

Seafood Companies, Grocery Store Chains, and Experts Call for Robust Traceability Standards for all Seafood Sold in Canada

March 22, 2022 (Ottawa) – A group of 26 grocery chains, seafood industry stakeholders and experts are calling on the federal government to commit to a timeline and plan to fulfill its mandate to implement boat-to-plate traceability for seafood in Canada. This comes at a critical time as the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans is studying seafood traceability in Canada as a way to support the sustainability and long-term viability of Canada’s seafood supply chains while combatting fraud, human rights abuses and illegal fishing.

The [letter](#), signed by 26 seafood industry stakeholders, including grocery stores Buy-Low Foods and Save-On-Foods, suppliers Ocean Brands, Organic Ocean and Skipper Otto and environmental groups SeaChoice and Oceana Canada, was delivered to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency as part of its recent boat-to-plate seafood traceability consultation. It argues that the minimum standards must be expanded so that all seafood products are fully traceable from the point of final sale back to the point of harvest, including key information about the who, what, where, when and how of fishing or farming, processing and distribution. The signatories highlight their concern that no timeline or plan is in place to implement a better traceability system, despite the initiative being announced more than two years ago.

Seafood follows a highly complex path from a fishing vessel or fish farm to people’s plates, with a risk of illegal practices, fraud and mislabelling at every step along the way. Consumers currently have no sure way to know where their seafood came from, how it was caught, if the fish is labelled as the correct species and that it is not harmful to human health or the health of ocean ecosystems. According to a YouGov Plc survey commissioned by SeaChoice in November 2021, 86 per cent of Canadians support improved seafood traceability for all products sold in Canada.

With jurisdictions worldwide increasingly requiring electronic data to follow seafood products through the supply chain to safeguard their true identity and point of origin and to ensure legality, the Canadian government must fulfill its 2019 mandate to implement boat-to-plate traceability.

Quotes:

Christina Callegari, Sustainable Seafood Coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre on behalf of SeaChoice says, “Canada’s grocers and seafood companies have a critical role to play in advancing seafood traceability in Canada, especially by supporting improvements in minimum traceability standards. This will help create a level playing field among industry actors where businesses who don’t invest in traceability can’t undercut those that do.”

Sayara Thurston, Seafood Fraud Campaigner at Oceana Canada said: “Eighty per cent of the seafood we eat is caught in other parts of the world – including regions that use forced labour and illegal fishing practices. Canadians, including retailers, want to know where and how their seafood is caught, and they want the federal government to put a robust boat-to-plate traceability program in place to prevent Canada from contributing to these devastating practices.”

Ian Ricketts, President of Ocean Brands, a supplier of seafood brands; Ocean’s, Gold Seal, and Millionaires, “Boat to plate traceability of seafood is central to preventing overfishing and illegal fishing. To contribute, we can work together to prevent overfishing by eliminating markets for seafood that are not traceable and likely caught illegally or with forced labour. While a lot of work has been done in the past to provide traceability for certain fish species, there is room for more progress to be made to look after our oceans. We look forward to working with our industry partners and associates to achieve full traceability for all seafood sold in Canada.”

Dane Chauvel, Founder and CEO at Organic Ocean, a sustainable seafood supplier, says “Some view traceability and labeling reform as introducing additional and needless costs in an already skinny margin business while others feel it’s necessary to address IUU fisheries and enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions. Organic Ocean would be in the latter, believing the benefits outweigh the costs.”

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About 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 a healthy ocean. SeaChoice is a science-based, solutions-focused influencer, advocate and watchdog leading the next evolution of seafood sustainability in Canada. 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.

About Oceana Canada:

[Oceana Canada](#) was established as an independent charity in 2015 and is part of the largest international advocacy group dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana Canada has successfully campaigned to end the shark fin trade, make rebuilding depleted fish populations the law, improve the way fisheries are managed and protect marine habitat. We work with civil society, academics, fishers, Indigenous Peoples and the federal government to return Canada’s formerly vibrant oceans to health and abundance. By restoring Canada’s

oceans, we can strengthen our communities, reap greater economic and nutritional benefits and protect our future.

Background:

in 2019, the federal government instructed the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to work with the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to develop a boat-to-plate traceability program to help Canadian fishers to “better market their high-quality products.”

On August 13, 2021, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency launched a 120-day consultation on the boat-to-plate traceability program with a discussion paper for the public to provide feedback and comments on. The consultation closed on December 11, 2021.

SeaChoice profiles major Canadian retailers' seafood commitments and practices through an online platform, Seafood Progress. All three retailers that signed on to the letter are part of Seafood Progress, including Sobeys, Buy-Low Foods and Save On Foods. www.seafoodprogress.org

The results from a YouGov survey commissioned by SeaChoice in November 2021 can be found here: <https://www.seachoice.org/survey-seafood-labelling-traceability/>

Link to the sign on letter: <https://www.seachoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Boat-to-plate-stakeholder-sign-on-letter-Dec-2021.pdf>