

NEWS SCIENCE

Seafood Fraud Is Literally Everywhere

Out of 25,000 samples worldwide, 20 percent were mislabeled

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If you eat seafood regularly and don't catch it yourself, you've almost certainly been ripped off at some point. The **latest report** from seafood watchdog group Oceana offers an up-to-date look at just how widespread fish fraud is: Out of 25,000 seafood samples tested across the globe, a full 20 percent were mislabelled. And it's literally everywhere: The report notes that "seafood fraud has been exposed ... in 55 countries and on every continent except Antarctica."

The problems surrounding mislabeled seafood are many. Besides cheating consumers into paying for something they're not actually getting, there's also health concerns: The report says 58 percent of the "substitute species" discovered carried health risks to consumers — ranging from parasites to environmental chemicals to natural toxins found in species like pufferfish — that can prove dangerous when not properly labelled.

A couple particularly egregious examples of fraud cited by Oceana include bluefin tuna in Brussels restaurants, where **98 percent of the dishes tested actually contained another fish**

entirely; and a sushi restaurant in Santa Monica, California that was busted serving endangered whale meat as fatty tuna.

A species called pangasius, or Asian catfish, is particularly popular with fraudsters, and has been discovered standing in for 18 different species of fish including cod, flounder, grouper, sole, and red snapper.

Another food that's highly susceptible to fraud: caviar. In one fraud study, 10 out of 27 caviar samples were found to be mislabeled, and three of them didn't even contain animal DNA but rather **a completely unidentified substance**.

So what's being done to combat this incredibly widespread issue here in the U.S.? Earlier this year a presidential task force proposed new rules that would require the supply chains of a dozen types of seafood that are particularly susceptible to fraud to be traceable, from the fishing boat where they're caught until they make it across the U.S. border. But Oceana argues that's not enough, and is pushing that the new regulations include *all* seafood species sold in the U.S., from the boat to the plate.

How can seafood lovers avoid deception in the meantime? Larry Olmsted, author of the new book *Real Food, Fake Food*, says for one thing, red snapper should be avoided at all costs, noting that **it's almost never the real thing**. Instead, "The best strategy for getting real fish is to eat at places that display it whole, order whole fish options, or stick to cheaper fishes that are not worth counterfeiting." Or, you know, catch it yourself.

- **Deceptive Dishes: Seafood Swaps Found Worldwide** [Oceana]
- **Why the Laws Policing Menu Fraud Don't Really Work** [E]
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