

SWINDLED BY SEAFOOD

Canadians Need Seafood Products To Be More Traceable

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What's The Problem?

A 2018 report by Oceana Canada reveals **44% of seafood sold by retailers and restaurants in Canada is mislabelled** – what is written on a seafood product label is not actually what it is. Fraud in Canada's seafood industry **cheats consumers** out of their hard-earned money and may lead them to suffer from poor health. Insufficient labelling also impacts **global ocean health** and affects the **sustainability of fish stocks**. The lack of traceability contributes to thousands of vulnerable men, women, and children being trafficked, tortured, & forced to fish on illegal boats. Illegal catches become part of Canada's seafood supply, and consumers unwittingly **support slavery practices** through purchases of **illegally caught seafood**.



How Does Mislabelling Affect Us?

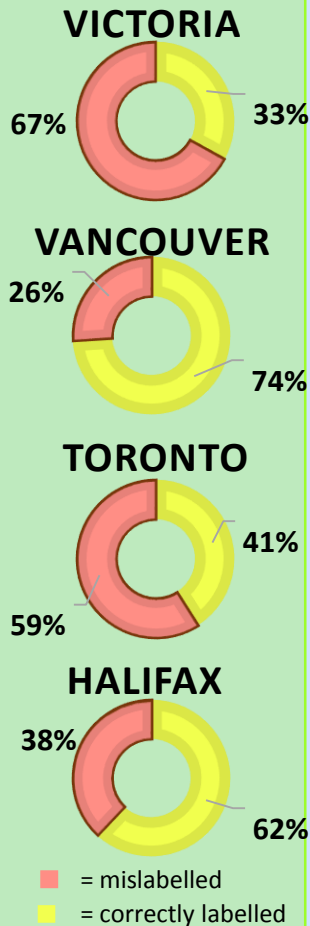
- ➔ **Cheaper species are substituted for expensive ones** – consumers are duped into paying more because they believe they are buying a more sought-after species.
- ➔ **More harm to our health** – there are documented cases where consumers purchased snake mackerel, a fish deemed unsafe for consumption, that was mislabelled as butterfish or white tuna.
- ➔ **Human rights violations** – slaves and indentured labourers are forced to work in inhumane conditions onboard illegal vessels. Illegally-caught fishes are offloaded into legal vessels and sold into the Canadian market.
- ➔ **Conservation efforts are lost** – endangered fish species are sold as species with better conservation statuses. Overfished stocks are exploited when they are labelled as from a sustainably fished stock.
- ➔ **Local fishermen lose their livelihoods** – mislabelled seafood is sold cheaper, meaning fishermen cannot support themselves with their honest fishing practices.



Exploited peoples are forced to work in horrendous conditions in the fishing industry. Proper seafood labels can halt the demand on illegal fishing (Getty Images)

How Does Seafood Fraud Happen?

Mislabelled Seafood Found Coast To Coast



The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) sets the traceability requirements for foods to be imported into Canada, but the **criteria for what qualifies as “traceable” is weak**. Importers of seafood must show traceability documents that show the common name of the food, the company that supplied the food to the importer, and to whom the importer is handing the food to next. The simple **“one step back, one step forward”** approach does not account for the multiple transfers of fishes from vessel to vessel, and the same information is lost in the movement of seafood to the consumer’s plate. Only requiring common names carries great risk: the **CFIA Fish List** shows the common name “snapper” **encompasses 54 species of snapper** that originate from various global regions with different conservation statuses. **More stringent seafood traceability criteria** by CFIA is required to eliminate mislabelling.

... But We Have Certified Seafoods Already!

Yes, but no certification process is **fully traceable**. Restaurants and retailers can become certified by carrying **as little as one certified item**. Labelling programs **do not account for human rights issues**. A target species having an ecolabel does not mean the fishery itself abides by **ethical and sustainable practices**.

What Needs To Be Done?

- ➔ **Implement more traceability measures in CFIA guidelines** – ask for information about all vessels in the supply chain rather than only one vessel before the importer.
- ➔ **Develop verification protocols** – the CFIA should conduct periodic inspections of imported seafood to make sure what importers claim to be importing is the truth.
- ➔ **Ban the import of seafood caught by suspected illegal vessels** – Canada needs to show that human rights violations in the fishing industry are unacceptable.
- ➔ **Enforce penalties** – introduce fines against importers that violate traceability measures.
- ➔ **Provide consumers with better information** – have the CFIA require more than just common names on labels by including Latin species names.

References:

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