

Casting a Wider Net: More Action Needed to Stop Seafood Fraud in the United States

U.S. consumers are eating more seafood, yet the fish that lands on their plates may not be what they ordered. Seafood fraud—specifically species substitution—has been uncovered both in the United States and abroad. Seafood fraud ultimately hurts honest fishermen and seafood businesses, masks conservation and health risks, and misleads consumers who fall victim to a bait and switch.

First Steps to Tackle Mislabeling

Since 2018, some imported seafood must meet additional catch documentation and traceability requirements to be allowed into the United States. Under the Seafood Import Monitoring Program, the federal government requires that some fish at risk of illegal fishing and seafood fraud have key information accompany it, similar to what U.S. fishermen are already required to report, such as what fish it is, who caught it, and where and how it was caught or farmed. This seafood must also be traced from the fishing boat or farm to the U.S. border. However, without traceability required for all seafood throughout the supply chain, opportunities for seafood fraud remain.

Seafood Fraud Persists

Oceana launched a new investigation to study whether seafood fraud persists in the U.S. seafood market. Between March and August 2018, Oceana collected more than 400 samples of seafood not covered in the Seafood Import Monitoring Program from 24 different states and the District of Columbia. One in every 5 of the fish tested were mislabeled. Seafood fraud continues to cheat consumers, weaken ocean conservation efforts, and undermine honest fishermen and seafood businesses.

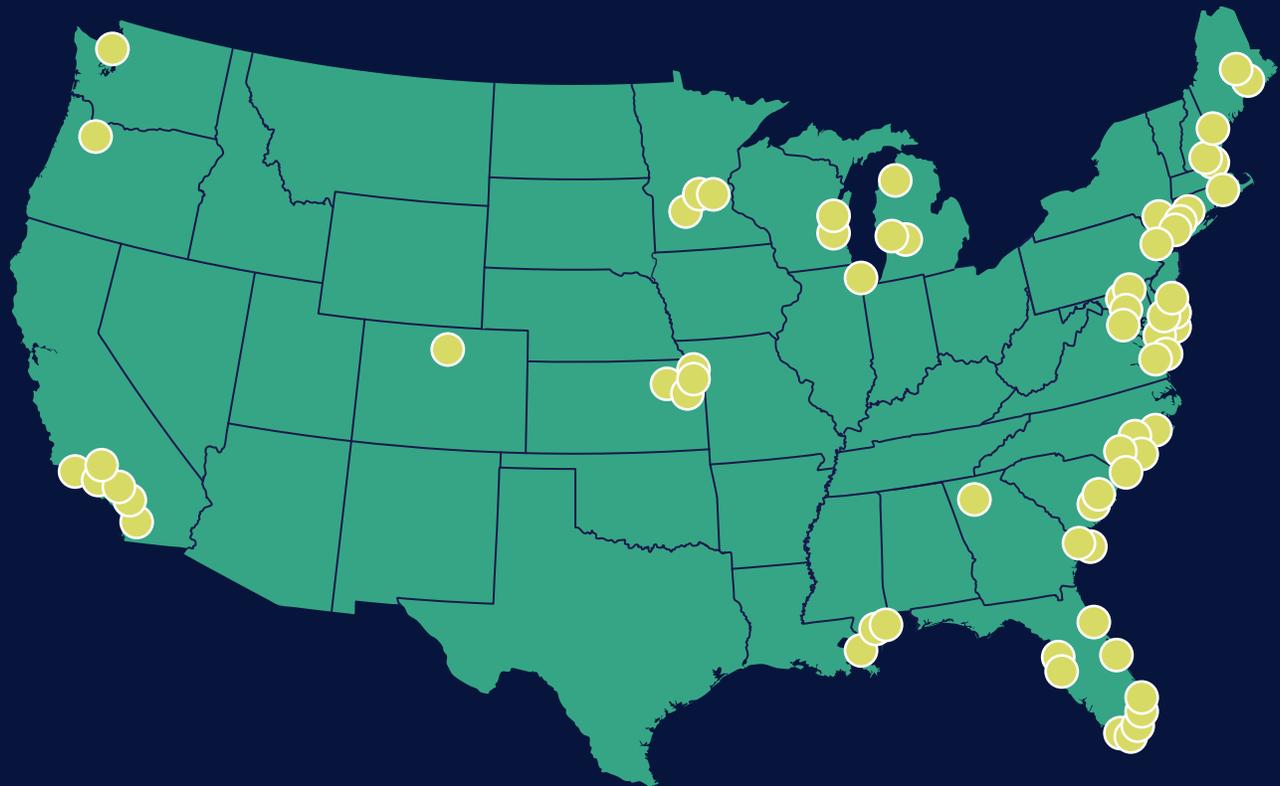
Highlights

- One in every 5 of the 449 fish tested were mislabeled.
- One-third of the establishments visited sold mislabeled seafood.
- Seafood was more frequently mislabeled at restaurants and smaller markets than at larger chain grocery stores.
- Sea bass and snapper had the highest rates of mislabeling (55 and 42 percent, respectively).
- Imported seafood was sold as regional favorites, fooling consumers into thinking their seafood is locally sourced.
- Vulnerable species, such as Atlantic halibut, were sold as more sustainable catch.

Seafood Swaps

What Oceana Bought	What Oceana Got
Hogfish 	 Sutchi catfish
	 Spinycheek grouper
Slipper lobster 	 Giant freshwater prawn
Sea bass 	 Giant perch
	 Nile tilapia
Alaskan halibut 	 Greenland turbot
Dover sole 	 Walleye
Redfish 	 Channel catfish
Black drum 	 Sheepshead
Florida snapper 	 Lavender jobfish

Seafood Fraud Persists: 21% of Samples Mislabeled



● Represents locations tested

Recommendations

Seafood fraud remains a problem, including for fish not covered by the Seafood Import Monitoring Program. In order to stop seafood fraud, Oceana calls for:

- **Catch Documentation:** Key details like when, where and how a fish was caught or farmed must be reported to ensure that only legally caught or sourced fish enters the U.S. market.
- **Full Chain Traceability:** All seafood—both domestic and imported—must be tracked from the fishing boat or farm to the plate.
- **Stronger Labeling:** Consumers need to know more about the seafood they eat, including what specific species it is, where and how it was caught, and whether it was farmed.

To keep consumers from falling victim to a bait and switch when buying seafood, key information should follow the fish through every step of the supply chain to the final point of sale to ensure that all seafood is safe, legally caught and honestly labeled.