

Do you know what you're eating?

Immediate improvements needed to seafood product labeling in Canada

Recommendations:

1) Amend the FDA and the CPLA to label all seafood products sold in Canada with (3):

- Species scientific (Latin) name
- Country of Origin (where the fish was caught or farmed)
- Method of production (wild caught or farmed)
- Method of extraction (Fishing gear or farming method)
- State of the stock from which it was obtained (healthy, depleted, etc.)

2) Further amend the FDA and the CPLA to label all Canadian seafood products as such (2).

Seafood product labeling regulations in Canada are among the most lax in the developed world (1). Current Canadian regulations require only the common name of the species and place of origin of the seafood product (1). As a result, Canadian consumers know next to nothing about where their seafood comes from, how it was obtained, or even exactly what it is, opening the door for the unknowing purchase and consumption of products raised or caught using destructive methods, or products from environmentally, socially, or economically unstable stocks.

This brief outlines the holes in the current Canadian system, what needs to be done to address this issue, and what simple changes to labeling policy could do for Canadians, the ocean and the world.

Flaws in the current system:

According to the Canadian Food and Drug Act (FDA) and the Consumer Packaging and Labeling Act (CPLA), seafood products sold in Canada are only required to be labeled with the specie's common name and the 'country of origin' on the species (2).



Image from Pinterest.com

Under the regulations of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency however, an organism's common name can refer to as many as 100 different species. As a result, consumers don't really know what they are eating (2).

Further, while the FDA does mandate that a country of origin be displayed

Nutrition Facts* Valeur nutritive	
Serving Size About 1 Piece (145g) Portion environ 1 morceau (145g)	
Amount Teneur	% Daily Value % valeur quotidienne
IUU	?%
Human Rights Violations	?%
Overfishing	?%
Bycatch	?%
Habitat Damage	?%
Antibiotics	?%
Pesticides	?%
Mercury Levels	?%

Figure 1. Current seafood labeling practices in Canada do not provide important information on the source or state of the stock from which the product was obtained. Image from SeaChoice.org

on the product, the "country of origin" listed can be the country in which the product was last processed, misleading consumers (1). Without knowing where the product is from, consumers cannot make informed decisions to avoid purchasing seafood from countries involved in Illegal Unregulated Unreported (IUU) fishing, human trafficking, or fishing of heavily depleted stocks.



Image from tradeschools.ca



Image from acmphoto.photoshelter.com



Image from pixabay.com

What will improved seafood labeling do for Canadians, the Ocean and the World?

- 1) Mandating the inclusion of species common and scientific names, the state of the stocks of the species, and the methods of production and extraction on product labels will ensure that Canadians know exactly what they are eating, and will be better able to avoid products of depleted stocks, at risk or endangered species, and seafood products produced and/or extracted through destructive means such as bottom trawling or dredging (1). By educating and informing Canadians, the demand for unsustainable products will decrease, relieving pressure on fish stocks and on the ocean as a whole.
- 2) Mandating the inclusion of the *true* country of origin (that is, the location from which the fish was extracted) on the labels of seafood products will further enable Canadians to choose sustainably and ethically sourced seafood, decreasing the pressure on over exploited stocks and the demand for products from nations with fishing industries known to be involved in human trafficking or IUU fishing (1).
- 3) The current system of labeling does not mandate domestic Canadian products be labeled as “made in Canada”. By mandating this label, Canadians will be better able to distinguish between Canadian and non-Canadian products, and thus be provided the opportunity to buy local products whenever possible. This in turn has the potential to boost sales of Canadian seafood products in Canada, helping local Canadian fishers, and the Canadian economy (2).

Immediate action is needed to address the issue of uninformed consumers in Canada. The simple amendments to the FDA and the CPLA outlined in this brief have the potential to benefit not only Canadians, but also people and marine species around the world.

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References:

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