

Oceana Reveals Shortfalls in Proposed Traceability Rule to Address Seafood Fraud



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Seafood fraud encompasses any illegal activity that misrepresents seafood, including instances when lower-value species are sold as their higher-value counterparts, farmed products are mislabeled as wild-caught, or when black market fish are sold as legally caught seafood.

Practices like these can have serious environmental, economic and social consequences, and even threaten consumer health. Mislabeling may hide illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing that depletes struggling fisheries, threatens marine wildlife facing extinction, and further stresses already exploited ocean ecosystems. Seafood fraud and IUU fishing hurts consumers' wallets and cheats fishermen and seafood businesses that play by the rules, leading to billions of dollars in economic losses. Finally, some seafood carries health risks that consumers may wish to avoid, like antibiotics and pesticides used in industrial farming operations, naturally occurring toxins, and environmental contamination present in larger fish, such as mercury. Mislabeling can hide these risks if consumers think they are getting one fish when it is actually another.

In 2014, President Obama established the Task Force on Combating IUU Fishing and Seafood Fraud to address these problems. The Task Force issued an action plan in 2015 that included recommendations to establish a seafood traceability program. The resulting proposed rule requires key information to follow 13 "at-risk" seafood types from the boat to the U.S. border.

While the proposed initial phase of the seafood traceability program is a valuable first step, it falls short in fighting seafood fraud inside the U.S. border and leaves the rest of the seafood sold in the U.S. without any increased transparency.

To illustrate the shortfalls of the proposed rule, Oceana reviewed scientific studies, government documents and news reports to identify examples of seafood fraud since 2001

involving species that have been excluded from this rule and that have occurred within the U.S. seafood supply chain. These pages summarize the findings, demonstrating that without strengthening the traceability program, fraudsters will continue to cheat consumers, undermine responsible and hardworking U.S. fishers and businesses, and damage efforts to ensure the long-term productivity of our oceans for future generations.

Shortfalls in Proposed Rule

Seafood Types

Oceana identified 50 different types of seafood mislabeled in the U.S., 74 percent of which will not be covered by the proposed rule (example: wild Alaska salmon).

74%
not covered

26%
covered

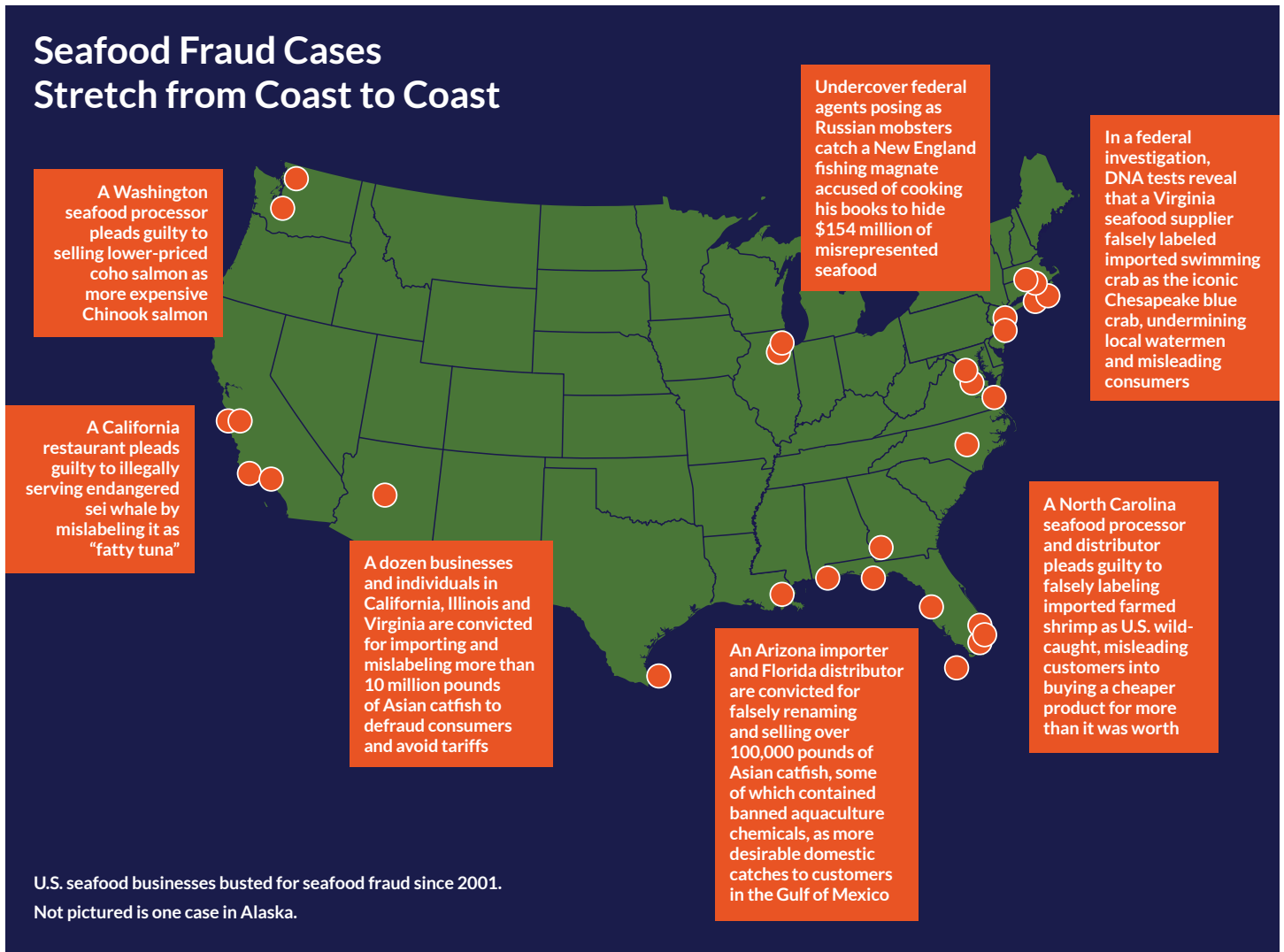
Seafood Supply Chain

Oceana identified 27 legal cases where seafood was found or suspected to be mislabeled since 2001, 77 percent of which involved seafood fraud that occurred within the U.S. (beyond what is covered by the proposed rule).

77%
not covered

23%
covered

Seafood Fraud Cases Stretch from Coast to Coast



Recommendations:

The federal government has an opportunity to design a traceability program that ensures all seafood sold in the U.S. is safe, legally caught and honestly labeled. In order to do so, key information, such as what species it is, and where and how it was caught or farmed, must follow our seafood from the fishing boat (or farm) to the dinner plate.

By only focusing on 13 "at-risk" seafood types, and by only following that seafood from the boat (or farm) to the U.S. border, many opportunities for continued seafood fraud remain.

The final traceability program should:

- Include a timeline to expand the requirements to cover all seafood sold in the U.S.
- Ensure that all seafood is traced through the entire supply chain – from boat (or farm) to plate
- Require that adequate information be available to consumers wherever they purchase seafood