

Next Steps: Achieving Traceability in Seafood

As the concept of seafood sustainability develops, it is becoming clear that a transparent and thorough traceability system is an essential to the effective management of our seafood resources. Consumers may demand sustainable seafood, and a retailer or restaurant may do their utmost to provide it, but without an adequate information stream that can reliably trace fish back to where they were caught or raised, it is impossible to unequivocally state that a given seafood product is or is not sustainable.

The global nature of the seafood industry poses numerous challenges for companies and organizations attempting to develop strong traceability systems. Cultural and linguistic barriers can cause critical information to be misinterpreted. Incongruent technologies can result in data loss during purchasing, processing, and passing through break-of-bulk points. To worsen matters, a sector of the industry—most notably the owners and operators of pirate fishing vessels—has been able to profit substantially off of fraudulent and illegal activity. These companies staunchly oppose proposed protocols and legal frameworks that would push back against their behavior through new regulations and more effective enforcement tactics.

We are seeing rampant fraud in the seafood marketplace, both here in the United States and abroad. Recent studies have revealed a tremendous amount of mislabeling and misrepresentation of fish species, even in sophisticated urban markets like New York, Miami, and Los Angeles. Offshore, pirate fishing vessels continue to roam and ransack the seas, taking approximately 20% of the world's catch—and as much as 50% for some particularly valuable species. Couple this enormous amount of fish with the fact that only a fraction is inspected (in 2010, the United States imported \$14.8 billion of seafood, but less than 2% of imported seafood is inspected at the border for safety), and it's no wonder that so much of this illegal plunder ends up in American fish markets, restaurants, and retail outlets.

As Greenpeace's sustainable seafood work continues, we will be increasing our focus in this area and looking to leading retailers to work with us on standing up to pirate fishing and increasing the overall traceability of the seafood supply chain in the United States. The newly proposed Commercial Seafood Consumer Protection Act (S. 50), International Fisheries Stewardship and Enforcement Act (S. 52), and Pirate Fishing Elimination Act (S. 1980) represent important legislative progress on this critical matter. Greenpeace asks all seafood retailers to contact their Senate representatives and to urge them to support these bills.

We will never achieve a truly sustainable seafood industry without cohesive and reliable traceability mechanisms. The alternatives—fraud, pirate fishing, and consumer confusion—are bad for business and bad for the oceans. Many retailers are hesitant to enter the political arena in support of legislation or conservation initiatives, but in this case, the seafood retail community must take action if we are to confront and solve this problem.

If we work together, we can eliminate this scourge from our waters, and there will be cause for celebration all around. If we fail to act, however, these acts of fraud and piracy will continue on a grand scale, pillaging both our ocean and our economy.



Next Steps: Protecting the Bering Sea Canyons

Half of the fish caught in the US comes from Alaska, and much of it is harvested along the incredibly productive Bering Sea shelf break. Known as the Green Belt, this several hundred mile stretch is prime fishing grounds for pollock, crab, pacific cod, yellowtail flounder, and a number of other fisheries generating well over a billion dollars a year. Zhemchug and Pribilof Canyons, two of the largest underwater canyons in the world, are carved into this shelf break. The canyons play an important role in funneling nutrient rich water up from the deep Aleutian basin.

A large and growing alliance of environmental groups, tribal organizations, and other stakeholders has been working to protect the canyons. A new scientific publication authored by scientists from the University of California—Santa Barbara, NOAA, and Greenpeace revealed that the canyons are home to high densities of deep sea corals and sponges, which provide habitat for fish and other marine life. The report also documented impacts from fishing gear, particularly trawls and longlines. This is of particular concern due to the longevity of slow growing corals, which can live to be hundreds or even thousands of years old and are highly vulnerable to damage.

In April, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council voted to initiate a new review of the best available science regarding the canyons, and to start scoping potential future management actions. In addition to the new scientific findings and comments from approximately 30,000 people, one of the things that clearly got the Council's attention was input from the seafood industry. Major buyers of Bering Sea seafood were having conversations with their suppliers, which helped pave the way for support for the Council's decision from representatives of the trawl sectors. Safeway weighed in as well, with a strong letter to the Council making the business case for protecting representative portions of shelf break habitat—and taking a particularly close look at the canyons.

As this issue moves through the Council process, retailers will have a very important role to play in ensuring that seafood from the Bering Sea is not caught in a way that jeopardizes the future of this important seafood supply—or the habitats that sustain it. Retailers and other major buyers are among the most influential stakeholders in a Council process that is typically dominated by the catch sector. While the issues involved can often be complex, our hope is that other retailers will join Safeway in navigating these waters and speaking up for protecting these Grand Canyons of the Sea.

