

U.S. plan to stop seafood fraud: What others are saying

The Obama administration announced an ambitious plan on Sunday (March 15) to prevent seafood fraud by better tracking where seafood is caught and shipped to in the United States.

The **Presidential Task Force on Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing and Seafood Fraud**, created in June, released an action plan that works to combat fishing and seafood fraud abroad, strengthen enforcement, expand partnerships with non-federal entities to identify and eliminate seafood fraud and the sale of such seafood in the U.S., and increase the amount of information available on seafood products through additional traceability requirements.

The plan was released during the opening of the annual **Seafood Expo North America** in Boston.

Seafood brought into the U.S. would require additional information on its origins and while it appears many of the measures could be implemented by executive authority, some items will require Congressional legislation.

A study by the ocean conservation and advocacy nonprofit Oceana last year showed that some Gulf Coast restaurants, grocery stores and seafood markets **often misrepresent the origins of the shrimp they sell**. Using DNA analysis of shrimp marketed as Gulf shrimp in 2013, Oceana determined that more than a third of it was whiteleg shrimp, a farmed species that mainly hails from Asia.

The administration's new action plan in part looks to require traceability for seafood sold in the U.S. to ensure that it is safe, legally caught and honestly labeled, something Oceana had asked of the task force following the release of its study.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Administrator **Kathryn Sullivan** said in a statement that illegal, unreported, and unregulated "fishing and seafood fraud undermine economic and environmental sustainability of fisheries and fish stocks in the U.S. and around the world."

"These actions aim to level the playing field for legitimate fishermen, increase consumer confidence in the sustainability of seafood sold in the U.S., and ensure the vitality of marine fish stocks," Sullivan said.

During **the annual SeaWeb Seafood Summit in New Orleans last month**, speakers and audience members commented on the importance of the task force but also highlighted the difficulty of properly tracking seafood from its sources abroad and working with countries to ensure their fishers follow sustainable, environmentally sound practices.

Oceana's senior campaign director, Beth Lowell, said the task force's "efforts will help to stop the bait and switch of species like red snapper and Gulf shrimp."

U.S. fishermen in 2013 landed 9.9 billion pounds of fish and shellfish, worth \$5.5 billion. And globally, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing caused significant economic losses, fueling trafficking operations while undermining economic opportunities for U.S. fishermen and others engaged in legal fishing, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

"The plan we are releasing today puts us on course to tackle these complex global challenges, with a new traceability program at its heart," said State Department Under Secretary Cathy Novelli in a statement on Sunday. "It also gives new urgency to our work towards the strongest possible international tools - including ratification of the Port State Measures Agreement, which will ensure illegal fish cannot reach the global market. "

NOAA compiled a list of some key actions of the plan:

International:

- Conclude in 2015 the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations that include commitments to combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and first ever provisions to eliminate harmful fisheries subsidies.
- Work with Congress to enact implementing legislation for the Port State Measures Agreement and receive commitments from at least 14 additional foreign countries to join the Agreement;
- Work with international governments, Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, and others to advance best practices for: the monitoring, control, and surveillance of international fisheries; the implementation of port State controls; and, compliance monitoring.

Enforcement:

- Implement a strategy to optimize the collection, sharing, and analysis of information and resources to prevent IUU or fraudulently labeled seafood from entering U.S. commerce by September 2015.
- Implement recommended adjustments to U.S. tariff codes to properly identify seafood products in trade by December 2015.
- Prioritize combating seafood fraud and the sale of IUU seafood products for joint federal/state enforcement operations and investigation and prosecution of cases in 2015.

Partnerships:

- Enhance collaboration with interested stakeholders on specific IUU fishing or seafood fraud concerns including through an annual, public, in-person forum of interested stakeholders and the creation of a public web portal to relevant information held by agencies.

Traceability:

- Define the types of information to be collected along the seafood supply chain from harvest or farm to entry into the U.S. market and the ways in which this information will be collected by October 2015.
- With input from our partners through a public engagement process, identify the species to which this system will first apply based on how at risk they are of being the product of IUU fishing or seafood fraud by October 2015.
- Finalize rulemaking to collect additional information on species at risk as a requisite of entry into U.S. commerce by September 2016.
- Determine how information within the traceability system - including species, geographic origin, and means of production - can be shared with consumers.
- By December 2016, the Task Force will identify the next steps in expanding the program to all seafood entering U.S. commerce, taking into careful consideration input from stakeholders, as well as the experience from the first year.

Source : http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2015/03/seafood_fraud_action_plan_rele.html(18/03/15)