

# DNA testing reveals limited seafood fraud by Canadian retailers

## But poor labelling still an issue

**For immediate release: October 2, 2017**

**Halifax, Vancouver** — A countrywide SeaChoice research project found seafood fraud in Canada is minimal, but on-package seafood labels generally lack critical information that would allow consumers to make informed purchases.

In spring 2017, SeaChoice partnered with the University of Guelph Centre for Biodiversity Genomics' Life Scanner program to engage 300 volunteer "citizen scientists" across Canada. Each was provided with two DNA ID kits to sample seafood in their local grocery stores. The results are now public on the LifeScanner website.

The results show that just one per cent of the seafood tested across Canada was not what the label said it was, and seven per cent of tested seafood was mislabelled where fish were sold under a name that was not compliant with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's labelling regulations. In contrast, a 2008 study of North American retailers and restaurants found 25 per cent substitution or mislabelling.

"Over the past decade, most Canadian retailers have adopted sustainable seafood policies that have likely contributed to improvements in the accuracy of seafood labels," says Colleen Turlo, SeaChoice representative from the Ecology Action Centre. "The good news is that retailer efforts appear to have significantly reduced actual fraud. That said, more work needs to be done as there is still seafood being sold with noncompliant and generic common names."

Canada only requires seafood labels to display the species' common name. However, having additional information about seafood allows buyers to make decisions with more confidence, whether they're choosing food for its environmental sustainability, social responsibility, health reasons, supporting local fishers and fish farmers or simply wanting to know exactly what's in a package.

"The demand to participate was overwhelming," says Scott Wallace, SeaChoice steering committee member from David Suzuki Foundation. "We had more than 900 requests for our DNA ID kits. This demonstrates that consumers are concerned about their seafood and where it comes from." A recent Eco-Analytics survey of 3,000 Canadians found over 80 per cent agreed, "All seafood sold in Canada should be labelled with information identifying the species, where it was caught, and how it was caught."

SeaChoice's study results show wide variations in the information available on seafood labels from retailer to retailer, and species to species. Of the near 500 samples processed:

- Five per cent included the species scientific name,
- 16 per cent included the country of harvest,
- 58 per cent included whether the seafood was wild-caught or farmed,
- 4.5 per cent of labels contained information about the gear type used or farming method.

Other countries want better labelling too. "We know that other countries have moved to require more information on seafood products, to improve transparency and traceability throughout the supply chain and regain the trust of consumers," says Kelly Roebuck, SeaChoice representative from the Living Oceans Society. "Based on our results, less than two per cent of Canadian labels would meet international best practices for seafood labelling."

SeaChoice is in the process of sharing results with Canadian retailers, and providing them voluntary best practice guidelines for seafood labelling. SeaChoice and its member organizations will continue to engage with the federal government in support of improved seafood labelling legislation and integration of seafood labelling as part of a national food policy.

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**SeaChoice:**

SeaChoice is a collaboration of three internationally recognized organizations — the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecology Action Centre and Living Oceans Society — that use their broad, national expertise to find solutions for healthy oceans. Launched in 2006, SeaChoice was created to provide informative resources on seafood sustainability at various levels of the seafood supply chain, from harvesters to consumers. After achieving significant progress in the retail landscape between 2006 and 2016, with many retail partners reaching sustainable seafood commitments, SeaChoice is working toward a new and ambitious goal of increasing sustainability throughout the entire seafood supply chain. SeaChoice is a member organization of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions, and works with consumers, retailers, suppliers, government and producers to accomplish its objectives.

**Background:**

Full results of DNA testing work available at through Lifescanner:

Putting Canada's Seafood Labels to the Test – <http://www.lifescanner.net/dashboard/SeaChoice>

More information on SeaChoice website: <http://www.seachoice.org/dna-testing/>

SeaChoice report on seafood labelling:

Canadians Eating in the Dark: A Report Card of International Seafood Labelling Requirements – <http://labelmyseafood.ca/>

Eco-analytics polling: [www.ecologyaction.ca/ecoanalytics](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/ecoanalytics)

Previous DNA testing in Canada:

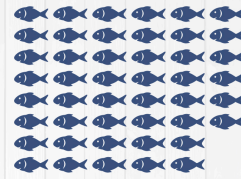
Wong, E.H.K. & R.H. Hanner. 2008. DNA barcoding detects market substitution in North American seafood Food Research International, 2008 – Elsevier – [http://bidt.ca/food\\_research\\_international.pdf](http://bidt.ca/food_research_international.pdf)

## Our **sampling** process:



Citizen Scientists tested

**46**  
different species  
of seafood



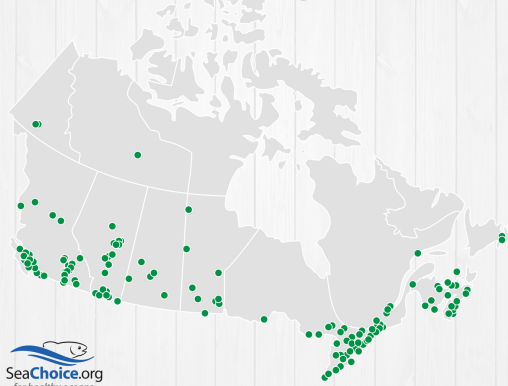
from



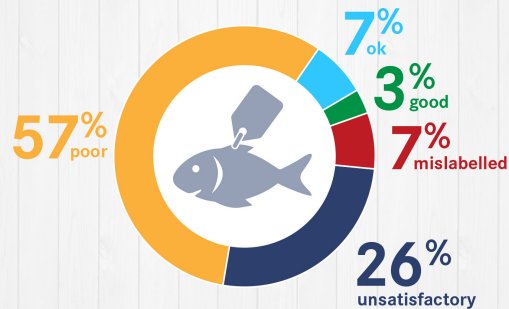
**49**  
retailers across  
the country



**501 DNA samples** were tested  
with representation from  
**across the country.**



**Quality of Canadian Seafood Labelling**  
as determined by how many labelling  
elements were included:



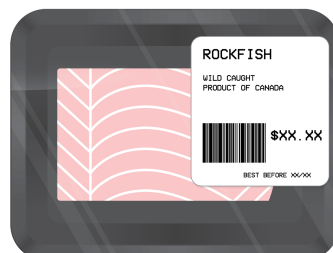
Below: An example of in-store labels depicting mandatory requirements for Pacific yellowtail rockfish sold in EU, US and Canadian stores.

**EUROPEAN UNION**



\*United Kingdom commercial designation

**UNITED STATES**



**CANADA**

