on fish stocks and demonstrates respect for the ocean's resources.



This guide will spotlight three abundant fish species that represent the best of traceable, locally sourced seafood: yellowtail, cape bream, and carpenter (silvers). These species are plentiful in our coastal waters and offer a wide range of flavours and textures for innovative cooking. By highlighting these species, we hope to encourage chefs and home cooks to embrace these delicious options, supporting marine health and the livelihoods of small-scale fishers. Explore the culinary potential of these remarkable fish and discover how making thoughtful choices can help protect our oceans.

Spotlight: Three abundant delicious species

YELLOWTAIL

Seriola lalandi

Rich flavour & oily texture



Ideal for: grilling, baking, braaiing



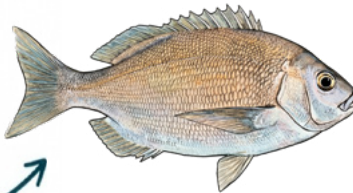
CAPE BREAM

Pachymetopon blochii

Mild & delicate flavour



Ideal for: pan-frying, steaming, ceviche



CARPENTER (SILVERS)

Argyrozona argyrozona

Sweet flavour & firm texture



Ideal for: all innovative cooking



SUPPORTING SMALL-SCALE FISHERS



Embrace delicious options, support livelihoods

OCEAN AND MARINE HEALTH

Thoughtful choices = protected oceans







Yellowtail

Yellowtail are most abundant in the cold Atlantic waters off the Cape coast but migrate towards the eastern coast (KwaZulu-Natal) during the annual sardine run. They typically gather in large shoals offshore at depths of up to 110 m. They are generalist feeders, preying on smaller fish (like sardines and anchovies) and squid. They can reach a maximum length of 120–150 cm and a weight of 40–60 kg, though in South Africa they seldom exceed 20 kg. They are fast-growing and resilient. Yellowtail (or Hiramasa in Japan) is prized for its culinary potential and is best realised by balancing its natural richness with bright, acidic, or umami-rich components.

Yellowtail

Seriola lalandi



Culinary profile and value

Flavour: Mild, clean, and subtly sweet; less “oceany” than some other oily fish

Texture: Firm, large flakes, and high oil content (which contributes to its rich mouthfeel)

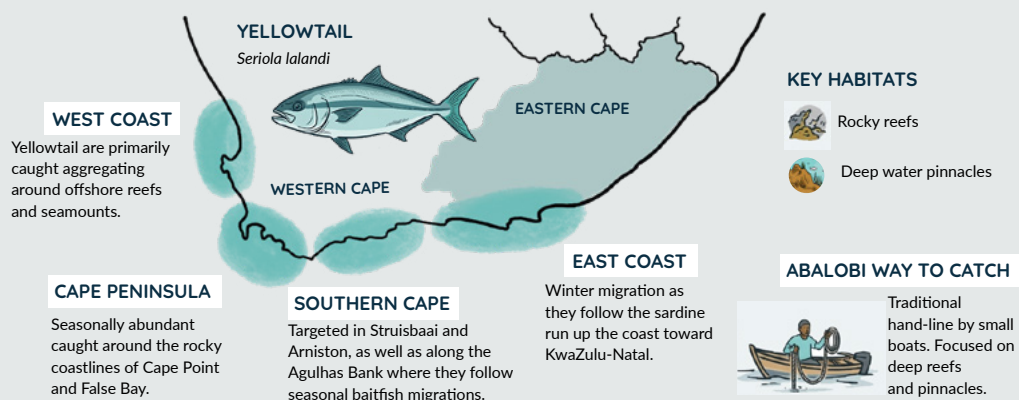
Bait used:

Pike, squid, sardine, octopus and mackerel. Sometimes lures are also used.

Season:

September to April

Where Yellowtail is caught





Because of its “melt-in-the-mouth” buttery texture, yellowtail is regarded as one of the finest fish for raw consumption.

Chef applications & techniques

The high oil content means it can become dry if overcooked; proper technique is essential.

Raw preparations (premium use)

Sashimi & nigiri:

Slice the fish thinly against the grain (approx. 5–7space mm). It pairs exceptionally well with citrus-based dressings like ponzu or sharp accents like yuzu kosho, jalapeño, and ginger.

Crudo & carpaccio:

Use a high-quality extra-virgin olive oil and an acid (lemon or lime) to cut through the fat. Add textural contrasts like radishes, capers, or toasted sesame seeds.

Poke:

Dice into 1-cm cubes and briefly marinate in soy sauce, sesame oil, and mirin. Its firm flesh holds up better than tuna in mixed bowls.

Flavour pairing & global styles

The fish's versatility allows it to bridge many culinary traditions.

Japanese:

Miso-glazed and grilled (saikyo yaki) or simmered with soy and ginger.

Mediterranean:

Grilled as meaty steaks with salsa verde; served with a light tomato-and-olive ragout; or served as a red-meat alternative in bolognese with rich tomato sauce, pasta, and basil.

Southeast Asian:

The firm flakes are ideal for aromatic curries (like Thai or Indian cafreal) as they do not disintegrate easily.

Curries & curing

Curing:

A flavoured salt rub can cure the fish for gravlax-style preparations. A 24-hour cure in salt, sugar, and citrus zest transforms it into a firm, concentrated “ham” that can be shaved thin.

Curries & stews:

The firm flesh holds up well in robustly flavoured dishes like Keralan fish curries, standing up to strong flavours such as tamarind and curry leaves.

Precision cooking techniques

High-heat searing:

Sear the skin side over high heat for 1–2 minutes to achieve a “potato chip” crispness, then flip and cook for only 30–40 seconds. The centre should remain medium-rare to rare (internal temp 48°C).

Oil poaching (confit):

Cook portions in 50–55°C olive oil infused with aromatics like lemongrass or thyme. This produces a silky, ultra-tender texture that mimics the richness of raw fish while being fully “cooked”.

Slow roasting:

Bake at a low temperature (120–150°C) on a bed of bok choy or soft greens. This gentle heat prevents the protein from seizing and keeps the fat from leaching out.

Grilling/barbecuing (braaiing):

Excellent for grilling whole or as thick cutlets. Using a citrus or garlic marinade helps prevent it from drying out on high heat.



© ABALOBI

Aesthetic appeal

We eat with our eyes first. The meat of yellowtail is striking. It features a translucent, pale pink flesh with a dark red “blood line” (lateral muscle). In high-end dining, this contrast accentuates the freshness and quality of the fish and is used to create visually stunning plates.

Health & nutritional value

From a nutritional standpoint, yellowtail is a powerhouse. It is exceptionally high in Omega-3 fatty acids, which contribute to both the heart-health benefits and the luxurious texture. It is also a dense source of protein and Vitamin D.

Utilisation of secondary parts

Collars (kama):

Often considered the “chef’s cut”, the fatty collar is best grilled until the skin is charred and the meat is succulent.

Bones & trim:

Use bones for a rich fish jus or dashi. Skin can be dehydrated and fried into crispy crackers.

© Michelle van Zyl







Cape bream

Cape bream is a notable fish species endemic to the marine waters of southern Africa. It is an important component of commercial, artisanal, and recreational line-fisheries, particularly in the Western Cape region.

They have a bronze-grey body with small, dark fins and can grow up to 54 cm in length, with a maximum recorded weight of 2.7 kg. Their mouths contain five rows of incisors in both jaws, but no molars.

Cape bream are resident, non-migratory fish typically found in shallow coastal waters (up to 55 m deep) with rocky reefs and kelp forests. Juveniles are often restricted to the kelp beds. They are relatively long-lived, typically reaching 12 years, but some individuals can live to 21 years.

Cape bream

Pachymetopon blochii



Culinary profile and value

Flavour:

mild, sweet, and subtly nutty profile with a clean "ocean" finish.

Texture:

The flesh is white, fine-grained, and moderately firm. When cooked correctly, it yields a moist, delicate flake that holds its shape well — making it suitable for pan-searing on the skin, grilling or steaming. Its natural fat ratio ensures a silky mouthfeel without being overly rich.

Bait used:

White mussel and red bait.

Season:

Year-round



Today, the most interesting cultural shift is its rebranding as a “hero” species. What was once a humble, overlooked fish has become a symbol of the “slow fish” movement and food sovereignty. By reclaiming the cape bream, modern South African chefs and fishers are not just serving food; they are challenging former hierarchies of taste and celebrating the resilience of the artisanal fishers who have sustainably harvested this abundant species for centuries.

Cultural significance

The cape bream is culturally significant not as a luxury, high-value fish, but as an affordable, reliable, and deeply traditional “staple” that has fed and supported the fishing communities and the culinary habits of the Western Cape for centuries.

“First catch” tradition: It is frequently one of the first fish species young anglers encounter and catch, making it a symbolic part of local, intergenerational fishing, education, and shore angling.

The “fall-back” fish: The species is especially critical when more valuable or targeted pelagic species, such as snoek (*Thysites atun*) or yellowtail

(*Seriola lalandi*), are unavailable, providing a vital source of income for local fishermen.

Traditional fishing identity: The species is deeply intertwined with the history of fishing communities along the West and Southwest Cape coast, with records of its fishery dating back to the late 19th century.

Kelp bed icon: As an endemic species, it is strongly associated with the unique kelp forests (*Ecklonia maxima* and *Laminaria pallida*) of the Western Cape, cementing its image as a true representative of the local cool-temperate maritime ecosystem.

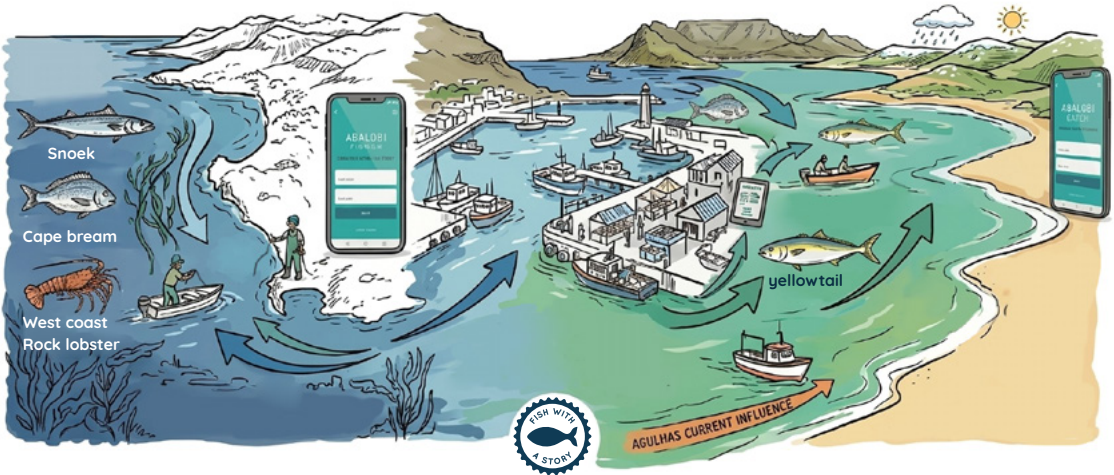
Western Cape's marine ecosystems

1. WEST COAST (Cool temperate)

2. TABLE BAY (Subtidal reefs)

3. HOUT BAY (Transitional zone)

4. SOUTH COAST (Warm temperate)



Regional variations

While the cape bream is a single species, its characteristics vary subtly along South Africa's coastline due to differences in water temperature and habitat.

1. West Coast (cool temperate)

This is the heart of the cape bream population. It is a vital species for traditional line fishers and small-scale fisheries. Fish here often exhibit a darker, more bronze-grey hue, adapted to the murky, nutrient-rich waters and extensive kelp forests of the Atlantic. Northern populations tend to reach sexual maturity earlier than their southern counterparts, with males maturing at approximately 4–5 years.

2. Table Bay (subtidal reefs)

Table Bay is one of the “abundance zones” for this species, making it a critical area for local small-scale fishers and a fascinating site for studying marine adaptation. The marine environment of Table Bay is dictated by a unique intersection of ocean currents and weather patterns that favour the cape bream.

3. Hout Bay (transitional hub)

Hout Bay serves as a primary landing site where cape bream is a “basket species” for small-boat fishers. It is a key location for the ABALOBI movement, as cape bream from this harbour is marketed as a premium, traceable, and sustainable seafood choice. Unlike the deep West Coast, Hout Bay fish are often caught alongside snoek and crayfish, reflecting the transition from the open Atlantic to the Cape Peninsula's sheltered bays.

4. South Coast (warm temperate)

Cape Agulhas marks the edge of the cape bream's common range; it becomes increasingly rare as you move further east toward the Breede River. In these warmer waters, the cape bream is often outcompeted or replaced by its relatives, such as the blue bream (*Pachymetopon aeneum*) and the bronze bream (*Pachymetopon grande*). Southern populations generally grow more slowly and reach maturity later (around six years for males) compared to West Coast fish.

Why cape bream is delicious

Cape bream is a prized table fish due to its clean, delicate profile and versatile texture. As an omnivorous reef dweller that feeds on a diverse diet of algae, crustaceans, and molluscs, its flesh develops a subtle, sweet complexity often compared to that of premium white fish like sea bass or snapper.

Flavour profile:

It offers a mild, sweet flavour that is neither overpowering nor overly “fishy”, making it an excellent canvas for both simple and bold seasonings.

Unique texture:

The flesh is white, lean, and firm yet moist. When cooked correctly, it flakes beautifully into large, succulent chunks.

High fat content in skin:

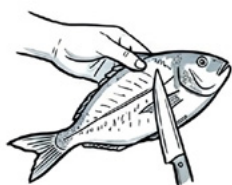
The skin contains natural oils that, when grilled or pan-seared, render down to baste the meat, preventing it from drying out and providing a rich, savoury finish.

Nutritional value:

It is a lean source of protein, rich in Omega-3 fatty acids, calcium, and iron.

Enjoy cape bream in the traditional South African way

METHOD: BUTTERFLY AND PLACE ON GRID



Butterfly the fish



Place in folding grid

SEASON LIKE A LOCAL

SEASON WITH



Seasoning secret



Many locals top the flesh with onion rings, sliced tomatoes, and even a sprinkle of grated cheese before closing the grid.

BRAAI OVER MEDIUM COALS



Braai over medium coals, starting flesh-side down briefly to seal, then finishing primarily on the skin side to crisp it up.

BASTING: COASTAL TECHNIQUE



MIXTURE



A mixture of melted butter, garlic, and apricot jam is a popular coastal basting technique that complements the fish's natural sweetness.



ENJOY

The very best preparations

Crudo/ceviche:

Given its fresh, locally available nature through direct sourcing, it may be suitable for raw preparations if handled correctly from catch to the kitchen.

Whole roasted in foil or baking paper (en papillote)

Ideal for keeping the fish incredibly moist and infusing it with aromatics.

Preparation: Stuff the cavity with lemon slices, fresh parsley, and bashed garlic cloves.

Cooking: Drizzle with olive oil and a splash of white wine. Wrap tightly in foil or baking paper and roast at 220°C for 8–10 minutes.

Pan-fried with lemon beurre blanc

For a more refined dish.

Method: Score the skin, then fry the fillets skin-side down in olive oil and butter until the skin is golden and crisp.



© ABALOB!

Because the cape bream is a smaller seabream (typically 25–54 cm), it is best prepared whole or as thick fillets.

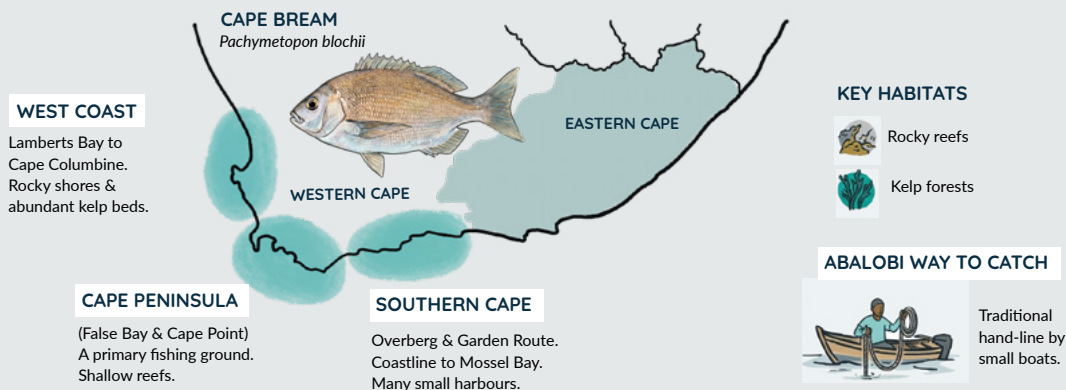
Finishing: Serve with a lemon beurre blanc (a reduction of white wine, lemon juice, and cream, whisked with cold butter) and a side of crushed-spring-onion potatoes.

Menu potential

Local provenance: Fits well into menus highlighting local, wild-foraged South African ingredients, aligning with current culinary trends that feature previously “underutilised” or traditional species.

Pairings: Its habitat in kelp forests and diet suggest it may pair well with coastal botanicals, seaweeds, and other local produce.

Where cape bream is caught







Carpenter (silvers)

Carpenter (silvers), also known as silvers or kaapenaar, is a popular fish endemic to the coastal waters of South Africa. It is a valuable resource for both commercial and recreational fishing.

Carpenter (silvers) is a cornerstone of South African maritime heritage, particularly in the Western Cape. Its cultural significance is rooted in its status as a staple resource for traditional fishing communities and its unique “everyman” appeal on the local dinner table.

Carpenter

Argyrozona argyrozona



Bait used:

Sardine, mackerel and mullet (harders)

Season:

March to October

Appearance:

The carpenter (silvers) is a small to medium-sized, elongated sea bream with a silver-pink body featuring faint pale blue or red horizontal bands along its sides.

Habitat:

It is a schooling fish found over rocky reefs at depths of 50 to 200 meters. Adults are generally resident in a specific area.

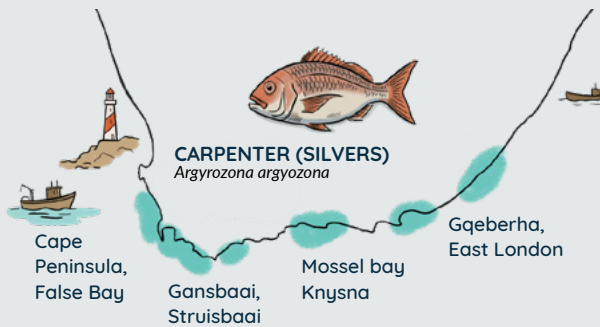
Diet:

It is a predator that uses its pronounced canine teeth to prey on smaller fish like sardines and anchovies, as well as squid. Juveniles feed on smaller crustaceans and worms.

Status:

Due to overfishing, the species experienced a significant population decline. Thanks to effective management, including reduced commercial fishing and the creation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), such as the Agulhas Bank, their numbers have increased considerably.

Where carpenter (silvers) is caught



HABITAT



Rocky outcropping and deep water up to 200 m

CATCH METHOD



Hand-line from small boats, recorded and traceable

PEAK SEASONS



Autumn to Spring.
March to October

Key cultural pillars

Traditional handline heritage: carpenter (silvers) is a primary target of the centuries-old traditional handline fishery. In coastal towns like Struisbaai and Gansbaai, it has been a reliable staple for over 160 years, representing a sustainable, “old-school” way of life that avoids industrial nets.

Local identity and naming: The fish carries several regional names that reflect its deep local roots.

In Cape Town, it is often called doppies (meaning “small shells” or “hulls”), while in other parts of the Cape, it is known as kaapenaar. The name “carpenter” is believed to be a corruption of this original Dutch/Afrikaans name.

Appearance note: Its scientific and common names (silvers and *Argyrozona argyrozona*) refer to the five or six shimmering silver-gold bands that appear on its body immediately after death.

Why silverfish is delicious

The carpenter (silvers) belongs to the sea bream family (*Sparidae*), which is renowned globally for producing high-quality table fish.

Sweet, delicate flavour: It possesses a mild, slightly sweet profile that isn’t “fishy”. This makes it an excellent “canvas” for subtle seasonings.

Unique texture: The white, moist flesh features a fine flake. When cooked correctly, it is incredibly tender, though it has slightly more structure than a very soft fish like hake.

Low oil content: It is a lean fish, which results in a clean palate. The natural sweetness of the meat shines through without being masked by heavy fats.

Crispy skin potential: The skin of the carpenter (silvers) is thin and silver. When seared, it renders down beautifully to become “cracker-thin” and crisp, providing a perfect textural contrast to the soft meat.





The very best cooking techniques

Because the carpenter (silvers) is a lean, delicate fish, the goal is to protect the moisture while enhancing the skin. Overcooking is the most common mistake. Because it is lean, it can dry out quickly.

Pan-searing

This is the best way to achieve a restaurant-quality finish.

Prep: Pat the skin bone-dry with a paper towel. Score the skin lightly to prevent curling.

The heat: Use a heavy-based pan over medium-high heat with a neutral oil (like avocado oil) and a small knob of butter to help with foaming.

Method: Place the fish skin-side down. Press it down with a spatula for the first 30 seconds to ensure even contact. Cook for 60% of the time on the skin side, until golden and crisp. Flip it once,

turn off the heat, and let the residual heat finish the flesh side for 1 minute.

Whole roasted with aromatics

Cooking the fish on the bone preserves the most moisture and adds a depth of flavour that fillets lack.

Prep: Stuff the cavity with lemon slices, fresh parsley, and a bruised clove of garlic.

Method: Rub the outside with olive oil and coarse sea salt. Roast at 200°C for about 6–8 minutes (depending on size).

The bones transfer heat evenly through the meat, resulting in an incredibly succulent flake.

En papillote: Steamed in parchment

Steaming a lean fish in its own juices ensures it never dries out.

CARPENTER (SILVERS)

Lean fish, needs enclosed cooking

ASSEMBLE THE PARCEL

Splash of dry white wine

Capers

Butter

FOLD AND SEAL

Fold securely to trap all juices

STEAM IN OVEN

Bake at 200° for 10-12 minutes

THE RESULT

Concentrated sea flavours

Creates light, healthy sauce

Flavour pairings to bring out the best

To elevate the fish, use bright, acidic, and herbaceous notes that won't overwhelm the mild meat:

Acidity: Lemon wedges, white wine, or capers.

Herbs: Fennel, thyme, parsley, and lemongrass.

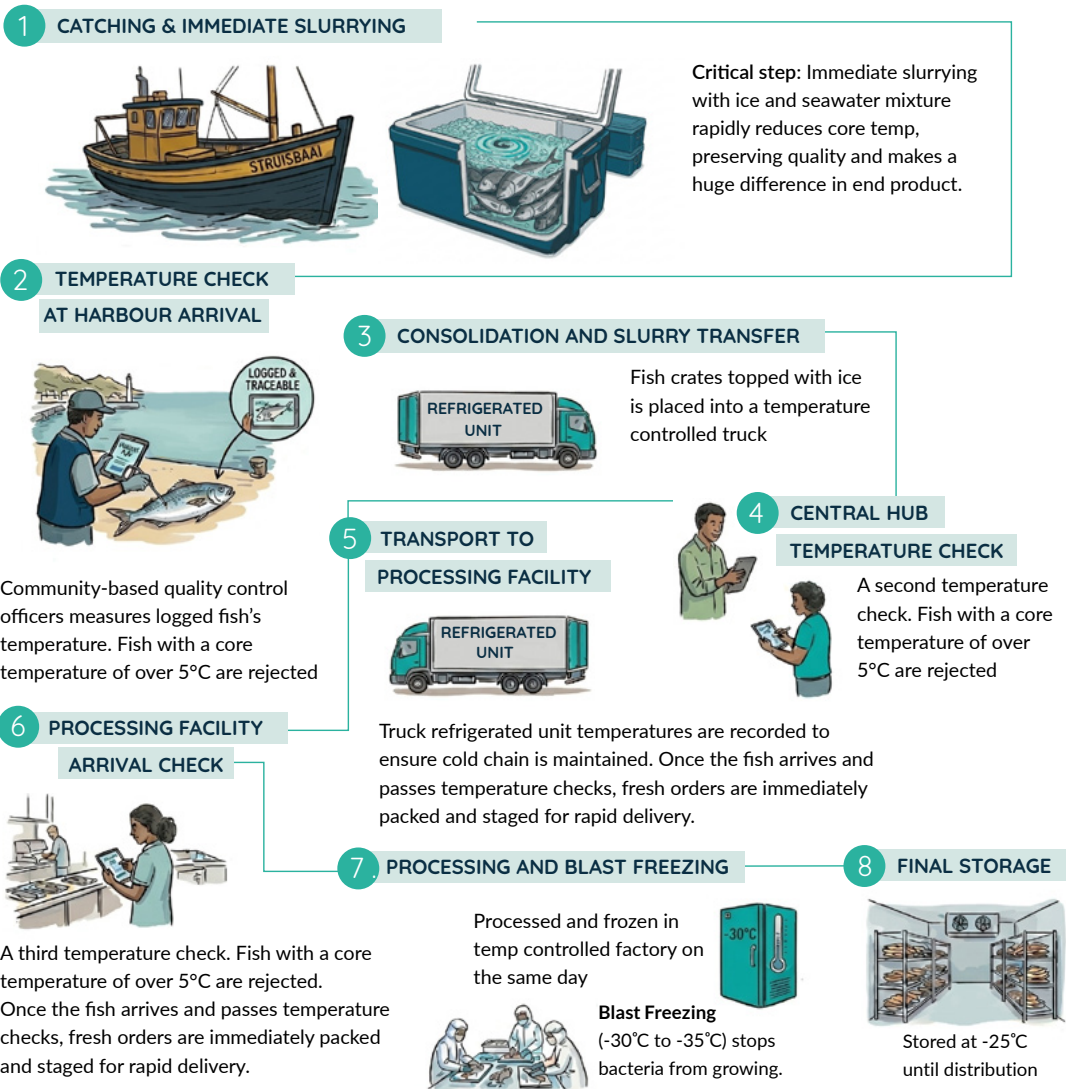
Aromatics: Garlic, shallot and butter.

The ABALOBI cold chain process

The following chart illustrates the rigorous ABALOBI cold chain process for the frozen range. This journey of precision and care begins the moment a fish leaves the water. By prioritising immediate slurring at sea – a critical step that rapidly lowers core temperatures – we preserve the cellular integrity and natural flavour of the catch, far surpassing conventional methods. Every

transition, from the decks of the “chukkies” to our final fresh delivery in ice-filled cooler boxes or our premium -25°C blast-frozen products, is governed by strict temperature checkpoints and real-time digital traceability. This commitment ensures that every fish delivered to the market maintains its “peak freshness” and superior quality, bridging the gap between artisanal heritage and world-class standards.

ABALOBI cold chain ensures peak freshness





© ABALOB

Professional fish preparation guide

This guide provides professional chefs with essential principles and best practices for preparing and cooking fish to perfection, highlighting both traditional and modern approaches that celebrate this versatile ingredient.

Fish preparation is a fundamental skill for professional chefs, requiring precision, a thorough understanding of various techniques and respect for the ingredient. Whether working with delicate white fish or robust oily species, the approach begins with sourcing the freshest possible catch or premium quality frozen products and understanding its unique characteristics. Mastery in filleting, skinning, deboning, and portioning ensures both safety and presentation, while proper storage preserves flavour and texture. From classic poaching and steaming to contemporary sous vide and grilling, each cooking method brings out different qualities in the fish.

Heat and fish

Two characteristics of fish make cooking them quite tricky. Whole fish and fillets are thick at the centre and taper down to nothing at the edges: so thin areas overcook while the thick areas cook through. Fish vary widely in their chemical and physical condition, and therefore, their response to heat is also variable.

Fillets of hake or kingklip and other species often suffer from some degree of gaping, separations of

muscle layers through which heat penetrates more rapidly. Fish such as tuna and swordfish have very dense flesh, crammed full of protein (25%), which absorbs a lot of heat before the temperature rises; less active members of the hake family get by with less protein in their muscle (15–16%), and cook more rapidly. Fat transfers heat more slowly than protein, so fatty fish takes longer to cook than lean fish of the same size. The fat content in fish species also varies widely from season to season.





Internal temperature: The 62°C standard

Cooking fish on the bone to an internal temperature of approximately 62°C is a standard culinary practice designed to ensure both food safety and optimal texture. At this temperature, the fish is cooked thoroughly, allowing the flesh to turn opaque and flake easily, especially for white fish that needs to separate from the bone.

Preventing overcooking: While 62°C is the safe, fully cooked standard, avoid exceeding this threshold. Going above 63°C causes rapid moisture loss, leaving the fish dry and rubbery.

Bone as a heat conductor: Cooking on the bone allows the bones to transfer heat into the centre of the fish. Targeting 62°C ensures the thickest part near the bone is safe while the rest of the fish remains moist

Chef's tip: For a slightly more delicate texture, stop cooking at 60°C and let it "rest", as the residual heat will finish the cooking process.

The 70/30 method

The 70/30 method in fish cookery is a professional technique designed to ensure perfectly cooked, moist, and flavourful fish. It refers to cooking the fish for approximately 70% of the total time on the first side without moving or flipping it, then using the remaining 30% to finish it on the second side, off the heat.

1. Start cooking the fish skin-side down (or presentation side down) in a hot, well-oiled pan.
2. Allow the fish to cook undisturbed for most of the total cooking time; about 70%. This lets the proteins set, develops a crisp crust, and prevents sticking.
3. When the fillet is nearly cooked through (just starting to turn opaque at the edges and still translucent in the centre), gently flip it.
4. Remove the pan from the heat source and let the fish "rest" in the pan.
5. Remove the fish from the pan and let it rest on a paper towel for 20–30 seconds before serving.

The benefit of this method is that it minimises handling, preserves the delicate structure of the fish, and ensures even cooking with a beautiful crust. It is especially effective for fillets with skin or a delicate presentation side.

Structural integrity

Fish is delicate. Flipping it only once at the very end (the final 30%) reduces the risk of the fillet breaking or tearing in the pan.

Drying fish thoroughly with paper towels before cooking is essential to achieve a crispy, golden-brown sear, as it removes surface moisture that would otherwise cause the fish to steam and turn mushy. Dry skin prevents the fish from sticking to the pan, allows seasonings to adhere better, and ensures a firmer, less flaky texture.



Salting and brining

The addition of salt has beneficial effects on the texture and appearance of most fish. It's used to preserve by removing moisture in which microbes might thrive, and it can give smoked fish a good colour. Salt draws myosin proteins to the surface of the fish.

Lightly brining or salting briefly before cooking, especially flakier fish, can also make the flesh denser and moister. Salting has the added advantage of preventing the protein albumin from coming out of the fish as it cooks and speckling the surface with unattractive white blobs.

A simple rule of thumb is to use a 3–5% salt brine solution for 10 minutes to an hour. When removing the fish from brine, dry it thoroughly with a fan or paper towel.

Japanese vinegar curing (sujime)

Japanese vinegar (specifically rice vinegar, or *komezu*) is a cornerstone of Japanese cuisine, particularly for curing fish, a technique known as *sujime*. It is preferred for curing fish quickly because of its unique chemical composition, which provides a balance of acidity and umami, with a mild flavour profile that tenderises, disinfects, and enhances texture without making the fish overly sour or harsh.

Controlled “cooking”: Because it is not overly acidic, rice vinegar allows chefs to “cook” the fish more quickly without the surface becoming rubbery or turning too white, preserving a delicate texture.

Gentle penetration: It penetrates the flesh evenly without immediately burning or excessively denaturing the outermost layers, allowing for a thorough yet gentle cure.

Salt & vinegar combination

Japanese curing rarely involves just vinegar; it is a two-step process.

Phase 1 – Salt dehydration: The fish is first coated in salt (often *shio-jime*), which draws out moisture, firms the flesh, and opens up the pores.

Phase 2 – Vinegar bath: The salted fish is then rinsed and placed in a vinegar solution, sometimes mixed with sugar or mirin. Because the salt opens the pores, the rice vinegar penetrates quickly to disinfect and further improve the texture.

Preservation and safety

Antibacterial properties: The acetic acid in vinegar creates an acidic environment (pH 3.3–3.7) that kills or inhibits bacterial growth, enhancing safety.

Parasite management: While it does not fully replace freezing for parasite control, the vinegar bath provides an extra layer of safety when preparing raw fish.

Flavour enhancement and odour reduction

Removing “fishy” odours: The acid binds to the chemical compounds responsible for strong fishy smells (such as trimethylamine) in oily fish, effectively removing them and leaving a clean, fresh taste.

Umami synergy: High-quality rice vinegar, particularly red vinegar (*akazu*), contains amino acids that, when paired with the natural inosinate in fish, create a savoury “umami synergy”, making the flavour richer.

Historical evolution to “fast sushi”

The use of vinegar instead of long-term fermentation (*narezushi*) was a 17th-century innovation that allowed chefs to create sushi more quickly. It turned a process that took weeks into one that could be completed in minutes or hours, leading to the development of Edomae-style sushi.

The traditional Basque technique (*bacalao al pil pil*)

Originating in the Basque Country, this is considered a masterpiece of culinary resourcefulness.

The emulsion: A thick, pale sauce made by emulsifying olive oil with the natural gelatine released from fish (traditionally salt cod or bacalao).

Method: The chef gently shakes the pan in circular motions as the fish poaches at a low temperature. This mechanical movement fuses the fish proteins with the garlic-infused oil, creating a creamy, mayo-like consistency without eggs or cream.

Precision sous vide

The technique: Submerge vacuum-sealed fish in a temperature-controlled water bath at 50–51°C. Time depends on the thickness of portions.

Why it works: It’s impossible to overcook, preserving a unique, “custard-like” texture that traditional heat cannot replicate.

Pairing: Many chefs combine sous vide with smoking, or a final pan-sear for the best of both worlds.

Olive oil poaching

Instead of water or broth, the fish is submerged in oil (sometimes flavoured with citrus or herbs), heated to a low temperature (51–55°C). It creates a buttery, melt-in-your-mouth texture that is impossible to achieve with dry heat.

Culinary quick-reference

Below is a condensed, visually focused reference designed for commercial kitchens or retail counters to instantly communicate the value of these three species and encourage consumers to make thoughtful, sustainable choices.

	FLAVOUR PROFILE	BEST TECHNIQUE	EXPORT “X-FACTOR”
YELLOWTAIL	Bold, umami, buttery	Sashimi, searing, grilling	Wild “crunch” texture; superior to farmed hamachi
CARPENTER	Sweet, delicate, silky	Ceviche, poaching, whole roast	Ultra-white flesh holds structural “snap” in acid
CAPE BREAM	Mild, nutty, clean	Steaming, pan-frying, crudo	Low-mercury, artisanal choice; the ultimate “clean” protein

A note on ocean stewardship

Embracing South Africa's "undervalued" species is more than a culinary adventure; it is a profound act of ocean stewardship. By moving beyond the familiarity of kingklip and hake to champion the diversity of cape bream, yellowtail, and carpenter (silvers), we alleviate the pressure on our most vulnerable stocks and celebrate the true breadth of our marine heritage. However, this shift only holds weight when paired with radical traceability.

Our oceans are not an infinite pantry, but a living, breathing ecosystem that defines the South African identity. By buying with intent and cooking with conscience, we ensure that the vibrant, blue expanse of our two oceans remains a source of life and wonder for the generations of fishers and food-lovers yet to come.

"Every fish selected from this guide represents a choice to reduce pressure on over-exploited 'status' species. By diversifying our plates, we allow our reefs to recover and our artisanal fishing communities to thrive. Respect the sea, and it will feed the future."



“My philosophy with ABALOBİ is deeply personal. I want my children, and hopefully their children one day, to still have the privilege of eating fish from our oceans. A few years ago, the direction things were heading made that feel uncertain. Working with ABALOBİ has given me a way to be part of a more responsible future — one that supports small-scale fishers, protects our oceans, and creates a genuine connection between the people catching the fish and the people enjoying it on the plate.”

Kerry Kilpin

“ABALOBİ isn’t just technology – it’s respect. It gives our oceans a voice, our fishers dignity and chefs like myself a way to serve with purpose, not just passion.”

Michelle Theron

“At Eleven, working with ABALOBİ is about serving more than just incredible seafood; it’s about serving a story. The clearly visible direct-to-supplier model allows us to put fresh, traceable fish directly onto the plate, which supports the livelihoods of local fishing communities.”

Ryan Shell

“We feel like we are part of something doing good, not just takers – we are part of giving back.”

Veronica Canha Hibbert

“For chefs all around it’s a dream come true to have a diverse range of lesser known species – things that we haven’t cooked with much before that often would be undervalued.”

Kobus van der Merwe

“ABALOBİ should be the benchmark for all other suppliers”.

Braam Beyers

ABALOBİ  Fish With A Story